2-6-2015

Nurturing young learners in practice: a case study of key teacher dispositions that support child centered practice in an urban preschool environment

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Recommended Citation

Ricchezza, Lorraine, "Nurturing young learners in practice: a case study of key teacher dispositions that support child centered practice in an urban preschool environment" (2015). *Theses and Dissertations*. 400.
https://rdw.rowan.edu/etd/400

NURTURING YOUNG LEARNERS IN PRACTICE: A CASE STUDY OF KEY TEACHER DISPOSITIONS THAT SUPPORT CHILD CENTERED PRACTICE IN AN URBAN PRESCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

by
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A Dissertation

Submitted to the
Department of Educational Leadership
College of Education
In partial fulfillment of the requirement
For the degree of
Doctor of Education
at
Rowan University
November 2014

Dissertation Chair: Corine Meredith Brown, Ph.D.

Dedication

For my Son,

Luciano Steven Ricchezza

Acknowledgments

I wish to extend my heartfelt gratitude to my dissertation committee: Dr. Cori Meredith Brown, Dr. Monica Reid Kerrigan, and Dr. Karen L. Hutchison for the gift of their professional knowledge, sense of personal advocacy, and concern for learners across the educational continuum.

I especially wish to thank my Husband, Steven for providing me with unconditional love. I am grateful for the gift of you and for the life we share. For my Sister, Arlene Mary Laird who shares in the gift of my lived experience, I am grateful for everything. And, I know you are too.

Finally, to my dearest friends, colleagues, and to my supervisor, I wish to extend with much love, laughter, and deep appreciation, a heartfelt thank you for reminding me to "grab a tissue and keep on going".

Abstract

Lorraine C. Ricchezza
**NURTURING YOUNG LEARNERS IN PRACTICE: A CASE STUDY OF KEY
TEACHER DISPOSITIONS THAT SUPPORT CHILD CENTERED PRACTICE
IN AN URBAN PRESCHOOL ENVIRONMENT**
2014
Corine Meredith Brown, Ph.D.
Doctor of Education

This dissertation examines an educator's disposition to positively impact

children's cognitive and social emotional development in the preschool setting as

evidenced in child centered practices that arouse curiosity, foster social interaction, and

promote children's learning as expressed in interpersonal interactions that affirm

differences among young children in an urban preschool setting. Through examination

and interpretation, this study delineates educator perspectives on child differences and

reciprocal relationships as integral to developmentally appropriate practice. Seven female

educators at the ABC Elementary School in Urban City, New Jersey participated in this

study. This study involved key data sources. During 8 months of data collection,

educators participated in individual interviews, focus group dialogue, and reflective

conversations. Classroom observations revealed evidence of pedagoy and reciprocal

interactions. As supplemental data, relevant classroom documents were also reviewed.

The data sources were triangulated to identify recurring patterns in alignment to the

overarching research concern. Although the educators articulate the value of child-

centered pedagogy in the context of nurturing preschool learners, the evidence reveals

divergent classroom practices suggesting a greater need for early childhood communities

of practice to act in ensuring educators possess child development knowledge and

therefore embrace differences with heightened sensitivity to diverse preschool learners.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

With an ever-growing population of diverse learners entering publicly funded preschool settings, effective early childhood educators acknowledge and respond to children with knowledge, affective concern, and sensitivity to differences. The present study examines an educator's disposition to positively impact children's cognitive and social emotional development as evidenced in child centered practices that arouse curiosity, foster social interaction, and promote children's learning as expressed in interpersonal interactions that affirm differences among young children in an urban preschool setting through the lens of developmentally appropriate practice.

Many scholars in the field of early childhood education recognize the integral role of early childhood educators in wholly supporting children's learning needs in the preschool classroom environment. Within such learning environments, which are largely influenced by the theories of John Dewey, Jean Piaget, and Lev Vygotsky, children's developmental needs are highly regarded as the impetus for early childhood curricula and classroom instructional decisions (Copple and Bredekamp, 2009). Reflecting these perspectives, educational research has focused on the impact of teacher beliefs, values, and behaviors on meeting children's developmental needs (Borko, Liston, & Whitcomb, 2007; Welch, Pitts, Tenini, Kuenlen, & Wood, 2010). Although scholars affirm the value of a child centered philosophical orientation, researchers have tended to accept teacher beliefs as just cause for an early childhood educators' willingness to embrace a child centered philosophy wherein children's learning interests, needs, and abilities are acknowledged and celebrated in the early care and educational environment

(Brown, Bergen, House, Hittle and Dickerson, 2000; Fails-Nelson and Rogers, 2010; Han and Neugharth-Pritchett, 2010; Kowalski, Frontczak, and Johnson, 2001; McMullen, 1999; McMullen and Alat, 2002; Parker and Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006; Prawat, 1992; and Wien, 2003). Such perspectives neglect individual child differences especially among an ever growing population of young children entering the preschool setting from diverse cultural, lingusitic, and socio economic backgrounds.

Scholars identify diversity as a moral and ethical concern in the education of young children. As a result, researchers have explored the implications of diversity in the educational setting and have determined that an educators' willingness to embrace children and families of diverse cultural, linguistic, and socio economic status is expressed as cultural knowledge, sensitivity to context, and responsiveness to children (Burant & Kirby, 2002; Cook & Cleaf, 2000; Frederick-Steele, 2011; Hughes et al., 2004; Johnson & Reiman, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Lee & Herner-Patnode, 2010; Milner, 2006; Nieto, 2006; Talbert-Johnson, 2006; Villegas, 2007).

Because in the view of many scholars, education is a humanistic endeavor that serves essential to the overall development and well being of children, scholars assert that educators demonstrate a higher ethic of concern for children, families, and communities to ensure children are treated fairly and equitably in the educational setting. Research affirms that educators be open minded, compassionate, and trustworthy individuals who are committed to holding high standards for all children represented in the educational setting (Brown, Morehead, & Smith, 2008; Burant, Chubbuck, and Whipp, 2007; Fallona, 2000; Hansen, 1993; Osguthorpe, 2008; Sockett, 2009).

Advocates of child centered approaches to early learning believe that reciprocal relationships with families inform teacher knowledge (Copple and Bredekamp, 2009). Scholars advocate that educators keenly interpret children's needs as evidenced in reciprocal classroom interactions with children and families to foster children's development (Cheatham & Jimenez-Silva, 2012; Espinosa, 2008; Kidd, Sanchez, and Thorp, 2008). Educational research identifies familial influences and lived experience to account for children's learning needs. However, research affirms that educators misinterpret familial beliefs, practices, and expectations of families served in diverse educational settings. Such perspectives reveal that educators often fail to holistically address children's gaps in learning due to familial influences and lived experience. Therefore, children considered at risk for learning difficulties, ratherpossess a great capacity for learning that might otherwise flourish under the direction of caring, thoughtful, and sensitive educators acting with intention to guide children's learning experiences (Goodfellow, 2001; Hanson & Lynch, 1992; Holloway et al., 1995; Kidd, Sanchez, & Thorp, 2008; Miller and Votruba-Drzal, 2012).

Because linguistic diversity impacts children's learning, scholars have examined English language learners in the early learning setting and have determined that a child's ability to develop a second language progresses through developmental stages in accordance with age and individual appropriateness. Since in the view of researchers, linguistic diversity impacts children's learning, research affirms an impetus for educators to thoughtfully consider the developmental needs of English language learners who often lack the ability to meaningfully interact with peers and adults resulting in a child's feelings of social isolation and frustration (Sowa, 2009). Advocates of child centeredness

affirm the value of inclusive classroom environments resembling a child's culture, home, and community as characterized by curricula materials and child centered, learning experiences (Barrera, 1993; Copple and Bredekamp, 2009; Hanson & Gutierrez, 1997).

Scholars strongly advocate that affective concern for children is essential for child growth and development. Educational research interprets an early childhood educators' desire to demonstrate joy, passion, hopefulness, and perseverance as affective concern for children in concert with teacher knowledge (Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Colker, 2008; Swick, 2007; Webb & Blond, 1995). Such perspectives reveal the complexities of establishing trustworthy, intentional relationships with young children who are regarded as capable of understanding an adult's disposition to demonstrate genuine care and concern (Howes & Smith, 1995; Kugelmass & Ross-Bernstein, 2000; Sidle-Fuligni, Howes, Huang, Holiday Hong, & Lara-Cinisomo, 2012; Vitiello, Booren, Downer, & Williford, 2012).

Background of Study

Developmentally appropriate practice is widely recognized as a standard of practice in early childhood education. The framework of developmentally appropriate practice holistically considers children's interests, needs, and diverse abilities in the early learning environment. Such environments stimulate curiosity, affirm individual differences, and promote the well being of children. With emphasis on child development knowledge and pedagogical skill requisite to planning and implementing appropriate learning experiences, it is assumed that that early childhood educators possess an intuit desire to communicate knowledge with love, passion, and enthusiasm in the service of teaching young children.

Principles of developmentally appropriate practice consider effective educators critical to children's growth and development in the early care and educaitonal setting The framework stipulates an early childhood educators' role in cultivating a physical and an emotive classroom environment to support children's varying interests and abilities, which emerge from child experience with classroom materials, resources, and equipment and interpersonal interactions. With an emphasis on learning experiences that support a child's natural inclination for play and teacher led structured learning experiences necessary to promote child growth and development, developmentally appropriate practice articulates that educators possess child development knowledge, consider individual child needs, and embrace child differences to plan learning experiences for young children. Accounting for differences in culture, ethnicity, race, and language, developmentally appropriate practice affirms diversity.

The framework of developmentally appropriate practice values intentionality on the part of educators to serve and nurture individual children's strengths, abilities, and interests through active engagement in a variety of planned learning experiences across content areas and domains of learning which emerge in response to teacher observation and ongoing assessments. The framework values reciprocal relationships as fundamental to children's cognitive, social and emotional development in order to foster a child's sense of security, pro-social behaviors, and positive feelings about school especially among children living under difficult circumstances in the home environment.

In spite of the profound influence of developmentally appropriate practice on the field of early childhood education, early childhood practitioners often misinterpret the learning needs of young children and it remains unclear whether practicing early

childhood educators possess essential traits requisite to responding to children's varying needs interests, and abilities with knowledge, advocacy, and concern in preschool settings serving diverse learners. Such concerns support the significance of further research on the interrelatedness of curricula, pedagogy, and reciprocal interactions in an urban preschool setting.

The significance of examining an early childhood educator's disposition to nurture children's learning is supported by prior empirical research and scholarly literature that values teaching as a humanistic endeavor. The first area identified in the literature is the need for consensus among scholars, policymakers, and researchers on conceptualizing an educator's disposition. Scholars advocate that an educator's values, beliefs, and professional behaviors serve to influence interpersonal interactions with children, families, and communities in the educational setting. The literature broadly interprets an educator's values, beliefs, and professional behaviors through the lens of theoretical and philosophical assumptions. Much of the literature is framed around teacher education programs and seeks to determine desired dispositional characteristics of aspiring teachers in relation to professional educational practitioners (Almeria, Johnston, Henriott, and Shapiro, 2011; Gordon & Fittler, 2004;; Lee and Herner-Patnode, 2010; NCATE, 2008; Osguthorpe, 2008; Sockett, 2009; Shulte, Edick, Edwards & Mackiel, 2004; Shulman, 1987; Thornton, 2006).

As scholars assert, personal values, beliefs, and professional ethos including sensitivity influence an educator's capacity to positively impact student achievement (Welch, Pitts, Tenini, Kuenlen, and Wood, 2010). However, beliefs and practices often have a contradictory nature. Given a teacher's knowledge and pedagogical skill relevant

to specialized content areas in the educational setting, there is limited agreement among scholars on the implications of assessing a teacher's personal beliefs and feelings in the professional practice of teaching (Borko, Liston, and Whitcomb, 2007; Damon, 2007; Schussler 2006; Schussler, Stooksberry, and Bercaw, 2010). This suggests that teacher knowledge, pedagogical skill, and observed teacher actions are viewed holistically through the lens of practice which requires further research to provide in depth conceptualizations on teacher dispositions as garnered in case study research methodology.

The literature identifies an ongoing dialogue among scholars on the moral and ethical implications of education. Research on moral and ethical concerns in education differ in respect to how personal traits including truthfulness, fairness, and compassion are observed, interpreted, and measured in teacher practices in spite of the significance of personal character traits on reciprocal interactions with children in the educational setting (Brown, Morehead, & Smith, 2008; Burant Chubbuck, Whipp, 2007; Fallona, 2000; Hansen, 1993; Osguthorpe, 2008). However, there is general agreement that professional educators possess a higher ethic of concern for students.

Diversity is identified as a moral and ethical concern in the literature. There is general agreement among scholars on the responsibility of educators to embrace and affirm differences in the educational setting among children from diverse racial, ethnic, socio economic and linguistic backgrounds (Cook & Cleaf, 2000; Hughes, et al., 2004; Frederick-Steele, 2011; Milner, 2006; Talbert-Johnson, 2006). Some research interprets the notion of diversity as a socially just endeavor that requires courage, conviction, and passion on the part of educators to ensure students are treated equitably in the educational

setting (Nieto, 2006) while other scholars advocate for formalized culturally relevant curricula to inform and to assess culturally relevant pedagogy more often deemed appropriate for later school settings. (Johnson and Reiman, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Lee and Herner-Patnode, 2010; Villegas, 2007).

Researchers have examined diversity within the construct of the early care and educational setting situated in analysis of linguistically, ethnically, and culturally diverse familial beliefs, practices, and broad expectations of early childhood educators. However, many studies are characterized by large scale, quantitative studies conducted across varied geographical settings and much of the research employs standardized measures and secondary data to indicate findings (Barrera, 1993; Cheatham & Jimenez-Silva , 2012; Espinosa, 2008; Goodfellow, 2001; Hanson and Gutierrez, 1997; Hanson and Lynch, 1992; Holloway, Rambaurd, Fuller, and Eggers-Pierola, 1995; Miller and Votruba-Drzal, 2012; Sowa, 2009).

Children's success in the early care and educational setting is often regarded as requisite to children's readiness for success in the later school setting. While scholars consider that readiness is strongly influenced by familial and caregiver influence prior to entering formalized early care and educational settings, there is much dialogue and discourse on the notion of readiness among socio economically, culturally and linguistically diverse children and families and research findings are subject to much interpretation in the literature (Early, Pianta, Taylor and Cox, 2001; Freeman and Costello in D.M. Laverick, M.R. Jalongo, 2011; Winsler, Tran, Hartman, Madigan, Manfra, and Bleiker, 2008).

Scholars in the field of early childhood education advocate that constructivist theories, which emphasize children's developmental abilities, best support child readiness (Chien, et al. 2010) while other studies suggest that early learning standards emphasizing mastery of skills, and academic content knowledge impact a child's readiness for later school achievement (Wesley and Buysee, 2003). Therefore, it is difficult to draw empirical conclusions about teacher practices to most effectively support children's readiness. However, in spite of such differences, there is a general understanding of the value of early care and education in supporting children entering school with fewer academic skills and therefore significant gaps in learning to ensure children make considerable gains prior to entering kindergarten (Magnuson, Meyers, Ruhn, Walfdogel, 2004).

Effective teachers are considered to be knowledgeable practitioners who demonstrate content area knowledge with sensitivity to culture, language, and ability diverse students to accommodate children's varying learning needs. In the field of early childhood education, research on teacher knowledge is often situated in analysis of professional knowledge, educational attainment, and professional experience. Scholars advocate that teacher educational attainment and professional experience impact ability and a willingness to adopt a philosophical orientation as evidenced in curriculum delivery, integrated content area learning, and child initiated learning with emphasis on accommodating child differences(Kowalski, Pretti-Frontczak, & Johnson, 2001; McMullen, 1999; McMullen & Alat, 2002). However, much of the research has more narrowly focused on teacher beliefs and practices in accordance to principles of developmentally appropraite practice.

As scholars assert, there is much dialogue and discourse on developmentally appropriate practices in spite of its significance in addressing the developmental needs of children as advocated by experts in the field of early childhood education (Copple and Bredekamp, 2009; NAEYC, 2002). Much of the research on developmentally appropriate practices in the preschool setting broadly interprets a teacher beliefs and corresponding actions in consideration of existing tensions in the educational setting which includes accountability for school wide curriculum mandates, program structural characteristics, and contextual factors including work conditions. Very few studies wholly interprets the individual experiences of early childhood educators implementing developmentally appropriate practices and rarely are the voices of practitioners represented in the literature (McMullen, 1999; Fails-Nelson and Rogers, 2003; Parker and Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006; Wien, 1996). Although Fails-Nelson and Roger's (2003) study wholly interprets the experiences of an educator in the planning and implementation of developmentally appropriate practices, the case under study reports on culturally responsive practice as a separate construct from developmentally appropriate practice. In this circumstance, it is assumed that the framework of developmentally appropriate practice excludes culturally relevant practice suggesting that further research examine the interrelatedness of culture, pedagogy, and curriculum to foster a deeper understanding of the framework.

There are very few studies on the role of paraprofessionals in the early care and educational setting in spite of the significance of their role in supporting children's growth and development (Han and Neugharth-Pritchett, 2010). In this limited area of research, researchers have examined the role of paraprofessionals in supporting developmentally appropriate practices under the guidance of credentialed teachers and

have found that while credentialed teacher beliefs direct teacher assistants to act in an instructional or non-instructional capacity, a willingness on the part of paraprofessionals to embrace principles of developmentally appropriate practices including valuing children's enthusiasm, interests, abilities, and encouraging children's conversations is most often result of educational attainment. Further research on the nature of a paraprofessional's role in supporting child centered practice is relevant to the research on early childhood education.

The research on developmentally appropriate practices identifies an ongoing dialogue on the appropriateness of early learning standards. Studies have examined teacher instructional practices characterized by intentionally planned, thoughtful, and relevant learning experiences that build on prior child knowledge and support children's burgeoning interests across content areas and domains of learning as embedded in early learning standards and have found that despite tensions in the beliefs and practices of early childhood educators early learning standards support children's learning (Goldstein, 2008) while other studies on standards based early childhood curricula have determined that an increased emphasis on academic skills development hinders development among children considered at risk for learning difficulties due to poverty and lived experience particularly in the area of language arts literacy and mathematics suggesting that early learning standards do not consider the developmental skills, abilities, and interests of young children in an emotionally supportive classroom context (Stipek, 2006). Such a discord in findings suggests that further research examine whether practitioners embrace developmentally appropriate practice particularly in programs serving young children often considered at risk for learning difficulties problems due to diversity and lived

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experience citing concerns over readiness, early learning standards, and accountability in the educational setting.

Scholars have more narrowly focused on the implementation of prescribed curricula in the preschool setting and have determined that developmentally appropriate practices are evident in curriculum models that support child centered interactions, experiences with concrete materials, and varied learning experiences given that early care and educational practitioners demonstrate a willingness to embrace child centered practices in content specific instruction (Ryan, 2004). However, much of the research on content specific instruction centers on language arts literacy and mathematics (Justice Mashburn, Hamre, and Pianta , 2008; Ostrosky, Gaffney & Thomas, 2006). Very few studies interpret children's daily participation in classroom routines, transitions, and learning experiences aside from language arts literacy and mathematics. Further research on varied content specific learning experiences and domains of learning is relevant to the dialogue on early childhood education.

There is a general agreement among scholars that a higher ethic of care is essential in the education of young children. Much of the research on identifying essential traits of early childhood educators indicate that care, concern, and sensitivity to young children is a learned and personal characteristic of early care and educational practitioners. Studies on caring for young children in the early learning setting center on teacher knowledge, awareness, and responsiveness to children as evidenced in reciprocal interactions in the early learning setting and have found that effective early childhood educators advocate for children's growth and development as characterized by a desire to nurture a child's sense of well being, safety, and secure attachment to early childhood

educational practitioners rooted in a love of children (Bergin and Bergin, 2009; Coker, 2008; Swick, 2007; Webb and Blond, 1995).

Very few scholars have examined the ethic of care in the framework of developmentally appropriate practice, which makes explicit the role of caring adults in the early learning environment. Often characterized as a teacher's gentle demeanor, mannerisms, and physical gestures, Goldstein's (1998) study on the ethic of care in the context of developmentally appropriate practices determined that an educator's intellect and thoughtfulness characterized by a sensitivity and responsiveness to children's developmental abilities, interests, and learning needs is situated in contextually and individually appropriate classroom experiences suggesting that teacher intellect and child development knowledge are the basis of a responsive caring centered curricula which relies upon a teacher's willingness to nurture children's learning. Further research on the nature of the relationship between developmentally appropriate practices and the notion of teacher affect as an essential disposition in the early care and education of young children is relevant to the dialogue on child centered developmentally appropriate practice.

There is a general agreement in the literature on the value of assessing interpersonal interactions among adults and children in the early learning setting suggesting the need for early childhood practitioners to demonstrate a desire to impact children's learning as evidenced in classroom learning experiences, responsiveness, and reciprocal interactions with children. However, much of the research on interpersonal interactions is situated in quantitative analysis of standardized instruments and measures to determine how early care and educational practitioners interact with children as

evidenced in program structural characteristics, curricula, and instructional strategies (Kugelmass & Ross-Bernstein, 2000; Sidle-Fuligni, Howes, Huang, Hong, and Lara-Cinisomo, 2012; Vitiello, Booren, Downer, and Williford, 2012).

Few studies have more narrowly focused on the role of adult behaviors in supporting children's engagement at play. Researchers have examined adult displays of affection, gesturing, and voice tonality and have found that a child's sense of safety, trust, and security is either promoted or hindered through adult behaviors indicating that responsiveness to children is characterized by an educator's willingness to engage children in extended conversations at play accompanied by demonstrations of affection suggesting that educators' responsiveness and ability to provide appropriate learning experiences supports children's development and sense of secure attachment requisite to learning (Howes and Smith, 1995). In this category of research, studies on curriculum, materials, and classroom resources indicate that quality early care and educational experiences are strongly influenced by children's personal characteristics and child engagement with adults and among peers in concrete learning experiences which affirms the value of rich environments conducive to play activities and active teacher engagement (Jeon, Langill, Perterson, Luze, Carta, and Atwater, 2010; Slutsky and Pistorovava, 2011). However, research on the nature of an early childhood educator's disposition to warmly interact with children at play is largely absent from the literature on interpersonal interactions in the early childhood setting and it remains unclear from the literature whether early childhood educators consider reciprocal interactions as requisite to children's early learning and success.

Statement of the Problem

Although early childhood educators are given charge to interpret and to respond to children's learning needs within early care and educational settings, there remains a significant gap in the knowledge on the capacity of early childhood educators to wholly interpret and respond to children's learning needs as articulated in teacher knowledge, advocacy, and concern for children. This study will address that gap in the existing body of knowledge. The research problem examines an educator's disposition to positively impact children's cognitive and social emotional development as evidenced in child centered practices that arouse curiosity, foster social interaction, and promote children's learning as expressed in interpersonal interactions that affirm differences among young children in an urban preschool setting through the lens of developmentally appropriate practice.

Purpose of the Study

This qualitative case study interprets the experience of early childhood educators in cultivating child growth and development in an urban preschool setting through the lens of developmentally appropriate practice, which is largely influenced by the educational theory of John Dewey, Jean Piaget, and Lev Vygotsky and stipulates that children's developmental needs are highly regarded as the impetus for early childhood curricula and classroom instructional decisions. The defined unit of analysis represents the interactions of early childhood educators and preschool age children in an urban preschool setting to provide a compelling interpretation of the case under study (Yin, 2009).

In the aim of interpreting an early childhood educator's disposition to nurture children's development, I consider the espoused beliefs of early childhood educators and how beliefs are evidenced in intentional and reciprocal interactions with preschool age children as observed in classroom practice. I posit that effective early childhood educators' posses essential character traits beyond notions of child centeredness to include heartfelt appreciation for children and families as articulated through knowledge, affective concern, and sensitivity to differences. I aim to provide a deeper understanding of the essential role of early childhood educators in holistically serving children's developmental needs and therefore contribute to an even greater understanding of the current framework of developmentally appropriate practice in early care and educational settings.

Context of the Research Site

Goodfellow and Sumsion (2000) propose that in order to fully understand a teacher's role in the service of teaching we must examine the context of the schools and communities in which teachers practice. This study endeavors to provide an understanding of early childhood practice in an urban environment populated by racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse children of families living in poverty (Frederick-Steele, 2011; Hanson & Lynch, 1992; Milner, 2006).

Nieto (2006) offers that teaching is a profession wrought with challenges. These challenges often include the physical and emotional conditions of schools, particularly in urban areas serving diverse groups of children. "One in four U.S. schools is overcrowded, and 3.5 million children attend public schools that are in very poor or even non operative conditions, this in the richest county in the world" (p. 460). Because schools in distress

often serve many of the most vulnerable children, sensitivity to context suggests that educators possess knowledge about the children, families, and communities in which teachers serve and apply this knowledge to implement instruction that accommodates differences among children. Differences among children including the diverse social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds of children and the range of skills children bring to the early childhood setting should be acknowledged and accounted for in the early childhood setting in the aim of planning relevant learning experiences for young children (Talbert-Johnson, 2006).

The site selected for this research study is the ABC Elementary School located in the Harrison Hill neighborhood in the City of Urban. The City of Urban is According to is among the poorest in the nation (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010. The ABC Elementary School is located in the City of Urban's Harrison Hill neighborhood. There are numerous homes, buildings, and vacant lots in the neighborhood, which are severely distressed and left for ruin. Within the Harrison Hill Neighborhood, single mothers and grandparents disproportionately serve as head of household and are the primary caretakers to children. A disproportionate number of families who reside in the Harrison Hill neighborhood live in poverty (Legal Services of New Jersey, 2007; Urban Strategies, 2008)).

The ABC Elementary School is a part of the Urban City School district. The Urban City School district, as a result of Abbott v. Burke, a landmark legal ruling, receives substantial funding from the State to equalize economic disparities that exist among public school districts within the State (Abbott v. Burke, 1998). In 1998, as a result of this ruling, the Urban City School district has offered a funded preschool

program for children who are three and four years old as a part of the regular educational program.

The ABC Elementary School accommodates four preschool classrooms serving 60 preschool age children, between three to five years of age. Each classroom is limited to 15 children to ensure children's needs are met and there are two adults in each classroom. A certificated preschool educator is assigned to lead classroom instruction and is supported in these efforts by a paraprofessional who is assigned to facilitate children's learning and lend support to the early childhood educator in the early childhood classroom.

The preschool curriculum in use at the ABC Elementary School is aligned to the state department of education's standards for early childhood programs as required in the State implementation guidelines for publicly funded preschool programs (New Jersey Department of Education, 2009). The curriculum is touted as an evidenced based model of child-centered practices that support content specific skill development and the process skills children use to learn content. The curriculum is intended to acknowledge and support developmental differences among children to promote positive learning outcomes for all children. Drawing on a child centered, constructivist approach to learning, the curriculum guides educators in intentionally planning integrated project based studies to support child development across all learning domains to ensure young children acquire concepts, skills, and knowledge requisite for meaningful learning supports the curriculum. (Trister-Dodge, Colker, and Heroman, 2002). The notion of intentionality on the part of early childhood educators applies to the physical and emotive classroom environment and suggests that effective educators are purposeful and thoughtful

classroom practitioners who engage children in a variety of learning experiences in the early childhood classroom setting (Epstein, 2007; NAEYC, 2009).

Research Concerns

The following overarching research concern serves as the basis for this study. The overarching question for this study involves an early childhood educator's disposition to implement developmentally appropriate practices in the early childhood classroom as described below:

1. What key dispositions of early childhood educators' support developmentally appropriate practice and affirm differences among children in the early childhood setting?

Sub topical concerns are addressed related to the main foci of this study as presented below:

a. How do early childhood educators perceive and respond to developmental differences among children in the early childhood setting?

b. How do early childhood educators form and nurture relationships with children whose background may be different from their own background?

Rationale for Research Concerns

The present case under study interprets the experiences of educators in an urban preschool setting and represents varied aspects of early childhood pedagogy to demonstrate knowledge, advocacy and concern for preschool age children. In the aim of providing a compelling interpretation of the case under study, the defined unit of analysis represents the interactions of early childhood educators and preschool age children as articulated through the lens of developmentally appropriate practice (Yin, 2009).

The overarching research concern considers that early childhood educators act in the best interests of young children in accordance to personally held values, beliefs, knowledge, and professional experiences to promote child growth and development. Responding to children's needs, interests, and abilities in a physical and emotive early learning environment, it is assumed that early childhood educators demonstrate requisite pedagogical skills and child development knowledge in varied classroom routines, transitions, and intentional learning experiences. Under the direction and care of responsive early childhood educators, children are provided with materials, learning resources, and classroom equipment to support varied learning experiences. It is assumed that the early childhood educators possess requisite pedagogical knowledge and skills to intentionally plan lessons and to facilitate learning experiences that emerge in response to child interests, classroom conversations, and formative assessments of children's learning to inform classroom decision making.

The overarching research concern considers how early childhood educators structure instructional time, space arrangement, materials and equipment to implement varied learning experiences to support the individual learning needs and diverse abilities of children which mimic the linguistic, social, emotional, and cultural context of a child's lived experience. Referring to a child's lived experience, it is assumed that early childhood educators act on knowledge about individual children, families, and communities represented in the preschool setting as evidenced in an educator's willingness to create a physical classroom environment reflecting child diversity including authentic multicultural materials, photographs, play materials, children's literature, and the creative arts. A teacher's capacity to empathize, care, and demonstrate

sensitivity to children, while enthusiastically communicating knowledge as evident in child engagement and participation in varied developmentally appropriate learning experiences is considered essential to an early childhood educators' disposition.

Because the focus of this study pertains to how early childhood educators nurture children to holistically address children's needs in the early care and educational setting sub topical concerns are viewed through the lens of child development theories. In the early learning environment, it is assumed that the early childhood educators' demonstrate evidence of planned learning experiences along a continuum of varied teacher directed, structured, open ended, and child initiated learning experiences in accordance to the prescribed curricula. Under adult guidance and among peers, children acquire requisite skills, concepts, and knowledge while engaged in varied experiences that arouse curiosity, stimulate imaginary play, and support a child's need for self-directed learning and social interaction among their peers. Considering children as unique individuals with a capacity for learning, it is assumed that early childhood educators engage children and support individual child efforts to be successful in varied learning experiences.

A second sub topical concern is addressed in the notion of reciprocal relationships. As a powerful determinant of learning outcomes and child growth development, trusting reciprocal relationships are essential to a child's development. Relationships with adults in the preschool setting serves essential for children living under difficult circumstances in the home environment and serves as powerful determinant of learning outcomes and development (NAEYC, 2009). Early childhood educators foster a child's sense of security; promote pro-social behaviors and positive feelings of self worth that serve requisite to children's success in the preschool setting.

In the context of developing relationships with young children it is assumed that early childhood educators acknowledge and affirm differences in the presence of similarities and differences among the early childhood educators and children in the preschool setting. An early childhood educator's willingness to embrace and respond to differences suggests that early childhood educators consider the moral and ethical implications of education, such dispositions are considered as evidence knowledge, advocacy, and concern for children. It is assumed that educators demonstrate a higher ethic of concern for children, families, and communities acting to serve children fairly and equitably.

Theoretical Framework

In the field of early care and education, every aspect of the early learning environment is considered essential to teaching and learning (Platz & Arrellano, 2011; Spodek & Saracho, 2003). Informed by early educators and philosophers who recognized the necessity and intrinsic value of early childhood education as an approach to child care, development, and education; contemporary approaches to early learning programs for young children articulate the integral role of early childhood educators in holistically addressing children's development as demonstrated in play based exploration, and social interaction in the early learning setting (Platz & Arellano, 2011).

Among these early educators and philosophers, the works of John Dewey, Jean Piaget, and Lev Vygotsky inform this research study. Dewey (1916) maintained that education is a humanistic, social, and democratic process wherein children's learning occurs as a result of personal experiences and nurturing interpersonal relationships. Whereas Dewey articulates the role of schools, communities, and educators in the service

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of education, Lev Vygotsky advocates for social interaction as requisite to cognitive development in children. Vygotsky (1978) asserts that cognitive development occurs as a result of social interactions in the classroom environment. According to Vygotsky, children construct knowledge as they interact with adults and peers with materials and through classroom experience. While Vygotsky emphasizes social interaction as requisite to child experiences in the early learning environment, Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development proposes that children progress through sequential stages of cognitive development (Lubeck, 1996; Lutz & Huitt, 2004; Piaget, 1981). Piaget's theory advocates the importance of readiness in children's learning and emphasizes child development in the construction of knowledge.

Drawing on the developmental theories of Lev Vygtosky and Jean Piaget, developmentally appropriate practice (Bredekamp, 1987; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; NAEYC, 2009) is based on knowledge of how children learn and develop and is widely recognized as a standard of practice in early childhood education. The framework for developmentally appropriate practice accounts for all areas of children's physical, emotional, social and cognitive development and is intended to ensure educator practices are appropriate to a child's age and stage of individual development. Developmentally appropriate practice considers the cultural and social context in which children grow and develop (Bredekamp, 1987; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Dickinson, 2002; Mallory & New, 1994; NAYEC, 2009).

Dewey (1916) articulates that a child's natural curiosity be developed in classroom conversation and learning experiences that embrace play based activities. According to Dewey, schools, communities, and society are responsible to nurture young

children's learning. Integral to Dewey's philosophy is the belief that education is a humanistic, social, and democratic process (Dewey, 1916). Dewey regarded schools as nurturing institutions wherein children's learning occurs as the result of knowledgeable, enthusiastic, and caring educators who guide, model, and present a variety of learning experiences in the classroom (Ozmon & Craver, 2003; Schecter, 2011). Dewey (1916) offers, "Education consists primarily in transmission through communication. Communication is a process of sharing experience 'till it becomes a common possession. It modifies the disposition of both the parties who partake in it" (p. 9).

In Dewey's view, effective educators are essential to children's learning. He espoused that effective teaching practices are often art over science, indicating that educators construct learning environments that stimulate cognitive and social-emotional development among children. Dewey (1916) suggested that effective educators embody qualities that extend beyond pedagogical knowledge and embrace an affective disposition towards children developed in the context of deliberate, purposeful, and meaningful interpersonal relationships with children in the school setting. He asserted that educators possess a capacity to empathize, care, and enjoy classroom contact with children that serves to nurture child interests and builds upon a child's lived experience (Simpson, Jackson & Aycock, 2005). Dewey (1908) offered, "I believe, finally, that the teacher is engaged, not simply in the training of individuals, but in the formation of the proper social life" (p. 18). In Dewey's view, educators enthusiastically interact with students in an expressive manner that demonstrates an affective disposition towards content knowledge and learning in the aim of arousing intellectual curiosity in students within

and beyond the classroom. Dewey (1916) writes, "the environment involves a personal sharing in common experiences" (p. 71).

Dewey (1940) advocates that children are at the center of the curriculum. He asserted that children's play and work in the context of the curriculum, promote active exploration, experiential learning, and self-direction among children within the learning environment. Dewey imparts that children develop in response to the school environment, physical classroom setting, and instructional materials for learning. Dewey suggests that this requires skill, knowledge, and effort on the part of effective educators and calls upon educators to observe and study children's actions at play in the classroom environment suggesting that educators reflect upon their own reactions to children in the educational setting (Carter, Cividanes, Curtis, & Lebo, 2010; Dewey, 1933; Waks, 2011). Because early learning experiences foster active learning and opportunities for children to collaborate with adults and peers, Dewey's philosophies articulate that young children construct knowledge through experience and interaction (Schecter, 2011; Ultanir, 2012).

Children's cognitive development represents a child's understanding of the world (Piaget, 1981). Piaget's theory of cognitive development in young children articulates that learning occurs as the result of distinct stages in a child's biological maturation and through typical learning characteristics of young children. Piaget's theory advocates that children are active learners who construct their own knowledge in stages in accordance with age and environmental influence (Mallory & New, 1994). Piaget's theory supports that an increase in play and imagination among children between two to seven years of age is characterized by symbolic play and social interactions although typically developing preschool age children are often illogical, egocentric and one dimensional in

their thinking. Because the focus of this study is preschool age children, Piaget's theory is illustrated in learning experiences that stimulate children's thought processes including magical thinking, reasoning, and other cognitive capacities representing a preoperational stage of development, under the guidance and support of early childhood educators in the preschool classroom. Piaget's theory supports the notion that an early childhood educator's role is to model, guide, and provide meaningful activities to foster children's curiosity. Piaget's theory advocates that an educator's role is to promote children's thinking and engagement in play like activities including problem solving to stimulate cognitive development in a period of rapid cognitive development in children.

Vygotsky (1978) theory of social cognitive development advocates for social interaction in the development of cognition in children and articulates the value of experience and interactions within the early learning environment. This study illustrates the value of social interaction in the cognitive development of children as expressed in Vygotsky's (1978) theory of social cognitive development. This theory imparts that a child's capacity for learning is greatly influenced by a child's lived experience with particular emphasis on play, prior to attending formalized schooling. According to Vygtosky (1978) children's development occurs as the result of child engagement in meaningful learning experiences. The zone of proximal development represents the distance between a child's developmental level and the level of potential development that is attained when children engage in learning activities with peers and under the guidance of adults, in contrast to working alone suggesting that learning is a social behavior (Blake & Pope, 2008; Follari, 2007; Hudson, 2002). Vygotsky's theory will foster insight into the process of learning and development in the early childhood setting

as expressed when children engage in social behaviors with peers and educators in the classroom setting. Vygotsky's theory articulates the integral role of early childhood teachers to nurture and respond to children's interests in order to advance children developmentally. Because young children develop at varying rates, Vygotsky's theory implies that an effective early childhood educator posses knowledge of child development and is therefore capable to address children's needs holistically in classroom practice.

Developmentally appropriate practice is widely recognized as a standard of practice in Early Childhood Education. The framework for developmentally appropriate practice is informed by Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development, which stipulates that a child's learning progresses in sequential stages (Blake & Pope, 2008; Daniels & Shumov, 2003; Lubeck, 1996; Lutz & Huitt, 2004; Piaget, 1981) and Lev Vygotsky theory of social cognitive development which advocates for social interaction in the development of cognition in children (Vygotsky, 1978). The framework maintains a holistic view of the child and provides a framework for all areas of a child's physical, emotional, social and cognitive development. The promotion of a child's learning and development is a key feature of developmentally appropriate practice, which maintains educators view children as unique individuals (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Mallory & New, 1994; NAEYC, 2009). Developmentally appropriate practice seeks to ensure that children's experiences are differentiated to meet individual learning goals that emerge from a child's experiences and interactions within the learning environment. The framework for practice asserts that early childhood educators create a caring environment of learners that enhances child development and learning and implies that teacher

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planning and instruction grows out of teacher interactions and observation, interactions, and assessment (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Dickinson, 2002; Goldstein, 2008; Mallory & New, 1994; NAEYC, 2009).

Grounded in research and knowledge regarding young children, developmentally appropriate practice reflects the demographical context of an early childhood program (NAEYC, 2009). The current framework for developmentally appropriate practice considers the cultural and social context in which children grow and develop as essential to early learning and illustrates the growing need for educators to consider a child's racial identity, culture, socio-economic status, and language in the course of teaching, nurturing, and responding to children in the preschool setting (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Mallory & New, 1994; NAEYC, 2009). The framework of developmentally appropriate practice addresses a child's readiness for learning and achievement gaps that may exist among young children transitioning from home to the school environment while stressing the importance of relationships with children and their families as requisite to child development particularly among children from diverse backgrounds (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

Research Methodology

This study examined the nature of an early childhood educator's disposition as integral to children's learning in an urban preschool setting. Guided by an interpretive constructivist paradigm, I sought to understand the perspectives of each participant as expressed in teacher beliefs and observations of classroom practices. In order to garner an in depth understanding of affect as an essential disposition in early childhood practice, I employed an interpretive, naturalistic approach to understanding this phenomenon

(Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A case study research design was best suited to illustrate evidence of developmentally appropriate practices and key characteristics of early childhood educators in nurturing children's growth and development. In the aim of understanding an early childhood educator's capacity to nurture and affirm child differences, I considered the stated beliefs of early childhood educators and the relationship between their beliefs and classroom practices that demonstrated deliberate, thoughtful, and meaningful interactions with young children through the lens of developmentally appropriate practice.

In order to gather evidence of developmentally appropriate practices and key affective characteristics of early childhood educators to support children's growth and development, multiple sources of qualitative evidence were collected and analyzed including individual interviews, classroom observations and focus group dialogue. Secondary data was collected as a part of this research and includes demographical information, census data, and government sponsored research.

Interviews with participants addressed culturally relevant teaching practices including materials and activities, and children's literature in support of child development. Modes of parent engagement and relationships with families were addressed in order to gain insight to a child's home environment. Focus group dialogue served to elicit conversation among the participants relevant to the context of the neighborhood demographics, early childhood pedagogy, and child centered practices that affirmed differences among young children. Observations of classroom practices sought to describe interpersonal classroom relationships and served to foster an understanding of an affective disposition of educators in the context of developmentally appropriate

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practice. A description of the physical environment provided substantial evidence of materials, activities, and supports for English language learners.

Each data source was coded the aim of identifying recurring patterns and themes among the data sources. Data analysis began informally during interviews or observations and continued during transcription, when recurring themes became evident to the researcher. As in case study analysis, this involved a spiraling, or cyclical process that proceeded from general to more specific interpetations of the data findings in the aim of presenting an in depth conceptualization of this study using narrative description (Creswell, 2007).

Significance of the Study

Among an ever growing population of young children from culturally, linguistically, socio economically, and ability diverse backgrounds entering the preschool setting, there is a greater need for early childhood educators to acknowledge and respond to individual children with affective care, concern, and sensitivity to differences. This study examines an educator's disposition to positively impact children's cognitive and social emotional development in the preschool setting as evidenced in child centered practices that arouse curiosity, foster social interaction, and promote children's learning as expressed in interpersonal interactions that affirm differences among young children in an urban preschool setting.

There remains a significant gap in our understanding of how early childhood educators' impact child growth and development among children of diverse backgrounds rooted in care, concern, and sensitivity thereby supporting the significance of this study. I hope that this study provides a deeper understanding of the essential role of the early

childhood educator in holistically serving children's developmental needs and contributes to an even greater understanding of the current framework of developmentally appropriate practice. This study aims to continue the dialogue on embracing diversity in the educational setting in the service of teaching young children.

The importance and necessity of examining an early childhood educator's disposition to nurture children's learning is supported by empirical research and scholarly literature that emphasizes teaching as a humanistic endeavor which serves essential to the development of young children in the early care and educational setting. For young children, who may be at risk for learning difficulties due to individual, familial, or contextual factors, early care and educational programs powerfully advocate for children and their families who are underserved in the educational setting (Child Trends, 2006; Fullan, 2003; Huffman & Speer, 2000; Kominski, Jamieson, & Martinez, 2001).While scholars recognize the value of child centered, developmentally appropriate practice and the integral role of early care and educational practitioners to support child development, current literature reveals that early care and educational practitioners more often purport to embrace principles of developmentally appropriate practices than fully implement developmentally appropriate practice. There is still much disagreement on whether early care and educational practitioners embrace developmentally appropriate practice particularly in programs serving young children considered at risk for learning difficulties problems due to diversity and lived experience, citing educator concerns over readiness, early learning standards, and accountability in the early care and educational setting.

The framework of developmentally appropriate practice considers children's interests, needs, and diverse abilities and the role of early care and educational

practitioners to respond to children's learning needs in the classroom environment. Such environments stimulate curiosity, affirm differences and promote the well being of children. The framework assumes early childhood educators possess child development knowledge and pedagogical skills requisite to planning and implementing appropriate learning experiences across content areas and domains of learning to promote child growth and development. With emphasis on children's interests, learning needs, and abilities, the framework of developmentally appropriate practices assumes early care and educational practitioners possess requisite knowledge and a capacity to interpret and respond to children's developmental needs. It is assumed that early care and educational practitioners possess an intuit desire to communicate knowledge with enthusiasm and passion for knowledge, teaching and learning. Referring to an educator's capacity to interpret and respond to children's needs, it is assumed that educators demonstrate a higher ethic of concern for children. The literature reveals the value of interpersonal relationships in the early learning setting to promote a child's sense of safety, security, and well being as integral to children's readiness for learning. It is unclear whether early childhood educators fully consider reciprocal interactions as requisite to children's early learning success.

Using a case study research design, this study provides a detailed description of early childhood practice that demonstrates an early childhood educator's passion to holistically address the needs of children with heartfelt appreciation for children and families of diverse backgrounds based on key assertions about children's development and the explicit responsibility of early childhood educators to demonstrate knowledge, advocacy and concern for children. Guided by an interpretive constructivist paradigm, I

provide the perspectives of early childhood educator's in relation to observed classroom practices. In the aim of understanding an early childhood educator's capacity to nurture and affirm child differences, I considered the stated beliefs of early childhood educators in relation to reciprocal interactions that demonstrate deliberate, thoughtful, and meaningful exchanges through the lens of developmentally appropriate practice.

This study illustrates the value of child development knowledge and advocacy as a meaningful construct in preschool education. This dissertation expands upon current research and interprets the experience of early childhood educators given charge to enhance child development and learning in a diverse preschool setting that purports to embrace principles of developmentally appropriate practice. As an in depth conceptualization of early childhood practices; interpreting the role of early childhood educators and the implications of affective concern provides insight to teacher practitioners, teacher education programs, and administrators in serving young children in the preschool setting which compliments an existing body of literature on early childhood education.

Definition of Terms

Several key terms and concepts will be used throughout the course of this research study. The following definitions are provided below in order to clarify these terms and to facilitate the readers understanding of this dissertation.

At-Risk Children: The term at risk children is defined as multiple indicators that inhibits the well being of school age children including individual, familial, and contextual factors such as such as poverty, low parental education levels, and high incidences of

crime in a child's community (Child Trends, 2006; Huffman & Speer, 2000; Kominski, Jamieson, & Martinez, 2001*).*

Child Development: Child development is defined as the social, emotional, physical and cognitive changes in children stimulated by biological maturation interacting with experience (NAEYC, 2009).

Constructivism: Constructivism will be defined as a theory of learning that accounts for prior experience and knowledge in the acquisition of new knowledge. Constructivism upholds the ideal that individuals develop understanding through interaction with materials, experiences, and activities under the direction of teachers who act to guide learning (Lutz & Huitt, 2004; Ultanir, 2012).

Cultural Competence: Culture is defined as the integrated patterns of human behavior that includes thoughts, communications, actions, customs, beliefs, values, and institutions of racial, ethnic, religious, or social groups. Competence is defined as having the capacity to function in a particular way. Cultural competence is the capacity to function within the context of culturally integrated patterns of human behavior as defined by a group (Cross, Bazron, Dennis, & Isaacs, 1989)**.**

Culturally Responsive Teaching: Culturally responsive teaching is a pedagogy that recognizes the importance of including students' cultural references in all aspects of learning. Culturally responsive teaching is the application of cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and learning styles of diverse students to make learning appropriate and effective for children (Gay, 2000).

Developmentally appropriate practice: A child center approach to instruction that emphasizes the whole child and takes into account gender, culture, disabilities, socio

economic status, and family in order to meet the individual child's needs, developmental

level, and learning style (Charlesworth, 1998; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

Developmentally Inappropriate Practice: Teaching practices characterized by didactic

instruction, extrinsic behaviors supports, and separate content areas (Charlesworth,

1998).

Dispositions: Dispositions are values, commitments and professional ethics that influence

a teacher's behavior towards students, families, colleagues, and communities. Guided by

beliefs, attitudes, and personal values including honesty, fairness, responsibility, and care,

dispositions refer to the requisite knowledge and skills demonstrated by teachers to enact

classroom practice (Murrell, Diez, Feiman-Nemser & Schussler, 2010; National Council

for Accreditation of Teacher Education [NCATE], 2008).

Diversity: Diversity will be generally defined as differences along the dimensions of race,

ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, or

religion (Gonzalez-Mena, 2008; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

Early Care and Educational Practitioners, Early Childhood Educators: The NAEYC

defines early childhood educators as all those individuals who work with young children

in early care and educational programs birth through age eight (NAEYC, 2011).

Instructional Scaffolding: Term used to describe assistance and supports for learning and

development that enables children to master a challenge just beyond their developmental

level. The adult gradually reduces this support, as children are ready to proceed with

independence (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

Intentionality: Combines both child-guided and adult-guided active experiences.

Children's interests and developmental levels help to shape adult-guided experiences,

while adults use their knowledge and observations to decide when and how to intervene in child-guided experiences. Intentional teaching is thoughtful, and purposeful. Intentional teachers use their knowledge, judgment, and expertise to organize learning experiences for children and allows for teaching opportunities representing child interests Intentional teaching means teachers act with specific learning outcomes and goals for children's development and learning (Epstein, 2007; NAEYC, 2002).

National Association for the Education of Young Children: The NAEYC is a professional organization and accreditation body in the field of early childhood that serves and acts on behalf of young children. The focus of the organization is to foster educational and developmental services and resources for children, families, and professionals to improve professional practices in early childhood education (NAEYC, 2011).

Professional Learning Communities of Practice: A group of educators including classroom teachers, school and district administrators, stakeholders, support personnel and parents who work on behalf of student to ensure student achievement through shared leadership, vision, and supportive conditions. Emphasizing learning, professional learning communities promote equity personal and social responsibility (Putnam, Gunnings-Moton, & Sharp, 2009).

 School Readiness: School readiness in the broadest sense is about children, families, early environments, schools and communities. All children are ready for school. Skills and developmentally are influenced by family context and through interactions with people and the environment before entering school (Maxwell & Clifford, 2004). A child's readiness for school is determined by a child's individual capabilities upon school entry (NAEYC, 1995).

Limitations and Delimitations

Several limitations to this study need to be acknowledged. The first limitation of this study is the site selection. At the onset of this study, the Urban Hope Act was signed into legislation at the ABC Elementary School site. The purpose of this legislation is to expand educational options for children and families served in chronically failing school districts (Urban Hope Act, 2012). This legislation prompted several of the participants to speculate that the ABC Elementary School would close and be replaced with a non-profit educational program for children residing in the Harrison Hill neighborhood impacting the climate of the school. Additionally, the ABC Elementary School building was deemed structurally unsafe resulting in the closure and temporary relocation of children in grades pre-kindergarten through second grade at the start of the 2011–2012 academic year. The relocation to a temporary school building outside of the Harrison Hill neighborhood and subsequent transfer of the school's administration fueled additional speculation of school closure among the participants and may have adversely affected participant dispositions during the data collection period. An additional limitation of this study relates to the children enrolled in the preschool classrooms. This study examined the participant's disposition to implement child-centered practices in the context of the classroom environment. While the researcher considered children's actions and interactions with adults and peers as integral to data collection and analysis, particular emphasis was given to the educator's disposition to create an engaging learning environment, implement developmentally appropriate learning experiences, and cultivate interpersonal relationships with children in the preschool classroom. Children were not interviewed as a part of this study.

Finally, a limitation of this study relates to the early childhood educators' understanding and interpretation of the state's early childhood standards and program guidelines. Because the site under study is a publicly funded preschool program, early learning standards for curriculum and instruction apply to the preschool classroom (New Jersey Department of Education [NJDOE], 2009). Drawing on principles of developmentally appropriate practices, the district's curriculum is intended to support child growth and development across content specific areas and domains of learning. The guidelines for early childhood pedagogy emphasize free choice play, social interactions, and teacher guided instruction. The state's guidelines support teacher intentionality in the planning of differentiated learning experiences that acknowledge developmental differences among children (Barnett & Ackerman, 2011; NAEYC, 2009; NJDOE, 2009; Trister-Dodge, Colker, & Heroman, 2002).

Chapter Summary

Early childhood educators are given charge to develop in children the necessary concepts, skills, and knowledge to support learning. An early childhood educator's capacity to positively impact children in an early childhood setting may be dependent on an educator's ability to interpret and respond to a child's cognitive and social needs while affirming differences. This chapter has provided an overview of the research and establishes the significance of this study. In the next chapter, a review of literature is presented to support an understanding of early childhood pedagogy that cultivates child growth and development and affirms child differences.

Dissertation Outline

With an ever-growing population of diverse learners entering the preschool setting, there is a greater need for early childhood educators to acknowledge and respond to child differences through the lens of child centered practice. This dissertation expands upon current research on developmentally appropriate practices and interprets the espoused beliefs and observed practices of early childhood educators given charge to enhance child development and learning in a diverse, urban preschool setting that purports to embrace principles of developmentally appropriate practice. This dissertation consists of five chapters that situate an analysis of key dispositions of early childhood educators that affirm diversity through the lens of child centered practices in an urban, publicly funded preschool setting within existing research on child growth and development in the preschool years.

Chapter Two examines the theoretical and empirical research that frames this dissertation. First, I begin by examining the nature of the problem and the theoretical framework that is relevant to understanding this phenomenon. Then, I examine empirical research and scholarly literature on identifying and assessing teacher dispositions to support effective teaching and learning in the educational setting. Next, I review research on early childhood education and the role of early childhood practitioners to support child growth and development in contemporary settings. Chapter Three identifies the methodological framework employed in this study. A qualitative, case study methodology was used to examine the beliefs and observed practices of seven early childhood educators in four preschool classrooms located in an urban contextual setting. The chapter describes the research context, participant selection, research protocols, data collection and analysis, and the researcher's role in the course of this study. Chapter Four presents on the data in relation to each of the four preschool classrooms. The presentation of findings corresponds to the early childhood educators' beliefs and observations of classroom instructional practice. Next, I perform a cross-classroom analysis of the findings to identify similarities and differences among the early childhood educators in relation to emerging themes. Chapter Five summarizes the findings in alignment to the overarching research concern and includes the implications of this study for early childhood communities of practice. The chapter concludes with recommendations for further research.

Chapter 2

Conceptual Framework

Early childhood educators are given charge to interpret and to respond to children's learning needs within early care and educational settings. Effective early childhood educators account for developmental differences among culturally, linguistically, socio economically, and ability diverse children and respond with knowledge, affective concern and sensitivity to differences.

Educational research affirms that effective teachers are critical for the children's success in the early care and educational setting. As a result, many scholars have studied teacher beliefs, values, and behaviors to determine teacher traits that best serve to impact children's learning (Borko, Liston, & Whitcomb, 2007; Welch, Pitts, Tenini, Kuenlen, & Wood, 2010). The literature identifies an ongoing dialogue among scholars on the implications of evaluating teacher morals and ethical concerns. Researchers also differ on how to observe and interpet moral virtures such as truthfulness, fairness, and compassion in spite of the significance of personal character traits on reciprocal interactions with children in the educational setting (Brown, Morehead, & Smith, 2008; Burant, Chubbuck, & Whipp, 2007; Damon, 2007; Fallona, 2000; Hansen, 1993; Osguthorpe, 2008; Sockett, 2009).

Scholars identify diversity as a foremost concern in education. There is general agreement among scholars on the responsibility of educators to embrace and affirm differences especially among children diverse racial, ethnic, socio economic and linguistic backgrounds but some researchers interpret a teachers disposition to embrace and affirm differences as a social justic concern that demands teacher courage,

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conviction, and passion to ensure equity (Nieto, 2006) while other studies indicate a need for teachers to possess a greater sensitivity to context as articulated in classroom decision making and content area instruction (Burant & Kirby, 2002; Cook & Cleaf, 2000; Frederick-Steele, 2011; Gordon & Fittler, 2004; Hughes et al., 2004 Milner, 2006; Talbert-Johnson, 2006).

Researchers have more narrowly focused on formalized, culturally relevant curricula to support diverse learners although much of the research is more often deemed approriate for later school settings (Johnson & Reiman, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Lee & Herner-Patnode, 2010; Villegas, 2007). However, because of the strong impact of cultural and linguistic diversity on children's learning, researchers have examined the experiences of English language learners in the early learning setting. Studies on English language learners in bilingual classrooms have found that among children for whom English is a second language, an inability to interact with peers and adults results in feelings of social isolation and frustration signifying that a child's ability to develop a second language progress through developmental stages in accordance with age and individual appropriateness (Sowa, 2009). While other studies on on bilingual children identified with special needs have examined the interrelatedness of culture, language, and disability and have determined that effective teachers cultivate classroom environments which resemble a child's culture, home, and community as characterized by curricula materials and learning activities as aligned to children's individualized educational plans inclusive of culture (Barrera, 1993; Hanson & Gutierrez, 1997).

Studies on diversity concerns are often situated in analysis of child and familial differences (Goodfellow, 2001; Holloway et al., 1995; Kidd, Sanchez, & Thorp, 2008).

Researchers have examined factors influencing child development in diverse urban, rural and suburban contexts characterized by population, cultural, and socio economic distress to determine its impact on child development (Hanson & Lynch, 1992; Miller and Votruba-Drzal, 2012) while other studies consider familial perspectives on early care and education in the presence of cultural, ethnic, and socio economic differences. The findings indicate that cultural, linguistic, and socio economic differences do not preclude familial expectations of high quality early care and educational programs promoting child centered, constructivist approaches often advocated by scholars in early childhood education (Holloway et al., 1995). Although the findings are signficant, many studies in this category of research are characterized by large scale quantitative studies that employ standardized measures and secondary data to indicate results.

Scholars have more narrowly focused on tensions among educators and families and have determined that cultural and linguistic differences adversely impact how educators respond to families therefore hindering child growth and development (Cheatham & Jimenez-Silva, 2012; Espinosa, 2008). Because of the strong impact of familial influences on children's development, researchers have more narrowly focused on children's home environments to determine whether chaotic home environments, often regarded as cause for children's failure to thrive in the educational setting, adversely impact child development. The findings indicate that an educator's beliefs, awareness, and willingness to respond to children with sensitivity to lived experience positively influences children's engagement in classroom learning experiences, but the results have not reached a consensus in the literature (Fleer & Hedegaard, 2010; Goodfellow, 2001).

Scholars have examined children's access to preschool education programs in consideration of familial income, education, ethnicity, and geographical mobility and have determined that poverty impacts child and familial access to preschool education programs (Barnett & Yarosz, 2007). Although scholars agree that access to high quality early care and education is unequal among diverse children and families, much of the research on children's participation in high quality early care and education is situated in an analysis of child readiness. Because child readiness is strongly influenced by familial and caregiver influence prior to entering formalized early care and educational settings, researchers have examined whether early care and education positively impacts children's development and have determined that economically disadvantaged children entering school with fewer academic skills and significant gaps in learning make considerable gains prior to entering kindergarten (Magnuson et al., 2004; Winsler, et al., 2008).

Although researchers affirms the integral role of early childhood practicioners in supporting children's early learning and later school success, there is much discourse in the literature on readiness and the findings are subject to much interpretation in the literature. In this area of research, scholars advocate that constructivist theories which emphasize children's developmental abilities best support child readiness (Chien et al., 2010) while other studies suggest that early learning standards emphasizing mastery of skills, and academic content knowledge impact a child's readiness for later school achievement (Wesley & Buysse, 2003). Because of such dissonance in findings it is difficult to draw conclusions on how to address child readiness.

References to inequality appear in the literature on readiness. In contrast to much of the research on children's readiness is the notion of ready schools to support children's learning. Studies on ready schools have examined the role of teachers, parents, and communities to support children's readiness for kindergarten in consideration of diversity, teacher education, and relationships with families prior to school entry. The findings indicate that transitional practices occurring prior to school entry require considerable time and planning and are most often implemented in schools and throughout communities with higher economic resources and trained educators with advanced degrees (Early, Pianta, Taylor, & Cox, 2001). Researchers have examined national and international efforts to promote readiness among children considered at risk due to low birth weight, parent education, and cultural differences and have determined that ready schools respond to children's developmental needs working alongside families and communities to ensure teaching practices consider diversity and developmental readiness in contrast to inappropriate skill and drill teacher instructional approaches designed to prepare children to perform on formalized assessments as an indicator of readiness (Freeman & Powers-Costello, 2011).

Research affirms knowledge as a requisite teacher dispostion. Throughout the literature there is a general understanding of the impact of practitioner knowledge on children's success in the early care and educational setting. Studies have examined teacher knowledge and have determined that knowledge refers to an educator's ability, willingness, and intrinsic motivation to impart knowledge to meet the interests and abilities of students across varied contexts (Gordon & Fitler, 2004; Shulte, Edick, Edwards, & Mackiel, 2004; Thornton, 2006), while other scholars suggest that content

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knowledge wholly represents teacher effectiveness (Shulman, 1987). Studies on teacher knowledge have more narrowly focused on identifying indicators to assess and measure teacher knowledge deemed relevant to specialized fields of knowledge in education (Almeria, Johnson, Henriott, & Shapiro, 2011; Shively & Misco, 2010).

In the field of early childhood education, research on teacher knowledge is often situated in analysis of professional knowledge, educational attainment, and professional experience. Scholars advocate that teacher educational attainment and professional experience impact ability and a willingness to adopt a philosophical orientation as evidenced in curriculum delivery, integrated content area learning, and child initiated learning with emphasis on accommodating child differences(Kowalski, Pretti-Frontczak, & Johnson, 2001;McMullen, 1999; McMullen & Alat, 2002). However, much of the research has more narrowly focused on teacher beliefs and practices in accordance to principles of developmentally appropraite practice. As scholars assert, there is much dialogue and discourse on developmentally appropriate practices in spite of its significance in addressing the children's developmental needs as advocated by experts in the field of early childhood education (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; NAEYC, 2002).

Studies on teacher knowledge have tended to identify teacher instructional practice under the categories of developmentally appropriate or inappropriate practice suggesting that teacher beliefs and instructional practices are considered as either appropriate or inappropriate rather than acknowledging developmentally appropriate practices along a continuum of instructional practices (Brown, Bergen, House, Hittle, & Dickerson, 2000; Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006; Prawat, 1992).

Researchers have also examined factors that impact teacher willingness to adopt principles of developmentally appropriate practices and have determined that tensions in the educational setting including accountability for school wide curriculum mandates, program structural characteristics, and contextual factors (Wien, 1996). Although the findings are signficant, research on developmentally appropriate practice broadly interprets teacher beliefs and corresponding actions. Very few studies wholly interpret the individual experiences of early childhood educators implementing developmentally appropriate practice and rarely are the voices of practitioners represented in the literature.

Although Fails-Nelson and Roger (2003) study wholly interprets the experiences of an educator in the planning and implementation of developmentally appropriate practices, the case under study represents culturally responsive practice as a separate construct from developmentally appropriate practice and very few studies examine the role paraprofessionals in the early care and educational setting in spite of the significance of their role in supporting children's growth and development (Han & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2010).

The research on developmentally appropriate practices identifies an ongoing dialogue among scholars on the appropriateness of learning standards in the early care and educational setting. Studies have examined classroom practices characterized by intentionally planned, thoughtful, and relevant learning experiences that build on prior child knowledge and support children's burgeoning interests across content areas and domains of learning despite reported tensions among early childhood educators (Goldstein, 2008) while other studies on early childhood curricula standards have determined that an increased emphasis on academic skill development hinders child

development especially among children considered at risk for learning difficulties in the content areas of language arts literacy and mathematics suggesting that early learning standards do not consider the developmental skills, abilities, and interests of young children in an emotionally supportive classroom context (Stipek, 2006).

Scholars have more narrowly focused on the implementation of prescribed curricula in the preschool setting and have determined that developmentally appropriate practices are evident in curriculum models that support child centered interactions, experiences with concrete materials, and varied learning experiences given that early care and educational practitioners demonstrate a willingness to embrace child centered practices in content specific instruction (Ryan, 2004). However, much of the research on content specific instruction centers on language arts literacy and mathematics and very few studies interpret children's daily participation in classroom routines, transitions, and learning experiences (Justice, Mashburn, Hamre, & Pianta , 2008; Ostrosky, Gaffney, & Thomas, 2006).

There is a general agreement among scholars that a higher ethic of care is essential in the education of young children. Research on personal character traits indicate that care, concern, and sensitivity to young children is a learned and personal characteristic of early care and educational practitioners. Scholars have also examined the notion of care in the construct of a teacher's knowledge and corresponding actions and have determined that thoughtful and intentional interactions with children are of equal importance to teacher knowledge and pedagogy (Webb & Blond, 1995) while other scholars advocate that empathy, commitment, and a willingness to model caring behaviors is rooted in a love of children that is shared among parents, families, and

caregivers and serves to influence a child's feelings of safety, security, and trust in the early learning environment therefore fostering a child's social, emotional, and cognitive development (Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Colker, 2008; Swick, 2007). Very few scholars have examined the ethic of care in the framework of developmentally appropriate practice, which makes explicit the role of caring adults in the early learning environment (Goldstein, 1998).

Research affirms the value of reciprocal interactions among adults and children in the early learning setting. Scholars have examined interpersonal interactions and have determined that a teacher's desire to impact children's learning is evident in classroom learning experiences, responsiveness, and reciprocal interactions with children (Sidle-Fuligni, Howes et al., 2012; Vitiello, Booren, Downer, & Williford, 2012). However, much of the research on interpersonal interactions is situated in quantitative analysis of standardized measures and very few studies qualitatively interpret the observed actions and behaviors of (Howes & Smith; Kugelmass & Ross-Bernstein, 2000). Researchers have more narrowly focused on the impact of curriculum, materials and classroom resources on early learning outcomes and have determined that early care and educational experiences are strongly influenced by children's personal characteristics and interpersonal interactions during engagement in play like learning experiences (Jeon et al., 2010; Slutsky & Pistorova, 2011).

Chapter Outline

This chapter reviews the empirical research and scholarly literature requisite to informing our understanding of an early childhood educator's disposition to nurture children's learning in the preschool setting. The review of empirical research and

scholarly literature is centered on prevailing concerns in education that serve essential in this study: (a) Conceptualizing teacher dispositions, (b) Diversity in the educational setting, (c) and Knowledge. In the later section of this chapter, I present on concerns unique to early childhood education as a specialized field of knowledge: (a) Children and Families, (b) Curricula and instruction, (c) Care and Secure Attachment, and (d) Reciprocal Interactions. In each section, studies are reviewed by the methodology employed, research context, findings, and implications thereby supporting the significance of the present study. This chapter concludes with an overview of the methodology for this research study.

Research Concerns

The following overarching research concern serves as the basis for this study. The overarching concern posed in this study involves an early childhood educator's disposition to implement developmentally appropriate practices in the early childhood classroom as described below:

1. What key dispositions of early childhood educators' support developmentally appropriate practice and affirm differences among children in the early childhood setting?

Sub topical concerns are addressed related to the main foci of this study as presented below:

a. How do early childhood educators perceive and respond to developmental differences among children in the early childhood setting?

b. How do early childhood educators form and nurture relationships with children whose background may be different from their own background?

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Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is embedded in the literature of several complimentary fields of empirical research and scholarly knowledge that inform this study. The theoretical focus of this study pertains to how early childhood educators nurture children's individual strengths, interests, and abilities in order to holistically serve children and how early childhood educators foster children's learning through varied learning experiences which account for child differences. To that end, I present on the philosophy of John Dewey to articulate essential dispositions of educators that serve children's interests in the early learning setting. Following, I present on child development theory as articulated in the educational theory of Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky to enhance child development as expressed in the framework of developmentally appropriate practice.

Dewey articulates that education is a humanistic, social, and democratic process (Dewey, 1916). In accordance with Dewey's philosophy, schools, communities, and society share the responsibility for children's learning. Whereas Dewey regards schools serve as nurturing institutions of learning, He regards an educator's passion for knowledge and a desire to communicate knowledge as integral to children's growth and development. Dewey regards these notions of love as essential traits of effective educators that embody qualities that include and extend beyond pedagogical knowledge. He articulates that for those who aspire to the profession of teaching, an educator's intuit desire to empathize, care, and nurture children's interests fosters children's experiences in the educational setting (Simpson, Jackson, & Aycock, 2005). Dewey (1908) offers, "I believe, finally, that the teacher is engaged, not simply in the training of individuals, but

in the formation of the proper social life" (p. 18). Regarding children's lived experiences, Dewey suggests that educators enthusiastically interact with students in an emotive manner when presenting content knowledge in the aim of arousing the intellectual curiosity of students both within and beyond the classroom environment. Requisite to educating children, Dewey (1916) regards communication as essential. He offers, "Education consists primarily in transmission through communication. Communication is a process of sharing experience 'till it becomes a common possession. It modifies the disposition of both the parties who partake in it" (p. 9). Advocating for children's interests as the center of curriculum, Dewey (1940) asserts children's play as a context for active learning experiences which promotes children's active engagement in experiential learning experiences offering children opportunities for engagement in self-directed experiential learning experiences in support of child growth and development (Schecter, 2011; Ultanir, 2012). According to Dewey, educators demonstrate skills, knowledge and effort in constructing physically and emotive learning environments as integral to children's learning. Dewey (1916) writes, "the environment involves a personal sharing in common experiences" (p. 71). Regarding the environment, Dewey suggests that educator's serve to plan, observe, and reflect upon children's actions at play in the classroom environment under the direction of educators and among their peers (Carter, Cividanes, Curtis, & Lebo, 2010; Dewey, 1933; Schecter, 2011; Ultanir, 2012; Waks, 2011). Because early learning experiences foster active learning and opportunities for children to collaborate with adults and peers, Dewey's notion of love is expressed as an educator's disposition to impart knowledge with great enthusiasm for subject matter to promote children's learning through varied experiences. Acting with knowledge and a

sense of responsibility for children's learning, Dewey regards emotion as integral to guiding children's learning and articulates that in the absence of love, educators misinterpret the educational needs of children relating a message of indifference to children (Dewey, 1938; Ozmon & Craver, 2003; Schecter, 2011).

Whereas Dewey articulates the role of educators in nurturing children's learning with emotion, Lev Vygotsky advocates for social interaction as requisite to cognitive development in children. Vygotsky (1978) asserts that cognitive development occurs as a result of a child's interactions with adults and among their peers classroom environment. Vygotsky's theory of social cognitive development articulates that a child's capacity for learning is greatly influenced by experience with emphasis on prior knowledge. According to Vygotsky, children's development occurs as the result of engagement in meaningful learning experiences that are in a child's zone of proximal development. The zone of proximal development represents the distance between a child's developmental level, defined as learning experiences children can do alone, and the level of potential development that is attained when children engage in learning activities with peers and under the guidance of adults, suggesting that learning is a social behavior (Blake & Pope, 2008; Follari, 2007; Hudson, 2002). Vygotsky's theory provides insight to the process of children's development in the early childhood setting and the integral role of early childhood teachers to nurture and respond to children's interests in order to advance children developmentally.

While Vygotsky emphasizes social interaction as requisite to child experiences in the early learning environment, Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development posits that children progress through sequential stages of cognitive development, which represents a

child's understanding of the world (Lubeck, 1996; Lutz & Huitt, 2004; Piaget, 1981). Piaget's (1951) theory of cognitive development in young children articulates that learning occurs as the result of distinct stages in a child's biological maturation and through typical learning characteristics of young children. Piaget's theory states that children construct knowledge in stages in accordance with age and environmental influence. Among children, two to seven years of age, symbolic play and child imagination increases with age and social interactions although typically developing preschool age children are often illogical, egocentric and one dimensional in their thinking. Piaget's theory illustrates the value of learning experiences that stimulate children's thought processes including magical thinking, reasoning, and other cognitive capacities representing a preoperational stage of development. According to Piaget, an early childhood educator's role is to model, guide, and provide meaningful activities to foster children's curiosity. According to Piaget's theory, educators' promote children's thinking and engagement in play like activities to stimulate cognitive development in a period of rapid cognitive development in children. Piaget asserts that educators' serve responsive to individual children and acknowledge children's readiness for learning through opportunities for play, and participation in a variety of learning experiences to support knowledge.

Whereas Dewey's notion of love in the service of teaching children is highly regarded in child centered practice and whereas Vygotsky and Piaget's theories stipulate the role of educators to cultivate children's development across a variety of content areas and learning domains as essential to children's learning, developmentally appropriate practice is a child-centered pedagogy that has significant implications for teachers of

young children. The framework for developmentally appropriate practice is intended to ensure early childhood programs, serving children from birth to age eight, implement child centered practice in accordance with chronological age, individual, and culturally appropriate learning experiences for children. Widely considered as a standard of practice in the field of early childhood education, developmentally appropriate practice is a framework of early learning principles which considers an educator's role in holistically addressing all aspects of a child's physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development in the early learning environment (Bredekamp, 1987; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Mallory & New, 1994).

Principles of developmentally appropriate practice consider an early childhood educator's role in creating a physical and emotive classroom environment of learners to support children's varying interests and abilities, which emerge from a child's experience with classroom materials, resources, and equipment and interpersonal interactions within the learning environment. With emphasis on child centered learning experiences to support a child's natural inclination for play and teacher led structured learning experiences necessary to cultivate child growth and development, principles of developmentally appropriate practice articulate that educators possess child development knowledge, consider children as individuals, and embrace a child's lived experience including the social and cultural context in which children live as essential to planning learning experiences for young children in the early learning environment.

The framework of developmentally appropriate practice values intentionality on the part of educators to serve and nurture individual children's strengths, abilities, and interests through active engagement in a variety of planned learning experiences across

content areas and domains of learning which emerge in response to teacher observation and ongoing assessments of children's learning occurring under the direction of adults and in collaboration with peers. As a framework for practice, grounded in research and knowledge of how children learn, developmentally appropriate practices are often measured against a continuum of practices (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Dickinson, 2002; Goldstein, 2008; Mallory & New, 1994; National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2009).

Reflecting the changing landscape of early childhood programs serving young children across a variety of settings, the current framework for developmentally appropriate practice has evolved in response to societal concerns, standards based educational reform, and accountability measures in early care and educational programs for children. The current framework for developmentally appropriate practice considers the cultural and social context in which children live as essential to early childhood practices. Accounting for differences in culture, ethnicity, race, and language, principles of developmentally appropriate practice espouse that educators consider a child's racial identity, culture, socio-economic status, and language in the course of teaching, nurturing, and responding to children in the early learning setting. Because learning opportunities for young children often differ with demographic factors including family income, parent education, and neighborhood characteristics, the framework of developmentally appropriate practice seeks to lessen the achievement gap which may exist among young children transitioning from home to the school environment.

In the framework of developmentally appropriate practice, interpersonal relationships are integral to child development and serve as an important context through which children develop and learn. Early childhood educators develop relationships through a variety of methods including observation, dialogue, work sampling, and communication with families. Relationships with young children serve to promote social and emotional development among young children, which fosters a child's sense of security, pro-social behaviors, and a positive attitude towards school. Relationships with responsive adults in the preschool setting also serve essential for children living under difficult circumstances in the home environment (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; NAEYC, 2009).

Developmentally appropriate practice is considered integral to standards based reform in public funded early childhood programs serving children under the age of five (Barnett & Nores, 2012). The impact of developmentally appropriate practice on publicly funded programs, which are widely recognized as pre kindergarten programs, seeks to ensure that educators are accountable to incorporate a variety of experiences and teaching strategies that accommodate differences among learners while simultaneously ensuring state mandated learning goals and standards for young children are achieved in the early childhood setting (NAEYC, 2009; NJDOE, 2009).

Conceptualizing Teacher Dispositions

Effective teachers are assumed to be critical for the success of students. Thus, researchers have examined teacher values, beliefs and professional behaviors that serve to influence teacher practice. Several disciplines including psychology, philosophy, and education inform scholarly knowledge and empirical research on teacher dispositions in

the literature and much of the research relies on theoretical and philosophical assumptions revealing the complexity of conceptualizing an educator's disposition (Fallona, 2000; NCATE, 2008; Nieto, 2006; Shulman, 1987; Sockett, 2009).

The first area identified in the literature centers on defining teacher dispostions in educational practice. Teacher dispositions as defined in the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) standards (2008) state that individuals preparing to teach in schools, practicing teachers who are pursuing professional development, and other school professionals including principals, school psychologists, and school library media specialists demonstrate professional attitudes, values, and beliefs as expressed in verbal and non-verbal behaviors which can be observed in classroom practices that support students learning and development.

In accordance to the NCATE standards, teacher beliefs, values, and attitudes towards diverse learners in the educational setting are expressed in a teacher's sense of fairness towards all students and revealed in a teacher's belief that all students are capable of learning. The NCATE standards of 2008 define dispositions as:

> The values, commitments and professional ethics that influence behaviors towards students, families, colleagues, and communities, and affect student learning, motivation, and developments as well as the educator's own professional development. Dispositions are guided by beliefs and attitudes related to values such as caring, fairness, honesty, responsibility and social justice (p. 53).

In consideration of NCATE's standard, Welch, Pitts, Tenini, Kuenlen, and Wood (2010) examine the personal values and beliefs of practicing teachers and clinical practice interns to define and assess dispositions in practice. Utilizing a standardized measurement instrument, teachers rated their agreement with a series of statements about student learning, personal values, and respect for individual students differences including

sensitivity to community and cultural context, professional ethos, and enthusiasm for learning. According to the study, teachers reported significant differences on the importance of personal values and beliefs including family security, happiness, helpfulness, and freedom in the role of teacher. On the contrary, ideals such as fairness and positive beliefs about student success guided teacher beliefs and teacher behaviors. Based on the findings, the authors' claim personally held beliefs and values are significant measures of teachers' disposition.

As Welch, Pitts, Tenini, Kuenlen, and Wood (2010) consider personally held values and beliefs as essential measures of dispositional characteristics, Borko, Liston, and Whitcomb (2007) assert that dispositions represent an individual's tendency to act which is evident in classroom practices and serves influential to student learning and achievement. The authors consider that teachers lacking requisite content knowledge are unable to effectively teach in spite of personal values, beliefs and desire to teach. Similarly, teachers who possess requisite knowledge and skill to enact classroom instruction may choose not to employ this knowledge in the classroom environment. According to Borko, Liston, and Whitcomb, such findings support an argument for assessing an educators' moral, ethical, and social justice awareness in the educational setting.

In a (2006) study, Schussler supports holistically address teacher dispositions. The researcher explores varying perspectives on teacher dispositions including the notion that dispositions are observable behaviors as suggested in the NCATE standards in relation to wider societal concerns including an ever-growing population of diverse learners present in the educational setting. Schussler contends that knowledge, skills, and teacher

tendencies to act in a particular manner are not mutually exclusive and therefore

dispositions in the construct of education should be viewed holistically, which requires a

more explicit understanding of teacher dispositions. Schussler contends that ability,

inclination, and sensitivity towards the needs of students are relevant teacher dispositions,

which are followed by an educator's disposition for self-reflection. Considering self-

reflection as a requisite disposition, Schussler suggests teacher candidates and practicing

teachers consider their values, beliefs, and commonly held assumptions about children,

which is a moral activity. Schussler offers the following example:

> On a very practical level, teacher education must encourage teacher
> candidates not just to acquire knowledge and skills intended to prepare
> them for the cacophony of a classroom's events, but to develop their
> awareness, inclinations and reflective abilities. In their programs,
> candidates are provided with the explicit cues for when to call upon
> specific theories or when to use specific skills. The classroom is mostly
> void of such prompting. How many pre-service teachers in a child
> psychology class learn to expertly explain the stages of Piaget's theory of
> child development, only to never think of Piaget again once the class
> ends? One could argue that as long as a teacher is using appropriate
> strategies that are consistent with effective practices for a child at a
> particular stage, it is irrelevant whether that teacher considers Piaget's
> theory or any other theory. This is true as long the situation remains the
> same (Schussler, p. 264).

Schussler's (2006) claim suggests that a teachers' awareness and ability to interpret

student needs is of equal importance to pedagogical skill and theoretical knowledge in

teacher practice.

In a (2010) qualitative study, Schussler, Stooksberry, and Bercaw propose a

dispositional framework consisting of three domains including intellectual, cultural, and

moral dispositions to identify and assess teacher dispositions. The researchers sought to

identify teacher qualities through an analysis of teacher candidate journals. The

participants included 35 teacher candidates enrolled in a secondary teacher education

program. Schussler, Stooksberry, & Bercaw's findings indicate that teacher candidates aptly respond to content, pedagogy, and classroom management concerns which represent an intellectual disposition. Secondly, teacher candidates often fail to recognize cultural differences and fail to accommodate student learning differences. Additionally, candidate responses on children, families and community revealed cultural stereotyping, a prevalent concern among schools and communities that results in classroom tensions. The authors determined that the teacher candidates viewed diversity as an obligation of teaching diverse learners and perspectives on moral and ethical concerns in the educational setting caused confusion on the part of teacher candidates. Based on the findings, Schussler, Stooksberry, and Bercaw suggest that teacher reflection is warranted in teacher development programs particularly in schools and communities serving diverse learners.

Unlike the aforementioned scholars who assert the value of personal values, beliefs and socially just concerns, Damon (2007) discusses the implications of assessing a teacher's personal beliefs and privately held feelings as inappropriate in the professional practice of teaching. Referring to NCATE's definition of dispositions, Damon contends that beliefs and attitudes reflect ideological beliefs including morals, social justice, and care, and are therefore not relevant to the professional disposition of teachers in practice. Damon argues that is acceptable to assess teacher skills, knowledge and pedagogical practice but that is not acceptable to assess personal characteristics of educators aside from the belief that all children can learn.

Moral and Ethical Concerns

The literature on conceptualizing an educators' disposition identifies an ongoing dialogue and discourse among scholars on the implications of assessing teacher morals and professional ethos as requisite teacher dispositions (Brown, Morehead, & Smith, 2008; Burant, Chubbuck, & Whipp, 2000; Fallona, 2000; Hansen, 1993; Osguthorpe, 2008). While scholars advocate that professional educators demonstrate truthfulness, honesty, and a sense of fairness to ensure students are treated equitably in the educational setting, such perspectives reveal a greater need for educators to embrace and support socially just concerns which warrants a discussion of the literature on identifying and assessing the moral and ethical implications of a teacher's disposition.

In a (2008) mixed method study, Brown, Morehead, and Smith examine the changing beliefs of prospective elementary teacher candidates during coursework and field experience placements to identify teacher candidate perceptions of love as requisite to teaching children. Seeking to promote standards based accountability among teacher candidates to foster student achievement while considering love as a desired trait of aspiring teachers, Brown, Morehead, and Smith report that many aspiring future elementary teachers are conflicted. Through an examination of courses emphasizing pedagogy combined with demonstrations of care and concern for diverse learners, the researchers reveal six prevailing aspiring teachers themes to describe teacher candidate perceptions including professionalism, student centeredness, knowledge, management, personal attitudes and pedagogical skill. Based on the findings, Brown, Morehead, and Smith concluded that coursework emphasizing care and concern for learners, candidates cite care, enthusiasm, compassion understanding and patience are integral teacher traits.

Thus, suggesting that teachers assume multiple identities including professionalism and a love of children.

Although Brown, Morehead, & Smith's (2008) research is significant to the field of teacher education, scholars consider philosophical assumptions to examine the moral conduct of teachers as significant to conceptualizing teacher dispositions. In a (2000) study, Fallona explores the notion of a teacher's moral conduct to explain how manner, representing a person's traits of character, can be observed, interpreted, and measured in teaching. Fallona refers to teacher character traits such as bravery, friendliness, wit, truthfulness, honor, mildness, magnanimity, generosity, temperance, and justice as expressions of manner in teaching.

Employing an interpretive, qualitative research methodology, Fallona analyzed the practices of three reading specialists in a middle school setting to ascertain evidence of teacher manner in observable actions and moral virtues less evident in teacher practice, the author found that moral virtues including friendliness, care, compassion, respect and responsiveness to children's needs are evident in teacher modeling and instructional practices. Fallona's findings suggest that an ability to compose oneself in particularly challenging classroom situations, to be proactive and to remain positive when confronted with particular challenging children is an observable teacher practice. Second, a teacher's sense of justice, fairness, and equitable treatment of diverse students including English language learners are observable in classroom interactions. According to the findings, less visible virtues, such as pride, wit, and mildness, which are subject to interpretation, is revealed in teacher demonstrations of concern. Fallona concluded that manner, as a moral

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virtue, is an integral aspect of a teacher's conduct and is therefore a requisite disposition of educators.

In contrast to Fallona's (2000) claim that moral virtues are essential teacher traits, Osguthorpe (2008) explores the practical considerations in defining and assessing an educators' moral virtue and the implications of an educator's moral disposition on students in the educational setting. Asserting the notion that teachers of good moral character are greatly needed because students served in the educational setting should be of good disposition and moral character, Osguthorpe imparts that educators serve as models for students in supporting students served in the educational setting.

According to the study, educators bear the responsibility of serving students with fairness, respect, honesty, and compassion, which is of equal importance to possessing knowledge and skillfulness in classroom practice. Acknowledging the troubling possibility that educators can be effective at delivering content knowledge and skills, without necessarily being good or moral, Osguthorpe suggests that the act of teaching, without the presence of moral character, becomes visible in classroom practice which suggests that teacher morals are relevant, observable, and measurable in classroom practice.

Unlike the aforementioned scholars who study teacher moral virtues based on philosophical assumptions, Hansen (1993) considers the notion of moral virtue as demonstrated in every day classroom norms, routines, transitions, and classroom practice and the impact on students. In the qualitative study, conducted across three different high school settings, Hansen sought to determine whether attentiveness, sensitivity, and respectful towards students positively impacted students. As a standard of measure, the

researcher recorded reciprocal classroom interactions including student turn taking, teacher prompts, hand raising, and teacher response time to determine whether reciprocal interactions support moral virtues such as student attentiveness, compliance to rules, and patience. Hansen's study claims that reciprocal classroom interactions support student virtues and promote student achievement that may generate deeper understanding about the value of reciprocal classroom interactions.

In contrast to Hansen's (1993) study and Fallona (2000), Sockett (2009) reports on the integral role of educators in negotiating student learning challenges, difficulties, and student behavioral concerns including the equitable treatment of diverse students and families. According to Sockett, education is a moral practice that requires teachers to possess character virtues, self knowledge, intellect, truthfulness, care and compassion for students. Sockett emphasizes that less virtuous teachers reveal prejudice and stereotypical behaviors towards students, which yields ineffective and biased teaching practices.

According to Sockett, intellect and truthfulness are pedagogical virtues demonstrated in content area knowledge regardless of how schools develop, plan and implement curriculum in the school setting. Sockett claims that truthfulness is evident in trusting relationships among teachers and children which suggests that virtuous teachers are open minded individuals who possess a commitment to educate children equitably, and hold high standards for all children. Such a perspective reveals that teacher commitment to high standards and concern for students represents the notion of democracy in education. Similarly, Sockett's perspective reveals that teachers who hold deficit views on diverse students are not trustworthy and therefore not moral individuals. Sockett's assertions indicate a greater need for educators to embrace and affirm

differences in the educational setting while maintaining high standards for students in curricula planning and lesson implementation therefore demonstrating a need for in depth examination of teacher knowledge and moral virtue relevant to specialized fields of study in education.

Diversity

Many scholars consider diversity as a foremost concern in education. As a result, researchers have explored the implications of diversity in the educational setting and have determined that an educators' willingness to respond to children and families of diverse cultural, linguistic, and socio economic backgrounds is expressed as cultural knowledge, sensitivity, and responsiveness to students in the classroom environment.

Among many scholars who have examined diversity in the educational setting, some interpret the notion of diversity as a socially just endeavor that requires courage, conviction, and passion on the part of educators to ensure students are treated equitably in the educational setting (Nieto, 2006) while other scholars advocate for formalized culturally relevant curricula to inform and to assess culturally relevant pedagogy more often deemed appropriate for later school contexts serving diverse learners than in the early care and educational setting (Johnson & Reiman, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Lee & Herner-Patnode, 2010; Villegas, 2007). Additional studies suggest that educator's possess sensitivity to context including a child's lived experience and are inspired to utilize this knowledge in content specific instruction garnered through knowledge, experience and reflective practice (Cook & Cleaf, 2000; Milner, 2006; Talbert-Johnson, 2006).

Social Justice and Equity

Nieto's (2006) study reports that teachers of diverse students possess heart, conviction and courage as equally essential to subject matter knowledge, pedagogical skills, and strong communication and organizational skills in the classroom. Nieto posits that teacher education programs foster an understanding of the sociopolitical context in which children grow and learn centered on effective teacher qualities including: a sense of mission, solidarity with and empathy for, their students, the courage to challenge mainstream knowledge, improvisation, and passion for social justice (p. 463). In the study, Nieto reports on the outcomes of her own earlier work across elementary, middle, and high school settings to determine how teachers demonstrate care, concern, and passion for students of diverse, race, ethnicity, language, and socio economic backgrounds.

According to Nieto, a personal sense of mission compels educators to the service of education as a profession. Such a perspective reveals that educators seek to ensure that every child is valued and respected in the classroom as evidenced through teacher traits including empathy, knowledge, courage, and respect for differences. The authors asserts that a sense of respect and empathy for diverse cultural, linguistic, and ethnic differences are highly desirable attributes of teachers. Acknowledging teacher knowledge and courage, Nieto claims that ensuring students learn and a willingness to respond to students in planned and unplanned classroom situations are essential traits of effective teachers. Thus, teachers of diverse students embrace social justice concerns and respond through classroom practices that demonstrate a deeper sense of care for students, which reveal the notion of education as a profession of service.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Unlike Nieto's (2006) work, Ladson-Billings (1995) advocates that teachers of diverse students possess requisite culturally relevant pedagogical skills to support student achievement in the urban setting. In a three-year study, educators identified as exceptional teachers of African American students, selected by parents of African American students and principals, participated in a series of in-depth ethnographic interviews, unannounced classroom visits, and video taped observations to determine qualities that support culturally relevant pedagogy. Over the course of the study, the researcher recorded varied experiences including daily classroom routines, lessons, and transitions to ascertain teacher personal qualities. Teacher views on students, families, and community were found to greatly contribute to teacher success in the classroom. Secondly, Ladson-Billings determined that teacher enthusiasm for subject matter; culturally relevant curriculum and instructional scaffolding positively impacted student achievement. Ladson-Billings suggests that culturally relevant pedagogy and teacher responsiveness positively influence student learning thus ensuring equity for diverse students in the educational setting.

Research on cultural diversity suggests that culturally relevant teaching be assessed in the field of education. Villegas (2007) asserts the need for culturally relevant teacher assessments to ensure teacher and school practices are equitable and fair to the growing population of students of racial, ethnic, and socio-economic status. The author claims that teachers who are culturally responsive to students requires a broad range of content knowledge, skills, and a deep understanding of how students develop in different cultural settings. Villegas offers, that teaching inspired by notions of social justice,

culturally relevant, multicultural education, and culturally responsive pedagogy require a

broad range of knowledge and skills on the part of educators.

> Such teachers further need sophisticated pedagogical expertise, including
> skills for creating learning experience that builds on student strengths
> while engaging them in meaningful and purposeful activity; facility for
> making the subject matters come live for learners from diverse
> backgrounds by using varied instructional strategies that create different
> paths to learning; skills for tapping relevant school and community
> resources in the service of student learning; ability to diagnose sources of
> difficulty in students' learning and strengths on which to build instruction;
> skills for monitoring students' developing understanding of new ideas and
> re-directing them if needed; proficiency in using varied assessment
> practices that promote learning for all students; and strategies for creating
> an inclusive classroom community that supports diverse students (p. 372).

Villegas advocates for the use of a dispositional framework in the preparation of

teachers to measure the tendencies of teacher candidates to act in a individuals to act in

particular manner under particular circumstances based on their beliefs, which the

authors asserts will carry forward into teacher candidates' formal roles as practicing

educators. The author posits that teacher education programs should provide aspiring

teachers with access to knowledge and experiences that support the belief that all

students are capable of learning. Citing the admissions process for teacher candidates at

her own institution of higher learning, Villegas offers that faculty actively seeks out

evidence of applicants' belief that all children can be educated through engagement in

coursework and immersion in field experiences throughout diverse communities to

develop the requisite skills, knowledge, and disposition to positively impact their

dispositions. As a course requirement, students explain their personal theories regarding

the reason for the achievement gap. Drawing on the results, Villegas reported that

faculty members are able to ascertain whether candidates hold deficit views on students,

families, and communities. Thus, according to the study, candidate beliefs, knowledge, and cultural responsiveness are considered as a measurable disposition.

Informed by cognitive development theory as a dispositional framework, Johnson and Reiman (2007) investigate teacher characteristics to determine how teacher judgment, actions, and reciprocal interactions influence learner outcomes. In a mixed method study, using quantitative and qualitative measures including observations, interviews and teacher reflections to explore the dispositions of three beginning teachers in a high school setting, the researchers posit that student engagement, teacher sensitivity to learners and established classroom norms, rules, and routines serve as measurable teacher dispositions. Johnson and Reiman determined that moral and ethical judgment along with pedagogical knowledge represent measurable dispositional characteristics of teachers. Such perspectives reveal a greater need for in depth investigation of care, concern, and sensitivity towards learners in the construct of teacher knowledge, curricula, and instructional practice.

Sensitivity to Context

Villegas (2007) and Johnson and Reiman's (2007) studies suggest that social justice concerns be investigated within specific contexts to inform teacher knowledge. Scholars recognize that a sensitivity to context influences knowledge, experience and ethical concerns in education. Sensitivity to context implies that educators possess an understanding of a child's culture and lived experience and are inspired to utilize this knowledge in content specific instruction garnered through knowledge, experience and reflective practice.

In a (2006) narrative study, Talbert-Johnson offers an argument for preparing teacher candidates for urban schools that serves to deepen an understanding of the ethical considerations in affirming diversity among students and the need for highly qualified teachers in the urban context. The author contends that is essential for teachers to affirm and embrace differences among students to promote equity in the school setting. Considering the growing need for teachers to affirm differences, the author posits that teachers have an ethical responsibility to affirm differences, based on several assumptions about the instructional needs of culturally diverse students. First, highly qualified teachers are instrumental to serving the needs of socio economically challenged diverse students who may be at risk for learning difficulties which requires that teachers are knowledgeable in content area and academic subject matter. Secondly, personally held beliefs influence teacher behaviors and therefore effective teachers need to understand the larger social context in which they serve students which implies that teacher candidates and therefore practicing teachers understanding ethnicity, language, and special needs of students.

Talbert-Johnson suggests that reform initiatives in teacher preparation programs must ensure teachers possess an affirming, caring and compassionate disposition to be effective in the urban setting. Referring to the individual capabilities of teachers, Talbert-Johnson's study imparts the need for teachers to possess an ability to communicate content knowledge with skill and to demonstrate a greater sense of accountability including empathy for learners manifested in caring relationships to support and motivate students to perform better academically.

While Talbert-Johnson's study affirms the need for reform initiatives in teacher preparation programs to ensure accountability in the urban setting, sensitivity to context is the focus of Cook and Van Cleaf's (2000) study on the novice teacher perceptions across urban, suburban, and rural contextual settings. In the study, the researchers examine novice teacher experiences to determine whether multicultural education courses prepare teachers to respond to diversity among students and families from diverse backgrounds. Participants included seventy-nine predominately white female, novice elementary teachers. Employing survey research, participants indicated that multicultural education courses offered in teacher education programs helped to prepare novice educators to understand and respond to the needs of children. At the onset of the study, many participants expressed confidence in their ability to interact with children, families, and communities serving diverse students because of their field experiences as students. As a result of the findings, the authors determined that novice teachers with prior student teaching experience in urban settings were aptly prepared to address the socio cultural needs of children and parents in contrast to those students without prior experience in diverse communities.

Acknowledging the similarities and differences among suburban, rural and urban communities and its' impact on student achievement, Milner (2006) reports similar results. However, Milner offers that among urban communities characterized by a higher concentration of students living in poverty, a higher percentage of single parent families, and ethnically and culturally diverse students; schools are largely under funded and lack materials, resources, and highly qualified teachers to support student development. Milner asserts that interactions with diverse students and families in the

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urban context in pre service teacher education influence teacher knowledge requisite to understanding culture, ethnicity, and pedagogical knowledge. Unlike Cook and Van Cleaf's (2000) study, Milner reports that critical self reflection, including an awareness of one's cultural background and experiences influence pre service teacher knowledge, instructional practice, and classroom curricula decisions.

Milner's work reveals a growing need for pre service teaching experiences in urban settings, mentoring opportunities and specialized university course offerings in multicultural education to influence teacher knowledge essential to working in an urban context. Such a perspective suggests that research on teacher experiences in urban settings be undertaken to wholly explore teacher pedagogical knowledge, experience, and interactions in specialized areas in urban settings.

Teacher Knowledge

Research on diversity affirms that educators' have an ethical responsibility to serve culturally, linguistically, and socio economically diverse students equitably in the educational setting. Effective teachers are considered to be knowledgeable practitioners who demonstrate content area knowledge with sensitivity to culture, language, and ability diverse students to accommodate student learning needs. Among some scholars, teacher knowledge is considered a foremost consideration in the development of aspiring educators (Shulman, 1987) while others scholars advocate that (Thornton, 2006) that teacher knowledge and skill develop in accordance with an intuit desire to impact student learning. Scholars have also examined the use of standardized frameworks to measure and assess teacher dispositions including knowledge and human behaviors and reported mixed results (Almeria, Johnson, Henriott, & Shapiro, 2011; Shiveley & Misco, 2010).

Gordon and Fittler's (2004) case study examines the individual classroom experiences of a relatively novice middle school teacher in serving students considered at risk for learning difficulties in an urban setting. It is one of a relatively few studies to interpret the voice of an educational practitioner using multiples measures. Based on the findings, Gordon and Fittler suggest teacher knowledge of community, culture, and individual students as evidenced through reciprocal classroom interactions influence curricula decisions, lesson planning and implementation. Such a perspective reveals that teacher knowledge, motivation, and awareness of wider socio political concerns present in the educational setting serves integral to teacher knowledge. Whereas Gordon & Fittler (2004) advocate that teacher knowledge and pedagogical skill develop in concert with a teacher's desire to impact student learning in the presence of socio political concerns, Shulman (1987) foremost considers teacher knowledge. According to Shulman, teaching is a learned profession which requires an in depth understanding of curriculum, materials, and subject matter. Shulman asserts that an educator's capacity to enact instructional practice requires teachers to accommodate student interests and abilities across contexts in spite of significant socio political concerns.

Shulte, Edick, Edwards, and Mackiel's (2004) study reports on the use of a dispositional framework to identify and assess essential dispositions including knowledge and human behaviors that promote student achievement such as content area knowledge and teacher opinions, attitudes, beliefs and personal values. Recognizing that some teacher candidates enter preparation programs with prior knowledge, experience, and intuit teacher dispositions, while others enter teacher preparation programs in need of development, the researchers consider the use of reliable quantitative instruments to

measure knowledge, pedagogy, and instructional characteristics of effective teachers. Informed by a sample of students, administrators, private and public school teachers and university professors, the researcher's findings suggest that a desire to communicate knowledge and to make accommodations for learners extends beyond teacher performance measures and includes human behaviors.

Although the literature on defining and assessing teacher dispositions interprets an educators' values, beliefs, and professional behaviors including content area knowledge and pedagogical skill as requisite teacher dispositions, a more explicit understanding of content area knowledge and pedagogical skills relevant to early childhood education are warranted to determine how educator values, beliefs, and practices are negotiated within

Early Care and Education

Educational researchers, scholars and policy experts advocate that early childhood education represents a specialized discipline which serves integral to child growth and development among children birth through eight years of age (Ackerman, 2004; Barnett, 2008; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Among scholars who have examined the impact of early care and education on child growth and development, Barnett and Yarosz's (2007) study on early care and education reports access to early care and educational programs.

In an effort to identify differences among children participating in preschool education programs and measures of care, Barnett and Yarosz (2007) sought to determine whether income, education, ethnicity, family structure, and geography influence children's participation in preschool setting. In the study, the researchers assert that preschool education positively impacts later school successes and reduces young adult delinquency in students from impoverished backgrounds. Drawing on a review of prior

research, the researchers found that a majority of children, beginning at four years of age enter preschool settings among middle income families relative to a smaller number of children low income, ethnically diverse parents and families. Accounting for population, eligibility, and geographic mobility as adverse factors impacting children and families, Barnett and Yarosz claim that inequality in access to early care and education among disadvantaged children is an impetus for educational policy reform to ensure children succeed in later school settings and to reduces delinquency in young adults from culturally, linguistically, and socio economically disadvantaged families. Barnett & Yarosz's work suggests that effective educators respond to children's needs with care, concern, and empathy while accounting for child differences within specific teaching contexts.

Readiness

Children's success in the early care and educational setting is often regarded as requisite to child readiness in later school settings. While scholars acknowledge that readiness is strongly influenced by familial and caregiver influences in a child's home environment prior to entering formalized early care and educational settings, research on child readiness is subject to much interpretation in the literature especially among children of socio economically, culturally and linguistically diverse families (Winsler et al. 2008). Among scholars, many advocate the value of early care and education in supporting children from economically disadvantaged families, entering school with fewer academic skills and therefore significant gaps in learning to ensure children make considerable gains in the early care and educational setting prior to entering kindergarten (Magnuson et al., 2004). However, some scholars emphasize developmental teaching and

learning to best support child readiness (Chien et al., 2010) while other scholars suggest that early learning standards emphasizing mastery of academic content skills best support a child's readiness for later school achievement (Wesley & Buysse, 2003). Therefore, it is difficult to draw empirical conclusions about teacher practices to most effectively support children's readiness.

In a (2008) quantitative study on school readiness gains that ethnically and linguistically diverse, impoverished children made attending varied early childhood settings including centered-based childcare and public pre-kindergarten programs Winsler et al. assert that children enrolled in funded preschool programs make considerable school readiness gains in cognitive, language, fine motor and social emotional development. In the large scale study, the researchers sampled nearly four thousand 4-year-olds enrolled in funded preschool programs and center based care in urban, multicultural settings to identify the extent to which ethnically and linguistically diverse children make school readiness gains as measured through social and emotional behaviors, fine and gross motor skills, mathematical knowledge and language arts literacy.

Mathematical knowledge including matching and counting, and language arts literacy assessments including story comprehension were conducted in the home language of children. Assessments of children's social and emotional behaviors were determined through interviews of parents, families, and teachers. According to the findings, children made considerable gains in cognitive, language, and fine motor development. Among children of linguistically diverse families identified as English language learners, the authors found that Spanish speaking children showed considerable

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gains in language suggesting that caregivers and educators who speak the same language as the children served in the setting, promote children's growth and development. The authors determined that children's readiness for school as measured during the pre-kindergarten year considerably improved among children in both community and public pre-kindergarten programs and found very limited evidence to suggest that credentialed early childhood educators, curriculum standards, and classroom support provided by paraprofessionals guaranteed children made considerable school readiness gains in the early learning setting.

In an effort to ascertain whether children from disadvantaged backgrounds make school readiness gain in the early care and educational setting as measured by children's engagement in a variety of child initiated early learning experiences, Chien et al. (2010) assert that child initiatied learning experiences under the direction of sensitive, caring, adults support children's readiness in the early learning setting. Informed by constuctivist theories in education and socio cultural theories emphasizing a holistic, person centered approach to learning, the authors posit that children's engagement in learning experiences is an indicator of classroom quality. In the large scale study of 2,751 impoverished children considered at risk, the authors sought to assess children's engagement in classroom learning experiences among children enrolled in pre-kindergarten and early educational programs across several states as measured by classroom observations of teacher content knowledge, interactions across varied instructional lessons, child screenings, bilingual assessments and demographic factors including poverty.

Observing children's learning, the author's determined that children spend a considerable portion of the instructional day in free choice play activities and whole

group didactic learning experiences centered on language, literacy, and mathematical skill development. The authors attributed this finding to personally held teacher beliefs that influence the actions of teachers. Citing teacher preferences, the authors indicated that the teachers delivered instruction via individual seatwork while others preferred to deliver instruction via group work. A second finding revealed that although the children spent a considerable portion of the day in free choice lay and didactic learning experiences, child assessments revealed a lack of child growth over time in comparison to other content areas. The authors attribute this finding to a lack of high quality interactions resulting from teacher stressors including the hurried scope and sequence of a standardized curricula and a hurried pace in classroom routines and transitions. The authors concluded that impoverished children who received considerable individual attention in smaller group settings made considerable learning readiness gains as evidenced in opportunities for scaffolded instruction and support from peers suggesting that free play when accompanied by high quality adult and peer interactions is most conducive to children's learning and readiness for the later grades.

Parent Perspectives on Readiness

In a qualitative study on teacher and parent perceptions on child readiness in schools and throughout communities, Wesley and Buysse, (2003) explore the tensions related to competing views on readiness in the field of early childhood education which emphasize child development as a best practice as compared to national goals for education which emphasize skills and academic readiness. The participants were selected from rural and urban educational settings and included 93 professional early childhood educators, school administrators, and 25 parents of diverse children enrolled in

community educational settings representing both large and small school settings. Employing a focus group methodology to ensure rich description, the research centered around seven questions, including what children should know in order to be successful in kindergarten and how children learn best in the early learning setting.

Seeking to identify the implications of school readiness as measured through academic content knowledge and academic skill areas in which children are most and least prepared for kindergarten, focus group dialogue centered on what children should be learning in the preschool setting and kindergarten readiness. The authors found that participants equally stressed the critical importance of social and emotional development as well as language and communication in the areas of alphabetic principles including naming letters and letter sounds although the participants indicated this was a lesser concern than children's dispositions to interact with adults and among their peers in the early learning setting. Children's dispositions for learning identified as following directions, demonstrating independence, self-expression, curiosity, and attention to task were highly regarded among the professional preschool and kindergarten educators. Among kindergarten teachers, academic skill development was considered integral to the role and responsibility of teaching young children whereas preschool teachers expressed the notion of relationships, varied group experiences and the ability to separate from parents as a primary responsibility. Play and academic skill development was highly regarded among parents as equally integral to children's preschool experiences.

Referring to standardized assessments and state mandates for kindergarten outcomes, the professional educators expressed inner conflict about developmentally appropriate practice emphasizing child development relative state requirements. Such

concerns were determined as just cause for deskwork, academic drills, and assessment. Citing the pressure to prepare children in the kindergarten classroom, many kindergarten teachers indicated a lack of time to support individual child development and opportunities for play particularly among children from varied socio economic and cultural backgrounds. However, the participants all agreed that young children learn best through play, relationships, varied materials, and active exploration indoor and outside environment. Referring to a push down of academic skill development into the preschool setting, the professional educators and principals expressed their belief that preschool education, emphasizing developmentally appropriate practices, would evolve into highly structured learning with standardized learning outcomes in content area knowledge. On the merits of developmentally appropriate practice, the authors' findings revealed mixed feelings on the part of parents and professional educators. The professional educators indicated the enormous value in parental support in both the home and school environment for children's learning as an indicator of children's preparedness for kindergarten. Citing the changing nature of kindergarten standards, the professional educators indicated that a disposition to organize time, classroom space, and instructional lessons based on principles of developmentally appropriate practices, adversely impacted their actions. The authors determined that children's readiness for school begins in the home setting and further develops in the early childhood setting suggesting that real partnerships with parents, families and communities best address the needs of children. Thus, Wesley and Buysse suggest that children's needs must be addressed in a holistic manner, which requires competent caregivers to work in collaboration with parents and administrators in order to promote readiness. Such perspectives reveal a greater need for

educators, schools, and communities to respond on behalf of children than for educators to act alone.

Ready Schools

In contrast to much of the empirical research on children's readiness for kindergarten and the impact of early care and education on children's readiness for kindergarten is the notion of ready schools to support children's learning as illustrated in Early, Pianta, Taylor and Cox's (2001) study on teacher, classroom, and school characteristics to support children's transitions to kindergarten. In the large scale survey of 3,595 public school kindergarten teachers of diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds with varied educational certifications, including advanced degrees in education and specialized training on children's transitions to the kindergarten setting, the author sought to identify transitional practices occurring prior to school entry including home visits and telephone calls to individual families and whole group practices including letters, flyers, and participation in kindergarten registration in relation to practices occurring after the start of the school year. Additionally, the authors sought to measure transition practices among educators of different racial and ethnic groups. The authors found that among the teachers, white teachers utilized more transitional practices prior to the school year than black and Hispanic teachers and very few differences between publicly funded and community preschool provider teachers. The authors found that larger class sizes influenced teacher decisions about transitional practices prior to the start of the school year. However, the author's found no relationship between class list distribution and transitional practices involving efforts among preschool programs and community providers. Early, Pianta, Taylor and Cox's (2001) concluded that the implementation of

transitional practices, prior to school entry, which require considerable time and planning are most often implemented in schools with higher economic resources and trained educators with advanced degrees.

Inequality and Readiness

References to inequality also appear in the literature on readiness. In a comparative study on ready schools, Freeman and Powers-Costello (2011) explore national and international school efforts to promote school readiness among children considered at risk due to a variety of factors including low birth weight, parent education, and cultural differences. Unlike the aforementioned studies in this category of research, Freeman and Powers-Costello (2011) advocate for schools to respond to children's developmental and educational needs through strengthened relationships with children, families, and communities. Citing culturally appropriate practices, child development knowledge and developmentally appropriate practices as characteristics of ready schools, the authors suggest schools create learning environments to meet child developmental needs and to foster experiences in routines, transitions, learning experiences in contrast to inappropriate skill and drill instructional approaches designed to prepare children to perform on formal assessments.

Freeman and Powers-Costello's (2011) study confirms that young children deserve access to high quality early care and educational opportunities which support developmental learning in consideration of family and cultural differences especially among children considered at risk for learning difficulties. It implies that early care and educational practitioners wholly address developmental differences in curricula and instructional practices.

Affirming Differences Among Children and Families

Researchers have examined diversity within the construct of the early care and educational setting situated in analysis of linguistically, ethnically, and culturally diverse familial beliefs, practices, and broad expectations of early childhood educators across varied geographical settings. However, much of the research is characterized by large scale quantitative studies employing standardized measures often interpreting secondary data sources to indicate results (Goodfellow, 2001; Hanson & Lynch, 1992; Miller & Votruba-Drzal, 2012; Rambaurd, Fuller, & Eggers-Pierola, 1995).

While scholars acknowledge familial influence on children's learning, scholars report on tensions involving culturally and linguistically diverse families Cheatham & Jimenez-Silva, 2012; Espinosa, 2008). Different from most studies that account for cultural, linguistic, and socio economic status, Fleer and Hedegaard's (2010) research accounts for a child's daily lived experience, which suggests that daily experiences across different contexts impacts child development. Scholars have also examined the role of practitioners to support culturally, linguistically, and ability diverse children and have determined that teacher beliefs and practices can adversely impact child growth and development (Barrera, 1993; Hanson & Gutierrez, 1997; Sowa, 2009).

Children and Families in Varied Contextual Settings

In a (2012) study on children and families across diverse geographical areas, Miller and Votruba-Drzal's (2012) sought to determine whether geographical differences impact academic achievement upon school entry. In the study, the researchers posit that parental education, familial beliefs, and environment adversely impact how children across urban, rural and suburban contexts develop prior to school entry in the presence of

population, cultural, and socio economic differences. Based on their findings, the researcher's determined that children in larger, urban and rural geographical areas enter kindergarten with less advanced academic skills than children in small, urban areas and suburban geographical areas. The researchers attributed this finding to parenting styles, less than stimulating activities in the home environment, and economic difficulties present in larger urban and smaller rural geographical areas. Among children in suburban areas, supportive home environments, socio economic status, and child care opportunities positively impacted children's performance on standardized assessments at school entry. Miller and Votruba-Drzal's (2012) findings suggest that familial influences, socio economic background, and geography adversely impact child learning outcomes. Thus, to improve outcomes for young children, educators consider a child's prior knowledge and lived experience and therefore accommodate differences.

Considering children's growth and development prior to entering the school setting, Hanson and Lynch (1992) examine the impact of family differences including size, ethnicity, language, and socio economic background on early education and services for young children considered at risk and among children identified with disabilities. Hanson and Lynch define families as all affiliated individuals who are committed to caring for each other. Citing foster parents, single parents, and a growing number of grandparents serving as primary caregivers to children as well as cultural differences as significant factors in childrearing, the authors refer to the impact of poverty on children's nutrition, health, and developmental outcomes suggesting that early care and educational programs support children and families in the home and within the school setting to foster children's development identified as at risk for learning difficulties and to promote the

overall well being of children. The authors concluded educational and health related programs within communities be expanded to fully serve families through childcare, health, educational and other social services reflecting the diversity present in children and families to support child growth and learning through holistic models of early care, intervention, and educational services.

In a (1995) study on maternal views on early care and education, Holloway, Rambaud, Fuller, and Eggers-Pierola explored the perceptions of low-income mothers' views on children's socialization and appropriate educational practices in the early care setting. In the qualitative study, multiple interviews were conducted over three years with 14 low-income women of diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds to ascertain the most salient goals of child rearing practices as expressed by the mothers of young children enrolled in local child care settings in a large metropolitan area. Different from prior research in this topical area, the authors found that the women held expectations of child care providers that were mostly consistent with constructivist or developmental views advocated by scholars in early childhood education. The women expected their child's provider to engage their child in didactic, highly structured instructional lessons aimed at teaching children literacy and numeracy skills but also expressed that play, field trips, art, and music were instrumental to children's early learning. The author's found evidence to suggest that the early childhood educators themselves valued didactic practices in contrast to play oriented program. Reflecting on their childhood experiences in school and on the different perspectives held by family and friends, the women held differing beliefs on the roles of child care teachers and their expectations for their children's education. All the women expressed the value of education as an indicator of future

success and expressed a sense of trust in the early childhood educators to accommodate children's needs.

The authors concluded that despite a lack of knowledge, the women's views on preparing children for school and their willingness to work alongside teachers served as evidence of the value they placed on their roles in preparing their children for school. Rambaud, Fuller, and Eggers-Pierola's work suggests that educators embrace and affirm familial differences in educational settings. It implies that to improve the quality of early care and education, understanding adversity in the lived experience of children and families is imperative to education.

In many studies, poverty is regarded as an indicator of children's failure to thrive in the educational setting. In contrast to this assertion, Fleer and Hedegaard (2010) study suggest that children's daily participation across different contexts impacts children's development and should therefore be considered by early care and educational practitioners in the early learning setting. Informed by Vygotsky's theories on social development, the case study describes determine how practices at home influence a child's activity in school and how school practices influence children at home. The study reports on the experiences of the eldest child who is enrolled in kindergarten as garnered through observations, interviews, field notes, and anecdotal records as he transitions from home to school over a 12-month time period and his family who family who live in a smaller urban, lower socio-economic town characterized by subsidized housing developments, public transportation, and funded school options for children including supplemental meal programs.

The researchers report on school and familial practices categorized as geographical roaming, actions, and transitions to determine how family routines, transitions, and environment impact a child's willingness and ability to remain on task and to fully participate in school activities. In the case under study, the eldest child is described as an observant and curious child who is identified at risk for learning problems. Based on parent and teacher interviews, observations, and video recordings, the researchers determined that child experiences in the home setting influence child behaviors in classroom routines, transitions, and learning experiences. Secondly, the researchers determined that the classroom teacher and school personnel held adverse perceptions on the parent's childrearing abilities, which directly influenced how the classroom teachers responded to the child.

Fleer and Hedegaard's work illustrates how conflicted teacher views on families adversely impact children which reveals an impetus for qualitative research to deepen an understanding of teacher beliefs, practices, and behaviors in the construct of child development theory. Thus, the study affirms the need for educators to address children's developmental needs with sensitivity to lived experience suggesting that teacher beliefs and practices should be qualitatively examined within specific contexts using thick, rich description.

Goodfellow's (2001) study serves as another example of the growing need for early childhood practitioners to examine their personally values, beliefs and expectations of children. In the qualitative study, the researcher examines parent perceptions on early learning in the home environment and within early care and educational programs.

Goodfellow asserts that early childhood practitioners often fail to recognize the influence of parents on child development and the value parents place on early care and education. Among parents in the study, the author determined that parents highly value a child's sense of well being in early care and educational settings. Such perspectives serve influential to parental decisions about childcare. Secondly, demonstrations of warmth, care, and sensitivity to children's social and emotional needs are highly desirable traits of educators due to parental concerns over children's separation anxiety. Trustworthiness and a willingness to support parents in addressing children's health and nutritional needs were considered essential to childcare arrangements. The most salient finding involved parental concerns over a continuity of care and shared expectations for children's development in the home and childcare setting.

If the messages that young children receive from their physical and social environment within the child care setting do not readily complement those already experienced by them within their home environment what challenges does this pose for the child? (p. 9)

Goodfellow's findings indicate that theoretical knowledge and a capacity to lead instruction are of equal importance to partnering with families in interpreting children's immediate needs. Thus, Goodfellow's work also strengthens the argument for reciprocal relationships with children and families.

Cultural and Linguistic Diversity

Acknowledging the shared responsibility of teachers, parents, schools and community to support children's learning, Espinosa (2008) offers that cultural and linguistic differences among children, families, and school settings require educators to align curricula and instruction to children's cultural and linguistic references. In the

(2008) policy brief, Espinosa asserts that early childhood practitioners immerse children in early reading, listening, and speaking activities to maintain children's home language and to support early fluency in English because preschool age Latino children possess a capacity to develop and interpret linguistic and contextual clues in multiple languages. Secondly, Espinosa claims that Latino children are generally socially and emotionally resilient which is attributed to Latino childrearing practices and cultural values in spite of the academic achievement gap that often exists among Latino children at school entry due to varied risk factors poverty, immigrant status, and a lack of health services. Espinosa asserts that in spite of cultural and language barriers, early care and educational programs are highly valued by Latino families. Therefore, in the absence of educator understanding and responsiveness to the expectations of culturally and linguistically different families, tensions among educational practitioners and families persist.

In a (2012) case study on partnering with Latino families during kindergarten transitions, Cheatham and Jimenez-Silva examine cultural and linguistically responsive tensions among early childhood educators and a Latino family in the early care and educational setting. The authors present on the case of an early childhood parent teacher conference to illustrate the importance of culture, language, and familial differences among early childhood educators and families and the impact of differences on early educational outcomes for children. Referring to interaction styles, perceptions, and language differences, the researchers' suggest that language differences including key words, phrases, and sentence use indicates how professional educators assert power in the educational context which may adversely impact interpersonal relations among parents, families, teachers, and schools. The participants in the study included an early childhood

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teacher, teaching assistant, and a Latino parent of child enrolled at an early childhood center. The early childhood teacher and a teaching assistant were European American and spoke only English.

A teacher interview and an audio recording of a parent teacher conference illustrate the researchers' assertions. In an interview with the early childhood teacher conducted prior to the parent teacher conference, the teacher spoke highly of the children in her program and of the children's families. The teacher expressed her desire to build parents confidence to support and participate in their children's early education. In the course of the interview the teacher implied that she was an expert regarding child development knowledge and early education. The teacher suggested that Latino families enrolled in the program held her in high regard as teacher. Reporting on the findings, the researchers indicated that the teacher, "had a somewhat limited view of parent involvement, and expressed that parents should allow more time for her to talk during parent teach conferences" (p. 179).

At the request of the child's mother, the parent teacher conference was conducted in English. The audio recording of the parent teacher conference revealed that the teacher and assistant spoke eighty percent of the time. The teacher reported that the child, a typically developing 4-year-old bilingual female was to remain at the early childhood center for the next school year rather than transitioning to kindergarten. Following, referring to the child's portfolio and citing the child's progress in the areas of academic and socio-emotional development, the teacher reported to the parent that the child was performing well and ended the parent teacher conference. In response, the mother challenged the teacher's decision based on the teacher's encouraging words and praise for

the child's progress that supported the mother's belief that her child was ready for kindergarten. After several attempts to advocate for her child, the teacher referred to the child's lack of progress in the socio emotional domain as just cause for the decision.

Reflecting on the findings, the researchers determined that cultural and linguistic differences including linguistic conventions, expressive language, and familial expectations contributed to a lack of understanding on the part of the Latino mother. Similarly, the teacher's interaction style, use of educational language, and positive comments were found misleading to the Latino mother. Based on the findings, the authors suggest that educators ensure words, phrases, and linguistic conventions sentences are clearly communicated and understood by diverse families with respect, honor, and sensitivity to familial beliefs about early educational expectations for young children requisite to partnering with culturally and linguistically different families.

In a practitioner action research study, Sowa (2009) examines the roles of educational practitioners to support academic achievement among linguistically diverse children. The purpose of the study was to determine how reflective teaching supports English language learners in the early learning classroom. The participants included six graduate students enrolled in university English as a second language courses with English language learning (ELL) experience in varied school settings. Among the educators, all were female Caucasians with varying years of experience implementing different models of English language learning (ELL) instruction.

The purpose of the study was to ascertain whether action research positively impacts prior beliefs, assumptions, and knowledge requisite to teaching English language learners. As a part of data collection, surveys, course projects, and course work reflection

papers sought to whether the action research supported the educator's instructional

practices and beliefs about English language learners. The authors found that teacher

participation in the action research study transformed prior perceptions on English

language learners including adapting instruction in mathematics and language arts

literacy, and valuing partnerships with parents, families, and community to implement

culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy. Sowa concluded that personal teacher

beliefs are evident in observable actions.

Ability Diverse Children

The need to respond to culturally, linguistically, and ability diverse children in the

early childhood setting is the subject of Barrera's (1993) narrative study on multicultural,

bilingual special education. The author presents on relevant concerns in serving young

children from diverse socio cultural environments including communication with families

and the value of nurturing children's development to assure children have a sense of

emotional security requisite to growth and development. Examining the interrelatedness

of culture, language, and disability, Barrera asserts that educator's accept, embrace, and

support children's culture and behaviors to promote children's adjustment to the early

learning setting. Because children's language learning and development occurs within the

context of culture, home, and community environment, Barrera advocates that classroom

environments, curricula materials, and resources resemble a child's culture, home, and

community. Referring to the capacity children have to learn a second language, Barrera

suggests that concepts and skills be introduced to children in their strongest language in

order to ensure children acquire key concepts and skills. Barrera suggests that

interventions for children with identified disabilities also consider children in the context

of their home, culture, language, and ability to determine appropriateness. Finally, Barerra suggests that intervention plans fully consider children's culture, language, and diverse abilities to foster learning. Thus, educators have a responsibility to affirm differences including ability.

While Barrera's (1993) work reveals a greater need for sensitivity to diverse learners, Hanson and Gutierrez's (1997), study reports on similar results. The researcher's assert that children's cognitive, linguistic and social emotional development is often hindered in early care and educational programs because children's experiences in the early care and educational setting differ from cultural and linguistic experiences at home and within a child's community. Citing the growing number of children identified with special needs, Hanson and Gutierrez examined cultural, linguistic, and ability diverse children enrolled in varied early care and educational programs across urban, rural, and suburban geographical areas to determine whether ability diverse children benefit from participation in preschool inclusion programs among typically developing children. The participants included 112 children of diverse cultural, linguistics, and socio economic backgrounds. The authors identified eighty of the children as having disabilities. Through open-ended interviews with teachers and parents, and through participant observations of classroom instruction and interpersonal interactions among children, adults, and peers, the authors sought to understand classroom events from the perspectives of parents and children. In reporting on the findings, the authors refer to three children identified with special needs who are each enrolled in bilingual preschool inclusion classrooms. Among the children, two were English language learners for whom language differences were not reflected on their individualized education plan although

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the children received speech therapies in English. The authors cited parental concerns about language differences including a desire for the children to learn English while receiving learning supports in the children's home language and parents ability to communicate with program staff. Additional parental concerns included worries over social isolation; lack of children's interactions with peers due to disability and concerns over a lack of bilingual classroom support. The authors found that individual teaching staff assigned to support identified children often interfered with opportunities for peer interactions and therefore social skills. The author's concluded that language, culture, and ability can adversely impact children's participation in classroom learning activities and opportunities to work with peers that extend beyond speech and language and relates to a child's sense of belonging in the early learning classroom.

Early Childhood Practitioner Knowledge

Research on practitioner knowledge is situated in analysis of educational attainment, philosophical orientation, and professional experience. Early care and educational practitioners represent a diverse population of caregivers, paraprofessionals, and credentialed teachers employed in a variety of early care and educational settings who are given charge to cultivate a child's capacity to learn in the presence of similarities and differences among individual children (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; NAEYC, 2002).

Educational Attainment and Professional Experience

In the field of early childhood education, scholars suggest that educational attainment and professional experience influence ability and a willingness to adopt a child centered, philosophical orientation as articulated in curricula planning, integrated

subject matter instruction, and opportunities for child initiated play with teacher

accommodation (Fails-Nelson and Roger, 2003; Han and Neuharth-Pritchett, 2010).

In a (2002) quantitative study, McMullen and Alat examined the relationship

between the educational background and philosophical orientation of early childhood

educators to determine how professional knowledge and educator preparation inform

developmentally appropriate practices. In their study of 151 early childhood caregivers

and teachers of young children, purposefully selected on the basis of time spent in

providing direct care and instruction to children, McMullen and Alat sought to determine

how child development knowledge informs teacher beliefs and practice. Using

standardized measures to identify whether educators adopt principles of developmentally

appropriate practice, McMullen and Alat identified three categories of teacher and

caregiver practices: Teacher-directed/teacher-control, child/individual initiated learning,

and child centered literacy instruction. The researchers found a direct correlation between

classroom management, child assessments, didactic practices, and teacher choice of

learning materials. Based on their findings, the researchers assert that to become a highly

qualified caregiver and teacher of young children, educators possess requisite child

development knowledge and a willingness to adopt developmentally appropriate practice

as a philosophical orientation beyond notions of child centeredness often advocated in

teacher preparation programs. As McMullen and Alat suggest, teachers and caregivers

interpret child centered pedagogy in diverse ways.

The implications of how teacher education preparation programs influence

teacher beliefs about child development knowledge and instructional practices upon

entering the early care and educational workforce is the focus of Han and Neuharth-

Pritchett's (2010) quantitative study on teachers and teaching assistant beliefs about developmentally appropriate practices in the early care and educational setting.

Paraprofessionals

Different from most studies in this category of research, Han and Neuharth-Pritchett's study considers the perspectives of teacher assistants, asserting that teaching assistants form personal beliefs on developmentally appropriate and inappropriate practice. As a standard of measure, Han and Neuharth-Pritchett surveyed key principles of developmentally appropriate practices to support children's development in the early learning setting: Valuing children's enthusiasm and learning interests, exploratory play, encouraging and extending classroom conversations, and teacher willingness to accept child responses. Based on the findings, the researchers claim that many teaching assistants endorsed inappropriate instructional practices such as homework, worksheets, and didactic instructional strategies. A quiet classroom and independent seatwork were highly regarded by the teaching assistants. Han and Neuharth-Pritchett attributed the findings to teacher assistant educational attainment. In contrast to the teaching assistants, the researchers found that teacher educational attainment and professional experience was insufficient to determine teacher beliefs and practices thus confirming that educational attainment and professional experiences influence beliefs on child centered practice. However, the researchers determined that teacher perceptions on developmentally appropriate practice influence whether teachers consider the role of teaching assistants as instructional or non instructional capacity.

Han and Neuharth-Pritchett acknowledge that teacher self reported beliefs acquired through survey research is subject to discrepancy.

Although the researchers' findings are significant, Han and Neuharth-Pritchett affirm that standardized measurement instruments do not fully capture teacher beliefs and practices. As Han and Neuharth-Pritchett's study indicates very few studies wholly interpret the individual experience of early childhood practitioners and rarely are the voices of practitioners represented in literature. Thus, there is a need for qualitative research on teacher beliefs, practices, and behaviors to provide rich, thick description. Such concerns support the significance of the present case study.

Culture and Child Centered Practice

Unlike the aforementioned scholars, Fails-Nelson and Roger's (2003) case study, interprets an African American preschool teacher's implementation of developmentally appropriate practice in a low-income school district to determine whether teacher culture impacts beliefs about developmentally appropriate practice. The case under study represents the experience of an African American teacher in her second year of teaching preschool while enrolled in graduate degree program in early childhood education. The case interprets the beliefs, perceptions, and actions of the teacher in the implementation of a culturally responsive, developmentally appropriate thematic unit in a preschool program serving African American students subject to readiness concerns, accountability issues and strict program standards, schedules, and routines to support children's learning in the preschool classroom.

As a part of curricula planning, the teacher conducted interviews of parents, colleagues and administers to ascertain stakeholder beliefs about developmentally appropriate practices. As a result of stakeholder interviews, the teacher found that parents in the mostly African American community held numerous concerns about preschool

play relative to basic skill development. Similarly, the teacher determined that many of her colleagues held similar concerns due to state mandated learning standards. Thus, parents and school colleagues were opposed to developmentally appropriate practice. Interviews with school administrators revealed that notions of cultural responsiveness, as expressed in the mission statement of the program, were to be addressed on a regular basis in culturally relevant instruction.

Based on the results of the interviews, the teacher determined that culturally appropriate practice aligned to state standards and framed within the construct of developmentally appropriate practice would benefit student learning and teacher development in the preschool setting. The teacher gathered and organized culturally relevant materials including books, artifacts, arts supplies and artwork from different cultures to develop a culturally and developmentally appropriate thematic unit. Drawing on cultural norms, the teacher engaged students in a variety of learning experiences center time, fee play, and whole group activities. The teacher recorded observations of children's learning and documented children's learning as measured through differentiated assessments. As a result of parent participation in classroom learning experiences, many parents expressed comfort in the preschool classroom. In response to the success of the thematic unit, Fails-Nelson and Roger determined that culturally and developmentally appropriate practices served influential to a shared understanding of developmentally appropriate practice among parents, teachers, and administrators.

Fails-Nelson and Roger's work articulates the value of teacher knowledge and a willingness to embrace familial differences in the presence of misinterpretations about developmentally appropriate practice. Although Fails-Nelson and Roger's findings are

significant, the case presents on culturally responsive practice as a separate theoretical construct. In this circumstance, it is assumed that the framework of developmentally appropriate practice excludes culturally relevant pedagogy thus supporting a greater need for understanding among early childhood communities of practice.

In spite of its significance on the field of early childhood education, there remains much dialogue and discourse on the merits of developmentally appropriate practice in serving children's learning needs. Among many scholars who have examined developmentally appropriate practice, research identifies teacher stressors and tensions in early care and educational settings as factors influencing teacher beliefs and practice. Such perspectives reveal that accountability issues, early childhood program structure, and contextual factors such as workplace conditions adversely impact developmentally appropriate practice (Parker and Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006; Prawat, 1992; Wien 1996).

Teacher Self-Competency

Unlike the aforementioned scholars who have examined tensions in the early care and educational setting to account for teacher beliefs and practice, McMullen (1999) claims that teacher feelings of competency influence developmentally appropriate practice. In the qualitative study, the researcher accounted for the professional preparation, professional experience, and present work conditions of 13 predominately female early childhood educators of children age three through third grade. Each participant held an undergraduate or graduate degree in early childhood educator preparation, special education or elementary education. Using qualitative measures, the researcher determined that teacher education and professional experience influenced learner centered developmentally appropriate practices evident in curricula, instruction,

and classroom environment. McMullen found that teachers identified as having an early childhood educational degree or child development education degree combined with professional experience embraced principles of developmentally appropriate practices in contrast to primary teachers with either an early childhood education or elementary education degree.

Among the findings, McMullen determined that self confidence and competency significantly influenced teacher practices. Such perspectives revealed that teacher perceptions of familial circumstances and teacher beliefs on making a difference in the lives of children served to influence teacher planned learning experiences. Secondly, perceived administrative pressure and school setting influenced classroom decision-making and curricula decisions. Thus, McMullen's work suggests that researchers consider the voices of practitioners' in conceptualizing a teachers' disposition. Such concerns are addressed in the present case under study. As McMullen asserts there is a tendency to categorize child centered, developmentally appropriate practice as appropriate or inappropriate teacher practice. Such perspectives fail to recognize that developmentally appropriate practice supports a continuum of best practices to address children's unique interests, needs and diverse abilities (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

In a (2001) study, Kowalski, Pretti-Frontczak, and Johnson (2001) account for children's unique interests, needs and diverse abilities in an examination of 470 Head Start, preschool special education and publicly funded preschool settings to determine how child development knowledge influences teacher classroom decision making and curricula decisions among individual children. Kowalski, Pretti-Frontczak, and Johnson's work illustrates a growing need in the literature on early childhood education to address

children identified with special needs. Kowalski, Pretti-Frontczak, and Johnson (2001) claim that an emphasis on academic content in language arts literacy and mathematics adversely impacts children's development.

In the quantitative study, the researchers sought to determine how program structural characteristics teacher, geographical location, teacher educational attainment, and caregiver dispositional characteristics influenced teacher beliefs, values, and practice across key developmental domains of learning. Using standardized measures to describe typical early developmental abilities and skills most often displayed by children, the researchers determined that special education teachers placed a significantly higher value on children's social emotional development in comparison to skills in language arts literacy and mathematics such as writing letters, early counting and numeracy. Based on the findings, Kowalski, Pretti-Frontczak, and Johnson (2001) claim that preschool teachers are capable to make a distinction between academic skill development and key developmental domains. The researchers findings refute views on the value of language arts literacy and mathematical skill development as paramount to children's' success in the early care and educational setting. However, based on the results, the researchers report uncertainty on whether preschool teachers and special education teachers possess requisite skills and abilities to effectively address social and emotional concerns among children identified with special needs relative to early language arts literacy and mathematics. Thus, suggesting that sensitive preschool teachers support children's developmental growth and learning as precursor to academic skill development and mastery.

Because children identified with special needs are enrolled in preschool inclusion settings, scholars have examined developmentally appropriate practice within the construct of preschool inclusion settings to determine how typically developing children and those children identified with communication, motor skills, adaptive behaviors and social emotional delays develop and learn together throughout the preschool day. In one of a relatively few studies on daily classroom practices, Brown, Bergen, House, Hittle, and Dickerson (2000) report on the experiences of preschool general education, special education teachers, and instructional assistants employed in an integrated preschool program for children three to six years of age to determine early care and educational practitioners support children identified with special needs. Asserting that all preschool programs embrace a philosophical orientation towards inclusion, the researchers account for the experiences of teachers and children as evidenced in observations, interviews, and field notes centered on integrated content areas, teacher interactions, and adaptive materials presented in learning centers.

Based on observations of practices, the authors finding revealed that typical preschoolers and preschoolers with special needs shared mostly similar classroom experiences including classroom routines and transitions, calendar activities, play based learning activities, materials, and whole group learning experiences. The authors noted that many adaptive materials including stuffed animals, plastic building materials and wooden toys served to meet the needs of special needs children at free play in a play area away from typically developing children separated by a wooden gate. Following free play, special children entered the whole group morning circle areas for teacher led calendar activities. As a whole group, children were prompted to identify and state the

days on the calendar. Special education teachers supported special needs children through

the use of three dimensional figures corresponding to the day of the week for children

with visual impairments. Similarly, children identified with hearing disabilities

participated in morning circle songs using sign language. The authors found that

throughout observations, special needs teachers assistant children, provided praise for

students attending to task in accordance with learning goals specified on children's

individualized educational plans. Peer interactions were evident in small group settings

and learning experiences supported interactions between typically developing and special

needs children. Throughout the learning experiences, special needs teachers supported

children's efforts and supplemented materials to meet the needs of the special needs

children. Brown, Bergen, House, Hittle, and Dickerson's (2000) work suggests that ideal

preschool inclusion settings are characterized by child centered, developmentally

appropriate practices wherein frequent adult/child and peer interactions occur to support

the early academic and social behaviors of typically developing children and children

identified with special needs.

<center>**Early Learning Content Standards**</center>

The research on developmentally appropriate practices identifies an ongoing

dialogue in the literature on the appropriateness of early learning standards. Scholars

have examined teacher instructional practices characterized by intentionally planned,

thoughtful, and relevant learning experiences which build on prior child knowledge and

support children's burgeoning interests across content areas and domains of learning

embedded in early learning standards despite tensions in the beliefs and practices of early

childhood educators (Goldstein, 2008) while other scholars have examined early

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childhood curricula and have determined that increased emphasis on academic skills development in language arts literacy and mathematics hinders child development particularly among children considered at risk for learning difficulties due to poverty and lived experience suggesting that early learning standards do not consider the developmental skills, abilities, and interests of young children (Stipek, 2006).

Scholars have more narrowly focused on the implementation of prescribed curricula in the preschool setting and have determined that developmentally appropriate practice as articulated in curriculum models do not guarantee teacher compliance. In a (2004) case study, Ryan advocates that the promotion of developmentally appropriate practice is not curriculum specific. Employing a case study methodology, the researcher describes the case of two preschool teachers implementing a prescribed curriculum model in a community based, publicly funded preschool program to determine whether principles of developmentally appropriate practice are evident in curriculum content as articulated in the state's learning standards. In accordance to the prescribed curriculum model, children grow and develop through personal interaction with ideas, concrete materials, and practical experiences. The prescribed curriculum identified key learning experiences framed around daily routines, transitions, and activities for children and teachers were to assume a facilitative role in supporting children's learning. Positing that teachers faithfully implement mandated curriculum models in accordance to district policies, the researcher conducted interviews, observations of daily classroom experiences, and transcripts of teacher child interactions over the course of a school year. According to Ryan's findings, preschool teachers adapt curricula and instruction based on their personal beliefs and experience. In this instance, the preschool teachers believed that

direct instruction in specific academic content areas prepared children for kindergarten and therefore continued to implement teacher directed, structured learning experiences to foster academic skill development and readiness for the later grades. Secondly, the preschool teachers reported confusion on how to implement the curriculum in spite of training and as a result presented lessons in highly structured whole group learning experiences. Thus, Ryan determined that mandated curriculum models do not guarantee teacher compliance suggesting that mandated policies regarding pedagogy require a willingness on the part of educational practitioners to embrace change. Because Goldstein (2008), Stipek (2006), and Ryan (2004) report such a dissonance in findings, additional research is warranted to determine how early care and educational demonstrate developmentally appropriate practice within regulated preschool settings adhering to early learning standards and mandated curricula.

Content Area Knowledge and Instruction

Unlike Ryan's (2004) work, scholars have examined content specific instructional practices to determine how teacher beliefs influence content area practice. However, researchers report similar results. In a (2008) study, Justice, Mashburn, Hamre, & Pianta indicated that teacher beliefs influence language arts literacy instruction. Through an examination of explicit literacy instruction in phonological awareness and concepts of print, the authors found that preschool teachers who embrace a child centered philosophy, deliver child centered literacy instruction. However, Justice, Mashburn, Hamre, & Pianta determined that child centered, literacy instruction did not guarantee quality literacy instruction.

Although very few studies interpret children's daily participation in classroom routines, transitions, and learning experiences aside from language arts literacy and mathematics, Ostrosky, Gaffney and Thomas's (2006) study reports on the merits of responding to children's interests, skills, and abilities through authentic conversations in support of support language arts literacy while addressing the social and emotional needs of developing children. Ostrosky, Gaffney and Thomas assert that caring relationships with adults support children's emergent literacy skills in contrast to traditional methods of academic skill development. Citing characteristics of children enthusiasm and a positive disposition towards learning, the researchers advocate that children's learning needs, interests and abilities are either supported by caring, knowledgeable, skillful teachers or hindered in the early learning environment. The authors describe how instructional scaffolding supports children's emergent literacy and promotes cognitive and emotional development among children considered at risk due to familial factors and lived experience. The authors state:

> Children with vastly diverse experiences cross the threshold of the same class and are situated in contexts that vary in their goodness of fit. For one child, the class experiences could be very similar to home that the transitions is relatively smooth while another children may confront a virtual chasm between home and school. The traditional responses has been to blame the child and the parents for the incongruities between home and school contexts (p. 177)

Referring to the creation of literacy rich environments, the authors suggest that environmental print materials, varied literary genres and integrated content area experiences serve to promote emergent literacy. Ostrosky, Gaffney and Thomas indicate that literacy instruction embedded in caring relationships becomes evident in small group instruction and opportunities for children to engage in meaningful conversations with

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adults. Thus, effective teachers possess child development knowledge and therefore facilitate social emotional learning evidenced in shared reading, listening, speaking, and writing while fostering children's enjoyment and understanding of language and literacy. As Ostrosky, Gaffney and Thomas (2006) suggest, a love of learning best characterizes a young child's disposition in the early care and educational setting. Children's play is highly regarded as requisite to early learning. However, teachers, parents, and families often misunderstand children's play. In a (2009) study Wolfgang, Stannard, and Jones (2009) examine how block play in the early care and educational setting impacts child development and later elementary, middle and secondary school achievement in reading, math and science. The authors define block play is defined as sensory gross and fine motor play, symbolic play, dramatic play, and construction play. The researchers assert that block play, considered essential in developmentally appropriate learning experiences for young children, provides preschool age children with early numeracy skills including classifying, measuring, ordering and counting and early spatial and spatial and geometric skills including depth, width, length, symmetry, shape, and space.

In the longitudinal mixed methods study of 37 preschool children enrolled in play based preschools, the authors sought to determine whether preschool age children engaged in high levels of block building often evidenced in play-based preschools demonstrate higher levels of mathematical achievement in the later school setting. Drawing on three observations of block play in the preschool setting without explicit teacher direction, standardized measures of assessment in elementary mathematics, and higher level mathematics courses including geometry, calculus, and advanced placement courses, the authors found that block play did not significantly impact student

achievement in elementary and middle school mathematics. The authors attributed this finding to developmental stages in children wherein children progress through a preoperational stage of development in the preschool years to a concrete operational period in the elementary school setting. Analyzing the middle school level mathematical data, the researchers determined a significant relationship between block play and standardized student assessments. Secondly, the researchers identified significant results in mathematical achievement at the high school level.

Wolfgang, Stannard, and Jones (2009) determined that preschool age children who demonstrate high levels of block play in the preschool setting experience higher levels of cognitive growth as evidenced in middle school and high school mathematics which require higher order thinking skills in contrast to elementary mathematics emphasizing rote memorization and skill development. Thus, block play serves to influence later school achievement. It implies that developmental learning experiences support academic achievement in spite of teacher beliefs, values, and practices.

Care and Secure Attachment

There is a general agreement among scholars that a higher ethic of care, concern and sensitivity is essential to promote a child's sense of well being and secure attachment to adults in the early care and educational setting. As a result, researchers have explored the ethic of care in the educational setting and have determined that an educators' willingness to demonstrate care, concern and sensitivity towards children is a learned and personal characteristic of early care and educational practitioners (Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Colker, 2008). While scholars advocate that caring for children is an emotional disposition rooted in love (Swick, 2007) other scholars advocate that an ethic of care is

an educational policy concern (Webb and Blond, 1995). Such perspectives reveal that deep and enduring affectionate bonds between children and teachers fosters children's curiosity, promotes engagement, and encourage children to take classroom risks. Unlike the aforementioned concerns, Goldstein's (1998) study is the only one that reports on care in the framework of developmentally appropriate practice, which makes explicit the role of caring adults in the early learning environment. Goldstein's inquiry illustrates that teacher care has significant implications for early childhood education.

In the (1998) qualitative study, the researcher asserts that the notion of teacher care, characterized by a teacher's gentle demeanor, mannerism, and physical gestures disregards teacher intellect and thoughtfulness in serving children's needs. The study interprets an experienced early childhood educators' classroom interactions, instructional practices, and classroom decision making in an upper middle class inclusion classroom setting serving children identified as special needs and English language learners. According to Goldstein's findings, the teacher who endorsed developmentally appropriate practice, demonstrated care during classroom routines, transitions, and learning experiences while addressing children's diverse interests and abilities to support children's interests throughout the length of the instructional day. A teacher's aide, parent volunteers, and several tutors provided additional support to children in varied learning activities. Throughout the course of the instructional day, children were presented with five available daily learning activities that occurred simultaneously in different locations in the classroom. The teacher selected children's activities and purposefully assigned children to work together, providing children with opportunities to learn from on another. Children identified with special needs and behavioral concerns participated in planned

learning activities with accommodation. Children were rarely disciplined and the teacher acknowledged children's interests, needs, and developmental abilities in curricula, learning activities, and attentiveness to individual children. Based on the findings, Goldstein determined that the ethic of care in early childhood setting represents sensitivity and responsiveness to children's developmental abilities, interests, and learning needs situated in contextually and individually appropriate classroom experiences. Goldstein's work imparts that a teacher's commitment to children and a willingness to nurture children is evident in developmentally appropriate practice. Such concerns are presented in the case under study.

Reciprocal Interactions

Scholars acknowledge the value of reciprocal interactions to support children's growth and learning in the early care and educational setting. As a result, researchers have examined the type and frequency of reciprocal interactions in the early care and educational setting and the impact of reciprocal interactions on child development (Jeon et al., 2010; Slutsky and Pistorovava (2011) while other studies interpret emotionally supportive interactions as requisite teacher dispositions (Sidle-Fuligni, Howes, Huang, Soliday Hong, and Lara-Cinisomo 2012; Vitiello, Booren, Downer, and Williford, 2012).

Although the results of the research in this topical area are significant, much of the research is situated in an analysis of large scale, quantitative studies that employ standardized instruments to account for interpersonal interactions as articulated in program structural characteristics, curricula, and pedadogy. Very few studies interpret the observed actions and behaviors of educators in fostering reciprocal interactions with young to promote a child's sense of safety, trust, and security despite the significance of

adult displays of affective concern, physical gesturing, and voice tonality on children's

development (Howes and Smith, 1995; Kugelmass & Ross-Bernstein, 2000). Thus,

further research on this integral aspect of early care and education is warranted to deepen

an understanding of affective concern to inform early childhood practice.

Influence of Physical Environment on Interactions

Among scholars who have examined quality interactions in the early care and

educational setting, Jeon et al. (2010) study on the impact of curriculum, materials, and

resources on children' individual learning experiences in the early care and educational

environment claims that quality interactions significantly influence child learning

outcomes. In the qualitative study, the researchers observed the interactions of 138

children and their caregivers in rural and urban early care and educational settings to

determine whether curriculum, materials, and classroom resources influence child

outcomes in the presence of differences including gender, minority status, and disability.

Jeon et al. (2010) found that teacher child interactions and active learning

experiences characterized by children's access to materials and use of the early learning

environment influenced child outcomes. Analyzing frequency and type of reciprocal

interactions, the researchers found that children's experiences varied greatly across large

and small group learning experiences. They determined that a quality environment, as

measured through materials, did not support higher quality learning experiences for

children. On the contrary, small group learning and individual interactions with teachers

promoted children's learning especially among children with special needs. Thus, teacher

facilitated learning assures child engagement in classroom learning and play activities in

spite of abundant materials, resources, and classroom equipment.

In a (2011) study, Slutsky and Pistorovava (2011) report similar results. However, in contrast to Jeon et al. (2010), Slutsky and Pistorovava's case study interprets the actions and experiences of children, families, and educators in the implementation of an early childhood curriculum which considers the environment as a third teacher to support language rich instruction and opportunities for play. The case under study represents the experiences of children enrolled in privately funded, preschool classroom. Citing components of program quality including teacher education, inclusion children and children classified at risk for learning difficulties, the authors sought to identify how children's interactions with adults and peers in extended conversations, play based learning, classroom routines and transitions contribute to quality in the early learning environment.

> When the environment is perceived with such intent, it has the potential to illustrate the value we place on all our children, their families, and the teachers within a community of learners. The environment becomes more than simply a space, but also takes on the role of a third teacher. Creating an aesthetic space that reflects the children and the community supports and stimulates the relationships and interactions of children within their cultural context (p. 50).

Slutsky and Pistorovava (2011) found that teacher knowledge and a desire to impact child development as evidenced in a rich physical environment and many small group learning experiences fostered children's learning in a holistic manner. The researcher's concluded that committed educators seek to nurture children's curiosity in a physically and emotionally supportive classroom environment for children.

Emotive Classroom Environment Interactions

In a (2012) study, Sidle-Fuligni, Howes, Huang, Soliday Hong, and Lara-Cinisomo examined classroom routines, learning experiences, and instructional time to

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determine whether children's engagement in learning activities under the direction of teachers positively impacted learning outcomes. The research, conducted as a part of a larger quantitative study on low income children enrolled in varied ealry care and educational settings, sought to measure program structural components including: free choice play, meals and snacks, whole group learning and small group instruction.

To determine children's engagement, the researchers employed standardized measures to account for teacher scaffolding, lesson presentation and instructional materials. Based on the results, Sidle-Fuligni, Howes, Huang, Soliday Hong, and Lara-Cinisomo determined that child engagment varied across public, private, and community based child care settings. The researchers found that among teachers employed in publicly funded child care programs, highly directed, teacher instruction overshadowed opportunities for child interactions in contrast to children enrolled in privately funded and community based child care. The authors attributed this finding to current educational reforms and policy on outcomes based education for children in publicly funded settings in spite of research on the merits of play based learning advocated by scholars in the field of early childhood education. Secondly, with many opportunities for extended free choice play in privately funded and community based settings, the researchers determined that a higher degree of choice, frequent adult interactions, and emotionally supportive gestures positively impacted children development.

Sidle-Fuligni, Howes, Huang, Soliday Hong, and Lara-Cinisomo's work suggests that a higher frequency of free choice play, emotionally supportive gestures, and meaningful interactions often advocated by ealry childhood scholars promote child growth and development in sharp contrast to teacher directed, structured learning

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experiences most often considered as apprpriate for later school settings. Thus, it is necessary to examine how teachers influence children's development with care, concern, and sensitivity to differences.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided a comprehensive review and critical analysis of the empirical research and scholarly literature on an educator's disposition to positively impact children's growth and development in the early learning. The literature broadly interprets an educator's values, beliefs, and professional behaviors as evidence of a teacher's disposition to influence student achievement and much of literature relies on theoretical and philosophical assumptions presented within the contexts of aspiring teachers. It remains unclear whether practicing educators embrace such values, beliefs, and behaviors within specific teaching contexts.

Research affirms that education is a humanistic endeavor. Referring to an educator's capacity to interpret and respond to children's needs, it is assumed that educators demonstrate a higher ethic of concern for children, families, and communities. However, it is difficult to draw conclusions on whether educators fully embrace and affirm differences to foster children's growth and development. Among children of culturally, linguistically, and socio economically diverse families, research confirms that educational practitioners do not fully embrace, affirm, and honor familial differences. There is limited agreement in the literature on whether educators value reciprocal relationships with families to foster child growth and development.

Scholars recognize the value of child centered curricula and instruction to support children's learning needs, interests, and diverse abilities. However, research indicates that

educational practitioners more often purport to embrace principles of developmentally

appropriate practices than fully implement developmentally appropriate practice. There is

still much disagreement on whether practitioners implement child centered practices in

programs serving children considered at risk for learning difficulties problems due to

diversity and lived experience citing concerns over readiness, early learning standards,

and accountability in the educational setting. Thus, the literature reveals a need for

further research on whether early childhood educators possess qualities that extend

beyond content and pedagogical knowledge to include heartfelt appreciation for children

and families as demonstrated with care, sensitivity and responsiveness to children's needs

thereby supporting the significance of the present case under study.

In the next chapter, Methodological Framework, I present a discussion on the

process of examining an educator's disposition to positively impact children's cognitive

and social emotional development in the preschool setting as evidenced in child centered

practices that arouse curiosity, foster social interaction, and promote children's learning

as demonstrated in interpersonal interactions that affirm differences among young

children in an urban preschool setting

Chapter 3

Methodological Framework

There are significant gaps in the knowledge on the capacity of early childhood educators to wholly interpret and respond to children's learning needs as articulated in teacher knowledge, advocacy, and concern for children. This study will address that gap in the existing body of knowledge. The research problem examines the nature of an early childhood educator's role to positively impact children's cognitive and social emotional development in the preschool setting as evidenced in child centered practices that arouse curiosity, foster social interaction, and promote children's learning as expressed in interpersonal interactions that affirm differences among children enrolled in an urban preschool setting.

In the aim of understanding an early childhood educator's capacity to nurture and affirm child differences, I consider the espoused beliefs of early childhood educators and observed classroom practices that demonstrate deliberate, thoughtful, and meaningful interactions with young children in the construct of child centered practices. This study endeavors to heighten an awareness of child centered practice that embraces affective concern for children and aims to create a dialogue for discussion about diversity in the context of a young child's lived experience to compliment an existing body of literature on early childhood education.

In this chapter, I present a discussion on the process of studying early childhood practice and the nature of each participant's beliefs, perspectives, and interpersonal interactions with children in the preschool classroom. Because the theories and practices that frame this study advocate for an engaging physical and emotive classroom

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environment as essential to child centered practices and diversity in the early learning setting, the overarching research question posed in this study considers time, materials, space arrangement and a variety of planned learning experiences as relevant to child growth and development through the lens of developmentally appropriate practice (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Similarly, physical aspects of the early learning environment that mimic the linguistic, social, and cultural context of a child's lived experience provide evidence of an educator's affective disposition to affirm differences among children.

In order to foster an understanding of child development as requisite to teaching young children, participant perceptions of developmental differences and responsiveness to children from culturally, linguistically, and socio-economical diverse home environments are considered as essential to this research study (NAEYC, 2009). This study interprets the nature of an early childhood educator's disposition to foster nurturing interactions with children in the preschool classroom that demonstrate a sense of respect, concern, and sensitivity to a child's lived experience (Mallory & New, 1994; Nieto, 2006; Villegas, 2007) in the presence of similarities and differences among the educators and preschool age children assigned to their classroom.

<div align="center">**Research Concerns**</div>

The overarching research concern posed in this study examines the disposition of an early childhood educator in the context of developmentally appropriate practices that affirms differences among young children in an urban preschool setting as described below.

1. What key dispositions of early childhood educators' support developmentally appropriate practice and affirm differences among children in the early childhood setting?

Sub topical concerns are addressed related to the main foci of this study as presented below:

   a. How do early childhood educators perceive and respond to developmental differences among children in the early childhood setting?

   b. How do early childhood educators form and nurture relationships with children whose background may be different from their own background?

Constructivist Paradigm

This study was guided by an interpretive constructivist research paradigm. The constructivist seeks to understand how individuals in a group, culture, or discipline, construct and assign personal meaning to their experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Because the constructivist believes that knowledge is socially constructed, a qualitative case study research approach served critical to exploring the experiences, perceptions, and practices of the early childhood educators as gleaned through data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Hinchey, 2008).

As an educational practitioner in the field of early childhood education, my professional interests and experience as a former classroom teacher and administrator of a publicly funded preschool program influence how I approach this study. My professional experiences in urban education provide me with a platform for understanding the complexity of an early childhood educators role in implementing preschool curricula and

instruction in the context of an urban preschool setting and in particular among children from diverse backgrounds.

Qualitative Inquiry

Qualitative inquiry involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to understanding complex phenomena (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This study is guided by qualitative tradition and accounts for the espoused beliefs and observed practices of each participant as expressed through participant interviews, informal dialogue and observations of classroom practice. Drawing on a qualitative approach to inquiry, this study considers the nature of educating young children in an urban context and the degree to which the environment impacts child development as evidenced in planned learning experiences for young children. Similarly, this strategy of inquiry enhances the rigor of this research study and aids in the collection, analysis, and interpretation of this complex phenomenon (Creswell, 2007).

Case Study Research Design

Case study research is an approach to inquiry in which the researcher explores a bounded system over time in order to interpret the context and meaning of the experiences of the participants within the context of the research. Yin (2009) wrote that a case study design fulfills three principles of qualitative inquiry: to examine, understand, and explain. Case study research design serves essential to explaining, describing, and exploring instances in which the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. This study provides a conceptualization of the case as gleaned through multiple sources of evidence that answer "how" or "why" questions (Crowe et al., 2011; Yin, 2009). Because the purpose of this case study is to explore and conceptualize the

nature of an early childhood educator's affective disposition to nurture and affirm differences among children in the framework of child centered practices and to conceptualize the espoused beliefs an early childhood educator, a case study is a preferred research method.

The rationale for selecting a case study research design is that the case represents various interrelated aspects of early childhood education including curriculum, pedagogy, and teacher character traits that correspond to an early childhood educator's beliefs, values, commitment and professional ethos which may influence an early childhood educator's practices in the preschool setting. Secondly, guided by beliefs, attitudes, and personal values including honesty, fairness, responsibility, and care, this case study is seeking to interpret the espoused beliefs of early childhood educators that correspond to requisite knowledge and skills demonstrated in classroom practice in an holistic manner (Murrell, Diez, Feiman-Nemser, & Schussler, 2010; NCATE, 2008). Therefore, a case study research is an appropriate methodology because I am studying beliefs, values, and judgments of educators that are embedded in the professional actions of educators in the real life context of a classroom environment.

A second rationale for selecting a case study research design is that the case under study explains a complex phenomenon in the field of early care and education that relies on varied qualitative measures as evidence; including direct observations of classroom events and ongoing interviews of the participants involved in the events to illustrate beliefs, practices and important contextual factors as relevant to this study (Yin, 2009). Integral to understanding an early childhood educator's disposition to positively impact children's learning, as evidenced in practice and expressed in the beliefs of each

participant, this study places great emphasis on the intersection of child development knowledge, pedagogy, and child advocacy as demonstrated in the early learning setting. Dewey (1916) offers that education is a process of developing teacher child relationships that are deliberate, purposeful, and meaningful which result in student learning. Tenets of Dewey's educational philosophy are illustrated in classroom practices and revealed in the stated beliefs of the early childhood educators. Similarly, principles of developmentally appropriate practice, informed by Piaget's developmental theory, are illustrated in elements of the physical classroom environment; play based learning experiences and responsive adult child interactions (Charlesworth, 1998; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; NAEYC, 2009). Vygotsky's theory of social cognitive development as exemplified in practice and children's engagement in learning experiences among their peers and with adults in the classroom environment is illustrated in the espoused beliefs of the early childhood educators and revealed in the aim of child growth and development (Follari, 2007; Hudson, 2002; Vygotsky, 1978).

Case Study Boundaries

This case study is bound by a publicly funded preschool setting in an urban geographical area and is intended to examine key dispositions of early childhood educators in the context of child centered instruction that affirm differences among children in the preschool classroom (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 1999).

In the aim of understanding an early childhood educator's capacity to nurture and affirm child differences, I considered the espoused beliefs, perspectives, and instructional practices of each participant to cultivate interpersonal relationships that demonstrate a sense of respect, concern, and sensitivity to a child's lived experience (Mallory & New,

1994; Nieto, 2006; Villegas, 2007) in the presence of similarities and differences among adults and children in the preschool classroom as an essential source of evidence.

Secondly, the theories and practices that frame this study advocate for an engaging physical and emotive preschool classroom environment as essential to child growth and development and therefore instructional time, classroom materials, and space arrangement serve as a critical source of evidence. Finally, in order to garner an understanding of child development as requisite to teaching young children, participant perceptions of developmental differences and responsiveness to children from culturally, linguistically, and socio-economically diverse home environments are considered as essential to this study (NAEYC, 2009).

Unit of Analysis

According to Yin (2009), understanding a phenomenon in context requires the researcher to define the case under study. This study examines an educator's disposition to positively impact children's cognitive and social emotional development in the preschool setting as evidenced in child centered practices that arouse curiosity, foster social interaction, and promote children's learning as expressed in interpersonal interactions that affirm differences among young children in an urban preschool setting. Because a case study contributes to the existing knowledge of individuals, groups, organizations, and social phenomena (Yin, 2009), the richness of case study research lies in the researcher's ability to provide a compelling and extensive context for the case under study.

The defined unit of analysis for this case is the interaction among the early childhood educators and preschool age children in the early learning classroom as

evidenced through the lens of developmentally appropriate practice. For example, in the early learning environment, early childhood educators act on professional knowledge and pedagogical skill to purposefully plan and implement teaching and learning experiences to foster a child's social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development as aligned to measurable learning outcomes for children (Epstein, 2007). Combining both child guided and adult guided active experiences, intentionality in planned learning experiences for children is evident in routines, transitions, and learning experiences which foster children's understanding of concepts, skills, and knowledge across a variety of content areas and learning domains. Effective early childhood educators integrate teaching and learning with ongoing assessments including observations of children at play using a variety of methods that account for children's individual abilities including English language learners (Epstein, 2007). Requisite to intentional teaching, effective early childhood educators value positive, caring interactions among children and among adults to foster a child's well being and to promote learning. Therefore, the unit of analysis represents how early childhood educators honor children's needs, abilities, and interests while demonstrating high levels of respect, responsibility, care, and concern for children's prosocial behaviors, and self regulatory behaviors. The unit of analysis represents teacher interpersonal interactions that include acknowledging, encouraging, providing specific feedback, modeling, and teacher demonstration to enable children to fully participate in classroom routines, transitions, and learning experiences in the preschool setting (Epstein, 2007; NAEYC, 2002).

Using multiple sources of evidence as garnered through classroom routines, transitions, and learning experiences, I perform an embedded analysis of the data to

identify reciprocal interactions along a continuum of developmentally appropriate

practices (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2009) as evidenced in practice. I generalize the findings

to the educational theories that inform this study.

Overview of the Research Design

This study examines the nature of an early childhood educator's affective

disposition as integral to children's learning in an urban preschool setting. In the aim of

understanding an early childhood educator's capacity to nurture and affirm child

differences, I consider the stated beliefs of seven early childhood educators as expressed

in individual and group interviews and the relationship between their beliefs and

observations of classroom practices. This research design provided multiple

opportunities: (a) to document, describe, and analyze key affective dispositions of early

childhood educators in the context of developmentally appropriate practices that affirm

differences among preschool age children, (b) to document, describe, and analyze early

childhood perceptions of differences, and (c) to document, describe, and analyze

nurturing interactions as evidenced through the educator/child relationships in the context

of the early childhood setting.

In order to gather evidence of developmentally appropriate practices and key

affective characteristics to support child development, I relied on extensive classroom

observations, interviews, school-based documents, and classroom artifacts to support how

early childhood educators apply principles of developmentally appropriate practice in the

preschool classroom that affirm differences among children (Yin, 2009). In the aim of

soliciting participant views in a group setting, I facilitated a focus group discussion to

encourage open dialogue among the early childhood educators in a group setting.

Additionally, secondary data sources including demographical information, census data, and government-sponsored research are provided to support primary data sources.

In the course of data collection, I organized each data source in the aim of describing, classifying, and interpeting the data in alignment to the research questions. The analysis of data began informally following individual and focus group interviews and following classroom obsersvations. Data analysis continued during transcription, when recurring themes, patterns, and data categories emerged from the evidence. As in case study analysis, this involved a spiraling, or cyclical process that proceeded from general to specific data interpretations (Creswell, 2007). In an effort to ensure accuracy of the data collected, responsive interviews were conducted with each of the early childhood educators solicit each early childhood educator's interpetations of their expressed beliefs and classroom practices as garnered through interviews responses and observations of clasroom practices. A detailed description of the case emerges through data collection and analysis. I present an in-depth conceptualization of the study using descriptive narratives, and figures in Chapter Four, Presentation of Findings, and Chapter Five, Discussion.

Statement of Ethical Assurances

In an effort to protect human participants from risk, I adhered to the policies and procedures of the Rowan University Institutional Review Board. I completed and obtained a certificate of completion for the Human Participant Protections Education for Research from the National Institutes of Health. Additionally, I received written approval to conduct this research from the Rowan University institutional review board. A copy of the approval letter is provided in (Appendix A). This research study did not commence

until IRB approval was obtained from the Rowan University institutional review board.

In order to safeguard each of the participants, participant names remained confidential and the identities of the participants were kept in a secure location. Electronic data was stored on a private computer, which was solely accessed by the researcher. Written data was secured in a locked file cabinet with access limited to the researcher**.** All written documents will be maintained for a period of three years following this research study and will be discarded following this allotted time period.

I gained access to the participants through the ABC Elementary School Principal and the Urban City School District's Board of Education (Appendix B). Informed consent forms and a description of the study were provided to each of the participants (Appendix D). This process is a requirement of all research involving human participants; however, it is paramount to case study research methodology because case study research explores contemporary phenomenon in a real life context thus obligating the researcher to uphold a higher standard of ethical practices (Yin, 2009). In order to safeguard children enrolled in the preschool classrooms, by virtue of their age, I incorporated additional safeguards into this study and the researcher has received informed consent of these individuals through their parents/guardians (Appendix C).

At the onset of this study, the principal of the school expressed considerable interest in my intent to study early childhood practice in the school building. In particular, the principal of the school was interested in understanding early childhood practice and the degree to which the early childhood curriculum was being implemented as stated in the school district's curriculum guidelines for preschool education. Additionally, the principal cited classroom management and adult child interactions with preschool

children as relevant concerns. Because the school building is housed in two separate locations, the assistant principal served as gatekeeper for the research site. I visited the school site to meet with the assistant principal to fully explain the research topic and the methods of data collection in order to ensure access to each of the classrooms. I was met with great enthusiasm on the part of the assistant principal who provided copies of relevant school based documents. As a part of this visit, I was also introduced to each of the eight participants initially selected for this study at the Riverview location of the ABC Elementary School and was met with great enthusiasm on the part of the early childhood educators who each expressed an interest in participating in this study. In meeting with each participant, I explained that the purpose of the research was to investigate their role in supporting early learning as illustrated in classroom practices and the nature of their relationships with young children as demonstrated by care, concern, and sensitivity to children in the context of child centered practices.

In early January, following initial interviews and classroom observations, it was revealed that the principal and assistant principal were transferred to positions elsewhere in the district and a new administrative team was put in place at the school. In the aim of establishing a relationship with the school's leadership, I contacted the assistant principal who was assigned to the Riverview location in the aim of gaining support for the study. However, I was met with hesitation on the part of the assistant principal and a relationship with the assistant principal in support of the study was never fully developed at the research site although the principal of the school was agreeable to the completion of the study in the Riverview building.

Role of the Researcher

Educational leaders who value inquiry and reflection as an integral part of leadership better serve learning communities (Riehl, Larson, Short, & Reitzug, 2000). As an educational practitioner, I believe that inquiry serves to inform professional practice within the field of early childhood education and throughout the larger educational community (Riehl et al., 2000). Inquiry in the field of early childhood education provides educational practitioners insight to the value of establishing nurturing classroom communities of practice as integral to child development and relevant to the current work of schools serving young children.

In addition, multiple authors suggest that the nature of research in teacher education is wrought with challenges that include changing beliefs, perceptions, and understanding among educators in the school setting (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Perry, Henderson, & Meier, 2012; Zeichner, 1999). Guided by an interpretive constructivist research paradigm, I sought to explore the perspectives, experiences, and practices of early childhood educators in an urban preschool setting drawing on principles of developmentally appropriate practice (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Because the constructivist believes that knowledge is socially constructed, I placed great emphasis on cultivating a trusting relationship with each of the research participants in order to promote collaboration among the researcher and each of the participants (Creswell, 2007; Huberman, 1990). Although I had no prior relationship with six of the seven participants in this study, I came to know one of the participants in a professional capacity as Director, Early Childhood Programs, Southern New Jersey University.

In this course of this study, I assumed a variety of roles that serve essential to data collection, analysis and interpretation. In the role of researcher, I had access to each classroom over an eight month time period. Access to each of the early learning classrooms provided me with multiple opportunities to experience classroom interactions as an insider, rather than as an outsider aiding in the development of an accurate portrayal of the activities, interactions, and physical aspects of each classroom environment. In order to prevent the potential for bias, I carefully considered opportunities to actively participate in classroom routines and learning experiences in order to prevent the potential for bias (Yin, 2009). While I acknowledged the benefits of participant observation throughout the course of this study, I was also acutely aware that my professional credentials, experience, and knowledge in the field of early childhood education would impact my inferences about the data as gleaned through participant beliefs and observations of classroom practice.

For nearly fifteen years, I have served in a variety of roles in the public and private sectors of early childhood and elementary education. I hold a professional certification in elementary education and I have earned a Masters in Education. I have received training as an early childhood master teacher sponsored by the New Jersey Department of Education, Office of Early Childhood and I maintain professional memberships in national organizations for young children such as the NAEYC and the National Coalition for Campus Children's Centers.

As a former classroom teacher and preschool administrator of a publicly funded preschool program in an urban setting, the expectations, beliefs, and assumptions I hold about early childhood education inform this study. Although these experiences may

represent a degree of subjectivity, I relied on my knowledge of early childhood curriculum, instruction, and program quality assessment indicators to garner insights relevant to data collection, analysis and interpretation. Therefore every effort was made to eliminate the potential for bias (Maxwell, 2005). This research study is limited to my experiences within the context of the research site.

<p style="text-align:center;">Site and Participant Selection</p>

Harrison Hill Neighborhood, City of Urban

The City of Urban is among the poorest in the nation (United States Census Bureau, 2010). The ABC Elementary School is located in the City of Urban City's Harrison Hill neighborhood. The neighborhood is a mostly residential community that has been in steady decline over the last few decades. Currently, there are approximately 1,600 households within the neighborhood with a total population of approximately 4,000 people. Single mothers disproportionately head households within the Harrison Hill neighborhood and a significant number of children have grandparents as primary caretakers. The 2000 Census reports that fifty-six percent of Harrison Hill neighborhood families report incomes below poverty level and 20% of all households reported using local food pantries on a consistent basis. Thirty percent of the families residing in the neighborhood report that they do not have enough food in the household. Half of the neighborhood population contains children under the age of eighteen. The neighborhood population is predominately of African American and Hispanic/Latino origin (Urban Strategies, 2008).

The Urban City School District

"As a result of the *Abbott v. Burke* decision in 1998, New Jersey offers preschool programs in thirty-one of its lowest income school districts" (Brown & Trail, 2006; NJDOE, 2010). Preschool programs are offered to three and four year old children residing in 31 of the state's poorest geographical areas as a part of the regular educational program afforded to all children in public education. Funding for public preschool programs is provided by the State of New Jersey. The State has substantial oversight of early educational programs in an effort to ensure programs meet high quality standards. Ongoing support for early childhood educators' and opportunities for professional development are provided by in-district personnel.

In the course of this research study, considerable emphasis was placed on the pedagogical approach in use at the ABC Elementary School as recommended in the New Jersey Department of Education's implementation guidelines for early childhood programs. These guidelines support developmentally appropriate practices and teacher intentionality in planning learning experiences that emphasize free choice play, guided instruction, and child exploration to guide integrated learning. Supportive relationships with children and families are highly regarded in the aim of child centered practices in the early childhood environment (Barnett & Ackerman, 2011; NAEYC, 2009). Considering the influence of the state's curriculum guidelines for publicly funded programs serving preschool age children, it was assumed that the early childhood educator's pedagogical approaches would reflect practices consistent with a child centered philosophy as expressed in the state's implementation guidelines for preschool programs and articulated by the district's goals for preschool practices.

ABC Elementary School

The ABC Elementary School located in the Harrison Hill neighborhood once stood as the only public school in the Harrison Hill Neighborhood. In 2002, the Urban City Board of Education closed the original school site as a result of structural decay that deemed the school unsafe for occupancy (Urban Strategies, 2008). The ABC Elementary School is currently housed in two separate temporary locations due to structural deficiencies requiring the complete evacuation of the original site. As a result of subsequent structural deficiencies to the temporary school building, which occurred in late August 2011, preschool children through second grade are currently housed at a school building located outside of the Harrison Hill Neighborhood in the Riverview section of Urban City, New Jersey. Preschool age students travel by bus to the Riverview location accompanied by instructional aides.

The school serves a majority of general education and special education students in preschool through sixth grade. The school's total enrollment for the 2009–10 academic year was 318 students. Fifty-eight percent of the students are African American, 41% of the student population is Hispanic, and one percent of the student population is considered other ethnicities. Although only 0.8% of students are classified as Limited English Proficient (LEP), 39.4% of students speak Spanish as their first or home language. Ninety-one percent of students at the school qualify for free or reduced priced lunches, and 14% of ABC Elementary School students receive special education services (NJDOE, 2013).

The Setting in the Context of the Research

The ABC Elementary School served as an ideal site for this research study due to the diverse population of students in attendance at the school. This setting provided me with an opportunity to gain an in depth understanding of early childhood practice and to provide a thick, rich description of the phenomena as demonstrated in each of the four preschool classrooms within the Riverview location of the ABC School under investigation.

The ABC Elementary School currently houses four preschool classrooms serving diverse children who are three to five years of age. In this public preschool setting, classroom size is limited to 15 children, who are instructed by professional early childhood educators hired by Urban City Schools to lead classroom instruction. A paraprofessional is assigned to facilitate instruction and lend support to the credentialed early childhood educator in the early childhood classroom. As reported by the early childhood educators, the children enrolled in the four preschool classrooms are primarily African American and are of Hispanic origin. Among the children of Hispanic origin, many are Spanish dominant learners, for whom English is a second language. There are several children enrolled in the four preschool classrooms identified with special needs who require classroom accommodations.

As reported on the Camden City School's website, the mission of the ABC School declares that "staff believe in a comprehensive, instructional program for students in order to increase self-esteem and self-image through positive academic and social and emotional experiences, regardless of family background, socioeconomic status, race, or gender". This statement asserts that the ABC School leadership and staff accept the

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responsibility of providing positive cognitive and affective opportunities for young children within the school community.

Purposive Sampling Procedures

Purposive sampling procedures are designed to provide a sample that will answer the research questions under investigation (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Teddlie & Yu, 2007) in order to yield evidence relevant to the phenomena under study and to provide measures of validity that lend credibility to the study (Creswell, 2007 Mason, 2002; Patton-Quinn, 2002; Teddlie & Tashakkori , 2009). Because the focus of this study was to examine the affective characteristics of early childhood practitioners in an urban preschool setting, serving children of diverse backgrounds the research context was purposefully selected for this study. The rationale for this sample selection is as follows: (a) to select a smaller, sample of early childhood practitioners within an urban setting characterized by a higher population of diverse learners in order to implement the research design, (b) to observe an early learning curriculum characterized by a child centered pedagogical practices within an urban preschool setting, (c) to align evidence to the theoretically driven research questions posed in this study, and (d) to focus on the depth of narrative information as gleaned through data collection and analysis, and (Mason, 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Teddlie & Yu, 2007).

Purposive sampling procedures enhance a researcher's ability to account for activities, processes, and classroom events as well as contextual and cultural norms among the participants and prove critical to identifying emerging themes as gleaned through multiple sources of evidence (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). This study is bound by the interactions between the early childhood educators and children with whom they

interacted in the preschool classroom. However, it does not preclude settings, or interactions outside of the classroom, school wide events, and other social processes that occurred over the course of the study (Yin, 2009).

Participant Selection

For this study, I sought a sample of early childhood educators who serve as classroom teachers to preschool age children in an urban preschool setting. Because the NAEYC defines early childhood educators as all those individuals who work with young children in early care and educational programs both credentialed preschool teachers and paraprofessionals were included in this study (NAEYC, 2009).

The participants selected for this study were chosen based on the aim of this research in order to provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of interest. The following criteria was used to select the participants: (a) the person would be a practicing early childhood educator in an urban setting characterized by a higher population of diverse learners, (b) the participants would be open to sharing their ideas about early childhood pedagogy and best practices in an urban context, and (c) the participants would allow me to observe, record, and analyze their instructional practice and interactions with young children in an early childhood classroom.

Description of the Participants

The ABC Elementary School accommodates four preschool classrooms serving sixty preschool age children. At the onset of this study, four credential preschool teachers and four paraprofessionals expressed an interest in this study and met the criteria set forth at the onset of this study. One of the four paraprofessionals withdrew from the study during the data collection period and due to time constraints the three remaining

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paraprofessionals did not participate in individual interviews although each paraprofessional was open to responsive interviews following classroom observations. The participants possess a broad range of experiences in the school setting and represent a diverse group of individuals. The following information on each of the participants was collected at the onset of this study and represents my initial conversations with each participant.

Katie is an experienced educator who began her teaching career in the Urban City School district. She grew up in New Jersey and studied elementary education during her college years. Katie holds a standard teaching certificate and is certified to teach preschool through third grade. Katie is a Caucasian female and the mother of two young children. She believes that her teaching reflects the needs of the children enrolled in her classroom. Christine an experienced paraprofessional, who has served in the Urban City School District for nearly twenty-six years and resides in the neighborhood, supports Katie in her efforts. Christine, an African American female, holds a CDA certificate and reports to enjoy working with children. She is set to retire in the upcoming academic year.

Barbara is a novice educator with limited experience working with public school children. This will be her second year working in the City of Urban as a preschool teacher. Prior to this placement, Barbara served as a private provider preschool teacher in an urban University setting. She has also served as a health and physical education teacher in an urban Charter School. Barbara holds a provisional certificate and is enrolled in an alternate route teacher certification program. Barbara is a Caucasian female in her mid twenty's. She does not have children but reports to come from a large Irish Catholic

family. She describes being one of five children, as an asset to teaching and believes teaching should be tailored to meet the needs of individual children. Barbara believes that teaching and learning is a social process that fosters social and emotional development among children. Barbara asserts that teaching is an emotional process and asserts that affection for children is relevant to teaching.

Ilana is an experienced paraprofessional, who possesses 11 years experience as a paraprofessional working within the Urban City School District, assists Barbara in her efforts as classroom teacher. Ilana is an African American female who resides in the City of Urban. She has held a variety of positions within the school. This is Ilana's second placement this school year.

Lena is an experienced early childhood educator who has served in a variety of settings across the Urban City School District for 15 years. Lena holds a standard teaching certificate and has earned a Masters of Arts in Education. She serves as the team leader for the preschool teachers at the ABC Elementary School. Lena has also been selected to pilot a supplemental language arts literacy program for preschool age children. Lena believes that her teaching meets the individual needs and abilities of the children in her classroom. A former resident of Camden, Lena is familiar with many of the families who reside within the neighborhood and believes this serves as an asset in gaining support from parents and in resolving classroom management issues. Lena is an African American female and a mother. Karen an experienced paraprofessional supports Lena in her efforts. Due to attrition, Karen is not represented in the findings of this study.

Sarah is a relatively novice preschool teacher with nearly four years experience working with the City of Urban. Sarah is a Caucasian female in her mid twenty's. Prior to her current placement, Sarah served as a private preschool provider teacher within the City. She possesses a standard preschool teaching certificate and is dually certified to teach children with special needs. Sarah believes that teaching should be tailored to meet the individual needs of children in her classroom. She places great emphasis on meeting the needs of each dual language learner enrolled in her classroom. Sarah also reports to value technology as a tool to reach young learners. Sarah is supported in her efforts by Yulenia, an experienced early childhood paraprofessional, who possesses a bachelor's degree in industrial engineering from a University in her native Puerto Rico. Yulenia is an English language learner who communicates in both English and Spanish in order to teach, assess, and care for children in the classroom. She is eager to earn a teaching degree in the United States. Table 1 summarizes each participant's experience and credentials.

Table 1 Participant Experience and Credentials

Participant	Years of Experience	Level of Education
Paraprofessional 1 Christine	26 years experience	Professional Development, CDA
Paraprofessional 2 Ilana	11 years experience	Associate of Arts
Paraprofessional 3 Karen	22 years experience	56 College Credits
Paraprofessional 4 Yulenia	6 years experience	Bachelors of Science, Industrial Engineering
Preschool Teacher 1 Katie	11 years experience	Bachelors, Elementary Education, P3
Preschool Teacher 2 Barbara	1 ½ years experience	Bachelor of Arts, Alternate Rte. P3
Preschool Teacher 3 Lena	15 years experience	Masters of Arts in Teaching, P3
Preschool Teacher 4 Sarah	3 years experience	Bachelors, Early Childhood, P3, Special Ed.

Theory Driven Research Assumptions

The assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that inform this study rely on varied constructs in educational theory and contemporary issues in early childhood education (Maxwell, 2005; Yin, 2009). This study utilizes educational theory to inform the growing need for educators to meet the developmental needs of an increasingly larger population of diverse learners in the early childhood setting. In the development of this study, each research question was aligned to educational theories that express the value of child development knowledge and interpersonal interactions as evidenced through social interactions in the context of the school community.

Dewey (1916) offers that education is a process of interactions between children and educators that are deliberate, thoughtful, and meaningful to children that results in learning. This tenet of practice is observed through classroom observations that support child development and achievement. Principles of developmentally appropriate practice are revealed through stated beliefs about how children learn and develop in the early childhood setting and expressed through interactions between adults and young children that nurture and respond to the developmental needs of children (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; NAEYC, 2009). The value of social interaction on cognitive development is expressed through observations of classroom practice in alignment with Vygotsky's theory of social cognition, which suggests that children develop cognitively through social engagement with peers and adults in a supportive learning environment (Davis, 2003; Follari, 2007; Hudson, 2002). Table 2 illustrates the relationship of each educational theory to each research question.

Table 2 Educational Theories in Alignment to Research Questions

Educational Theories in Alignment to Research Questions

Research Questions	John Dewey	Lev Vygtosky Theory of Social Cognition	Jean Piaget	Developmentally Appropriate Practice
RQ1: What key dispositions of early childhood educators' support developmentally appropriate practice and affirm differences among children in the early childhood setting?	The school is an institution for learning wherein children are nurtured through social interaction and democratic principles (Ozmon & Craver , 2003). Effective teaching practices are often art over science (Ozmon & Craver, 2003). A teacher is a lover of learning, content knowledge who is passionate about interactions with students. Teacher interactions with should arouse intellectual curiosity in students and communicate knowledge (Simpson, Jackson, & Aycock, 2005).		Cognitive changes occur in young children especially during preschool (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009) Pretend Play is characterized by symbolic play and manipulating symbols. Play and make believe increases in children between ages of 2–7 (Piaget, 1981)	DAP should reflect the context of an EC program for children including home language, culture, and diversity. DAP framework implies teacher planning and instruction grows out of teacher/child interactions (Bredekamp, 1987; NAEYC, 2009).
RQ1 (a) How do early childhood educators perceive and respond to developmental differences among children in the early childhood setting?	A physical environment promotes self-directed learning (Dewey, 1916). Reflective Teaching is a process of observing and reacting to children in the classroom setting (Carter, Cividanes, Curtis, & Lebo, 2010; Dewey, 1933)	The zone of proximal development (ZPD) represents the range of skill acquisition among children with adult guidance or peer collaboration (Follari, 2007; Hudson, 2002, Vygotsky, 1978).	Children's cognitive development represents a child's understanding of the world (Piaget, 1951) Children progress through distinct stages of development (Piaget, 1951). Preschool age children are egocentric and illogical. Logic	Presents a framework for all areas of children's physical, emotional, social and cognitive development (Bredekamp, 1987).

			and reason develops with chronological age (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Piaget, 1951)	
RQ1 (b) How do early childhood educators form and nurture relationships with children whose background may be different from their own background?	Multiple forms of love expressed by teacher lies within the context of teacher/child relationships (Simpson, Jackson, & Aycock, 2005). Educators embody qualities that extend beyond pedagogical knowledge and embrace an affective disposition towards children developed in the context of deliberate, purposeful, and meaningful interpersonal relationships with children in the school setting (Dewey, 1916)	Theory of social development advocates for social interaction between adult/child, and among peers in the cognitive development of children (Vygotsky, 1978).		DAP should reflect the context of an EC program for children including home language, culture, and diversity (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Mallory & New, 1994; NAEYC, 2009). NAEYC position statement on DAP addresses the needs of children and families including poverty and level of parent education (NAEYC, 2009)

Data Instruments

A case study research design supports an in-depth understanding of the events, processes, and instructional practices of each of the early childhood educators in this study (Yin, 2009). This research study relied on qualitative data to investigate the experiences, characteristics, and knowledge of early childhood educators relevant to child growth and development among diverse learners in the early childhood setting and includes several strategies of inquiry typically employed by qualitative researchers. The strategies of qualitative inquiry consisted of primary data sources including researcher

field notes, photographs, open-ended interview responses, and observations of classroom practices including interpersonal interactions in order to ascertain data on the nature of supportive relationships between adults and children in the early childhood setting. Additionally, I interacted with children informally within the classroom setting. As a participant observer, I maintained field notes and a reflective journal throughout the course of study to provide an in depth account of classroom observations, researcher perceptions, and interpretation of educator relationships with young children in the early childhood setting. These multiple strategies of inquiry aided in triangulating the data and served to reduce the risk of bias in the research enhancing the validity of the research (Maxwell, 2005).

Alignment of Protocols to Research Concerns

In this study, I sought to understand the experiences, characteristics, and practices of early childhood educators that support children's learning in the early childhood setting. Because the research questions guide researchers in understanding phenomena under study, the use of selected research protocols provided a means of understanding and interpreting each data source (Maxwell, 2005). Each protocol selected for use in this study is aligned to each of the research questions. These protocols serve to provide an understanding of the data as gleaned through classroom observations and expressed through individual and focus group interviews. Drawing on the varied constructs of these protocols, I describes the physical setting and provides an account of observed classroom events and interactions among the early childhood educators and preschool children in order to interpret the experiences of the early childhood educators through the lens of

developmentally appropriate practices. Table 3 illustrates an alignment of the research

questions to the selected research protocols.

Table 3 Alignment of Research Questions with Data Protocols

Research Aim	Protocols		
Research Question	Observation	Interviews	Focus Groups
RQ1 What key dispositions of early childhood educators' support developmentally appropriate practice and affirm differences among children in the early childhood setting?	I. Demographical Data II. Checklist Indicators, B, C, D	Questions, 2a, 2c, 2f, 2g, 2h, 2j, 2k, 2m, 2n	Questions, 1a, 1d, 1e, 1f
RQ1a How do early childhood educators perceive and respond to developmental differences among children in the early childhood setting?	I. Demographical Data II. Checklist Indicators, C, D	Questions, 2b,2c, 2d, 2e, 2f, 2h, 2l	Questions 1c, 1e
RQ1b How do early childhood educators form and nurture relationships with children whose background may be different from their own background?	I. Demographical Data II. Checklist Indicators, B	Questions, 2d, 2f, 2g, 2i, 2k	Questions, 1a, 1d

Interviews as Interactions

In order to garner an understanding of the early childhood educator's beliefs and

experiences in early childhood education, structured and responsive interviews serve as

an essential source of case study data to conceptualize the beliefs of the participants in

comparison to observed classroom practices yielding a greater understanding of

developmentally appropriate practices in the construct of early childhood educator

practice (Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Yin, 2009).

The interview protocol was adapted from the Early Childhood Environmental

Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R), an environmental ratings scale developed to evaluate

the process quality in early childhood settings. This instrument is designed to assist

educational practitioners and in assessing the quality of the physical environment,

curriculum, interactions, and program structure and served essential in gathering evidence of the educators pedagogical beliefs, instructional practices, and views on children and their families in the urban preschool setting (Clifford, Reszka, & Rossback, 2010; Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 2004). A copy of the interview protocol is included in Appendix G.

In order to illustrate the early childhood educator's beliefs and the nature of their classroom practices, I conducted one structured interview with each participant at the onset of the study to become familiar with each of the participants and to establish a rapport with each participant. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes and occurred during the educator's planning period or when school was not in session. Interviews were conducted in a small teacher's lounge on the second floor of the school building. Several interviews were also conducted in the early childhood educator's preschool classroom depending upon the time of the scheduled interview. Throughout each interview, I recorded the interview responses onto paper in lieu of a tape recorder as planned prior to data collection. This was due in part to the reacation of the first interviewee's response to the use of tape recorder as we sat down for the initial interview. In the aim of interpeting the interviewee's affect, I paid particular attention to the early childhood educator's verbal and non verbal expressions, nuances, and emotional responses to each question. During structured interviews, it became apparent to the me that several of the early childhood educators were more adept in articulating their responses than other paricipants. Following each interview, I transcribed my notes and saved each transcription on onto a microsoft word document in order to reflect on the responses and to prepare follow up questions. During structured interviews, I sought to understand each educator's personal philosophy on early childhood education in

relationship to the school's prescribed curricula. In order to acscertain data on years of experience in eduction in comparison to years of service as an urban preschool teacher, each educator was prompted each eductor to tell the length of time in their present position as compared to years years of service in teaching in order to solicit participant views and experience in urban education. Each participant was asked to provide their professional credentials and years of experience teaching young children in an urban setting. Because early chilhdood education is often considered as a separate field of study in teacher education programs, it was essential to develop an interview question directed at the early childhood educators course of study in higher education including the early childhood educator's highest degree. Because there are several routes to certification for professional educators, this line of inquiry also served to elicit whether the early childhood educators obtained their teaching credentials via traditional teacher education programs or alternate route certification programs (Grossman & Williston, 2002; Kowalski, Pretti-Frontczak, & Johnson, 2001) .

In alignment to the main research questions posed in this study, I sought to understand the early childhood educator's personal beliefs about teaching young children and their role as early childhood practicioners in the urban preschool classroom. This line of inquiry served to elicit the early childhood educators' emotional beliefs about teaching as expressed in their repsponse to the question, "what do you enjoy about teaching?" Each participant was prompted to reveal any obstacles and challenges with teaching and to describe those challenges in detail. Based on the early childhood educator's response to this line of questioning, I provided examples of typical challenges faced by early childhood practictioners in the preschool classroom including classroom

management and the degree of support provided by school adminsitration. In order to garner an understanding of each participant's role in student learning and assessment, I also prompted each participant to describe their role as teacher in student learning and assessment.

In order to garner an understanding of each educator's role in supporting children's learning across learning domains and content specific areas, each early childhood educator was prompted to describe a typical preschool day in their classroom including materials, classroom resources, and planned learning experiences including free choice play. This line of inquiry was intended to ascertain knowledge of chid development and intentionality in planning learning experiences for children. Similarly, I purposefully selected two relevant content specific areas in preschool teaching and learning: language arts literacy and multiculturalim in order to assess each early childhood educator's pedagogical knowledge.

In the aim of understanding how each early childhood educators perceive and respond to differences among children the preschool classroom, each participant to describe any shared and individual characteristics among the preschool age children enrolled in their classroom and to describe instructional strategies as deemed appropriate by the early childhood educators to meet the cognitive and social needs of each child enrolled in the preschool classroom and to relate whether prior knowledge and child assessment data serve as a springboard for classroom instruction including play based learning experiences. This line of inquiry served to account for each early childhood educators' personal beliefs and expectations of children from diverse backgrounds. Similarly, because opportunities for social interaction and play based learning supports

children's development in the preschool setting, I sought each participant's beliefs about play and opportunities for social interactions in the preschool classroom. Modes of parent engagement and relationships with families were also addressed in order to gain insight to a child's home environment as expressed in the beliefs of each participant.

Later, as I developed a rapport with each of the early childhood educators and especially following classroom observations, a responsive interviewing model was employed to generate a greater understanding of the educators beliefs in relation to observed classroom practices. A responsive interviewing model, which relies on an intrepretive constructionvist philosophy, allowed me to fully understand each educators feelings, interests, and experiences in the early childhood setting and served in clarifying evidence gleaned through classroom observations in order to draw interpretations from the data (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Responsive interviews occurred ongoing following classroom observations and although as the researcher, I did not have a protocol for this set of interviews, this line of questioning proved relevant to confirming or disconfirming evidence as gleaned through classroom observations. In this format, I prompted the early childhood educators to clarify my understanding of the lesson and to reflect on whether the lesson was successful. In several instances, "what would you do differently?" and "describe the purpose of the lesson" fostered participant responses about pedagogy and developmental differences among the preschool children.

Among several of the participants, responsive interviewing promoted ongoing conversations about early childhood curriculum and instructional practices. It was during these conversations, that several of the participants began to speak openly on topics they found relevant to their classroom, school, and community (Hinchey, 2008; Rubin &

Rubin, 2005). In the role of researcher, I spent a significant amount of time with two of the early childhood educators in the course of lesson planning, classroom preparation, and during classroom routines and transitions. Additionally, I observed first hand the early childhood educator's interactions with parents and colleagues in the school setting. Moreover, I was present to listen to the early childhood educator's concerns about children. Although personal involvement influences bias, engaging the participants in conversation and demonstrating empathy in the course of conversation on topics, concerns, and relevant issues in early childhood education proved essential to data collection and was compatible with my personality.

Focus Group Dialogue

In order to garner participant views in a group setting, focus group discussion serves as an essential source of evidence in this study. The intent in facilitating a focus group discussion was to foster discussion among participants and to elicit responses in a group setting in contrast to individual interview responses (Cheng, 2007; Hollander, 2004; Krueger & Casey, 2000). Because focus group dialogue often serves to elicit agreements and discourse on the part of participants, focus group discussion serves as a measure of validity in this study enhancing the rigor of this research (Kidd and Parshall, 2000). We asked each participant to sign an informed consent form to participate in the focus group discussion (Appendix H) and used a checklist to facilitate focus group discussion (Appendix J).

I intended to have two separate focus group discussions as a part of this study. However, due to various time constraints, one focus group session occurred in this study. One the day of the scheduled focus group discussion, I received a telephone call from one

of the participants canceling the focus group discussion due to the fact that several of the participants were absent from work. In a second instance, a reported crime was committed in the neighborhood immediately surrounding the school. Because I was scheduled to observe classroom instruction on this day, I was present to observe a large group of people outside of the school building. One of the participants explained that a group had gathered on the corner because of a reported crime in the neighborhood, which caused alarm within the school building. Several of the participants reported that all of the teachers planned to leave at the student's dismissal time. However, the school was not put on lockdown and it did not appear that the building administrator planned to dismiss staff at the student's dismissal time. As a student researcher, and as an employee of Southern New Jersey University, I was also particularly concerned that several University students were also in the building conducting observations as a part of their teacher education program. The focus group session was rescheduled for a second time.

On the day of the session, I arranged to meet with the participants in the school cafeteria following student dismissal. In order to create a supportive context I engaged the participants in conversation prior to beginning the discussion. As a springboard for discussion among the participants, general discussion topics included: Community and neighborhood demographics, early childhood pedagogy, and supports for teaching and learning that celebrate diversity (Appendix I) (Cheng, 2007; Hollander, 2004). Throughout this dialogue, I sought to gain knowledge of the school community and surrounding neighborhood as gleaned through the perspectives of the participants and to elicit participant responses about early childhood practices that affirm differences among the preschool age children.

To begin the discussion, I prompted the participants to elaborate on the mission of the school. In particular, I sought to identify the implications of academic rigor as expressed in the mission statement to the nature of early childhood curriculum and instruction. I prompted, "if the mission is academic rigor and we are pre-kindergarten (Pre-K) educators how does this influence our practice in the early childhood classroom?'

Because the notion of diversity as expressed in classroom instructional practices serves essential to this study, two questions specifically address diversity in the context of the setting, neighborhood, and among families: "How do you define diversity within the context of your responsibilities as preschool educators?" and "What information about the neighborhood and community do you have?" It is relevant to note that several of the participants reside in the home neighborhood of the children attending the school and two participants are former residents of Urban City. Because several of the participants were familiar with the neighborhood beyond the context of their responsibilities in the preschool classroom, additional information about relationships with families and the impact of personal relationships on children's learning in the preschool setting was garnered throughout the discussion. Discussion topics related to children's learning sought to garner an understanding of child development requisite to children's learning in the preschool setting prior to school entry. In order to garner a greater understanding of the participant's beliefs about the characteristics of the children, I restated one of the structured interview questions, "what particular characteristics do the children share?" As the discussion proceeded, I listened intently to the early childhood educators while observing the group's dynamics. Too frequently, several of the participants appeared hesitant to respond in a group setting. In addition, because I was conducting classroom

observations at the time of the focus group discussion, the session provided an opportunity to deepen an understanding of observed classroom practices. For example, in several instances, children's behaviors were met with overtly harsh responses on the part of several of the early childhood educators prompting the question, "Do we ever talk to children in the way we assume they are spoken to at home?"

At the conclusion of the session, I sought participant responses to the following question, "what do children see as we interact them in the setting? Although a seemingly broad question, the purpose in seeking this information in a group setting was to garner an understanding of the educator's disposition to demonstrate care, concern, and sensitivity to children in the preschool classroom.

Observations

Observations of classroom practice are fundamental to this study and serve to illustrate each participant's espoused beliefs as garnered in individual interviews and focus group discussion in comparison to observed classroom practices. Incongruities between the participant's espoused beliefs and their observable actions inform the results of this study (Argyris & Schon, 1974). For example, developmentally appropriate practices rely on the early childhood educator's knowledge, skill, and disposition to plan learning experiences in a variety of groupings including free choice play, whole group, teacher guided instruction, and small group learning. Early childhood educators, who create a learning environment that fosters children's participation with other children, adults, and activities, plan learning experiences that consider children's developmental levels and interests as evidenced in classroom practice. Early childhood educators, who espouse to belief in the value of developmentally appropriate practices but severely limit

children's interactions with peers and their opportunity to pursue engaging activities as demonstrated in classroom practice, do not act in accordance with their espoused beliefs (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Similarly, early childhood educators who allocate extended periods of time for free choice play in learning areas demonstrate principles of developmentally appropriate practice. In contrast, early childhood educators who espouse the value of free choice play as an appropriate learning experience for young children, but offer limited opportunities for play and child guided experiences do not act on their stated beliefs.

In the aim of capturing relevant evidence, an observation protocol was used to describe child engagment in play based activities and whole group learning experiences under the direction of the early childhood educators. The observation protocol proved relevant to capturing evidence in the physical classroom learning enviroment including: content specific materials, displays of children's work, and planned learning activities. Teacher made displays including classroom signs served to illustrate language diversity among English language and Spanish language learners enrolled in the preschool classroom and also provide evidence of classroom lessons and child assessments. Classroom materials inclusive of diversity were accounted for in the description of the classroom environment. Demographical information on the preschool children enrolled in each classroom including children identified with special needs is included on the observation protocol. The observation protocol has been adapted from the ECERS-R (Clifford, Reszka, & Rossback, 2010; Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 2004) a copy of the observation protocol is included in Appendix E.

Classroom observations occurred in each classroom four times over the course of an eight-month time period at varied instructional periods of time during the preschool day in order to gather evidence of classroom instruction and interpersonal interactions among each of early childhood educators and preschoolers in the course of instruction, routines, and transitional time periods. During initial observations, careful attention was given to the educator's disposition in implementing child centered practices. I intended to remain in each preschool classroom for an observation period of no less than 45 minutes. Scheduling classroom observations proved challenging due to time constraints outside of my control including teacher planning periods, classroom breaks, and specialist area instruction. Specialist area instruction occurred daily during free choice play and although the specialist area teacher remained in the preschool classroom, specialist area teachers were not included in this study. Additionally, because the preschool students were transported by bus to the Riverview location located outside of the neighborhood, opportunities for end of the day learning activities including classroom wrap up and reflection did not occur as children were dismissed to the playground in order to wait for the school buses. However, in order to accommodate time and scheduling constraints, I remained with the early childhood educators at varying times often in excess of 45 minutes including dismissal in order to capture sufficient evidence. Observations of classroom practices yielded evidence of early childhood pedagogy as presented through multiple modes of instruction including free choice play and teacher led instruction. In order to illustrate elements of the physical environment, I relied on the prescribed curriculum to collect evidence of materials, activities, and planned opportunities for free choice play. Evidence of support for English language learners was revealed during

classroom observations of the physical classroom environment. This aided me in developing an accurate portrayal of classroom learning experiences, activities, interactions, and the physical classroom environment.

In order to garner an in depth understanding of the early childhood educator's classroom practices in comparison to the espoused beliefs of the educators, I account for all aspects of the early childhood instruction including the educator's dialogue in presenting learning experiences to children, during classroom routines, and discipline. Consistent with an interpretive paradigm, I sought to capture all aspects of the educator's verbal and non-behaviors in the aim of accurately portraying the early childhood educators' disposition in practice (Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Yin, 2009). Classroom documents including lesson plans, instructional schedules and children's work in the aim of gathering supporting evidence. Additionally, photographs of classroom displays and teacher made child assessments serve as essential evidence in support of this study.

Responsive interviews occurred with each of the early childhood educators following observations of classroom practices in order to garner a further understanding of the educators' intent in facilitating children's learning and to clarify interpretations of observed practices including varied aspects of the classroom environment. As a part of interviewing each early childhood educator following classroom observations, I shared my classroom observation notes in order to clarify aspects of observed classroom practices. In several instances, I was able to ascertain information about classroom activities, interactions, and instructional assessments observed during classroom instruction with assistance from the paraprofessional assigned to the classroom. In an effort to ensure trustworthiness in this study, one particular learning activity prompted I

inquired about the purpose of the learning experience as the activity was occurring in the classroom. Because of the integral nature of early childhood pedagogy as a holistic approach to early care and education, I carefully considered and reviewed classroom observational notes and the participant's responses to responsive interviews in the aim of accurately interpreting evidence. Because I was not merely a passive observer, I assumed a variety of roles in the aim of gathering data over an extended period of time. In the role of researcher, I interacted with children and participated in daily routines, transitions and free choice play experiences that were deemed appropriate in order to prevent the potential for bias (Yin, 2009). And, although the participants appeared uncomfortable at the onset of the study, as a participant observer, I had ample opportunity to observe classroom interactions as an insider, rather than as an outsider to the classroom environment.

<div align="center">**Artifacts**</div>

Artifacts, objects, and classroom instruments serve as an important source of evidence. Classroom artifacts fostered an understanding of the language and words of the participants in classroom based documents and classroom materials. Photographs illustrate varied images of children's work and teacher created displays that demonstrate informal child assessments produced during classroom projects and thematic activities (Hinchey, 2008; Yin, 2009). An example of a classroom instructional schedule and lesson plan template is provided in (Appendix K, Appendix N) along with a copy of the required in-district instructional schedule (Appendix L) to support evidence of planned learning experiences and varied instructional groupings.

Field Notes

In this study, I reflect on the experience in the form of handwritten field notes in the aim of interpreting interviews, observations, and focus group dialogue. Because reflection is an interpretative act, which is central to interpretative inquiry (Piantanida, & Garman, 2009) my reflections provided insight to the phenomenon under study (Watt, 2007). In the process of reflecting on the evidence gathered during data collection, researcher reflections are aligned to the broader theoretical concepts and relevant issues involved in this study. This process fostered my ability to draw conclusions based upon observations, interviews, and dialogue among the participants in order to construct the meaning of each participant's experiences in relation to the research questions thus enhancing my ability to articulate a personal and professional understanding of this phenomenon. Reflective and analytic thoughts are included in data analysis.

Secondary Data Collection: Archival Records

Secondary data is presented as a part of this research study to provide further analysis of the topical area during this research study. Because measures of effective classroom practice are complex due to the nature of school climate, teacher characteristics, and learning outcomes for children, the use of secondary data provides meaningful insight into the socio-cultural context of the school and community setting and serves to provide further insight to the effectiveness of the early childhood educators in the preschool setting (Kingston, Sammons, Day, & Regan, 2011; Yin, 2009).

The use of secondary data sources in this study includes: school demographics, census data, state department of education documents, and empirical research on the effectiveness of publicly funded preschool programs disseminated by the NJDOE on the

state's website and empirical research conducted by National Institute for Early

Education Research in collaboration with the State Department of Education (Boaduo,

2011).

Data Analysis

This study describes an early childhood educators affect in the education of

preschool age children and how early childhood educators perceive and respond to

developmental differences among diverse learners as demonstrated in developmentally

appropriate practices. The conceptual framework for data collection and analysis is

integral to the design and outcomes of this research study. Data collection and analysis

serves to inform: (a) documentation, description, and analysis of key characteristics of

early childhood educators to support developmentally appropriate practice and affirm

differences among children in the preschool setting, and (b) documentation, description,

and analysis of the stated beliefs among the early childhood educators and their responses

to developmental differences among preschool children in the in the early childhood

setting as evidenced through interviews, classroom observations, and data as gleaned

through data collection.

This case study involved primary data sources to explore the experiences,

characteristics, and perceptions of the participants that served to nurture child

development and affirm differences among young learners as illustrated in classroom

practice and expressed in individual interviews and focus group discussion. The task of

analysis began as I organized each source of evidence as gleaned in classroom

observations, individual interviews, and focus group dialogue. This task also involved the

seeking participant's views on the accuracy of classroom observation data, interpretations

of interview transcripts, and accounts of focus group discussions (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

During the process of analysis, classroom observations and artifacts served to provide evidence of pedagogical practices and interactions among children and adults in the preschool classroom. Individual interviews and focus group discussions revealed participant perspectives on developmental differences, diversity, and relationships with children and their families. These data sources were triangulated in order to identify emergent themes as aligned to the research questions.

Review of documents

The initial step in analysis began immediatley following individual interviews, observations, and focus group discussions. In the course of analysis, I read, and reflected upon each source of evidence expressed by participants during individual interviews and observed in classroom practices in order to develop tentative data categories (Maxwell, 2005). This process occurred ongoing as recurring ideas, patterns, and relationships emerged from each data source. Throughout data collection, secondary sources including classroom lesson plans, children's work, and photographs of classroom displays as well as photographs off the physical classroom environment were collected in the aim of complimenting other data sources. The review of documents aided in developing data categories and themes in analysis (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Data Analysis Categories

The overarching research question posed in this case study considers key dispositions of educators that serve to nurture and affirm differences among young learners in classroom practices and interpersonal relationships as revealed through

observations of classroom practice and expressed in individual interviews and focus group discussion.

Miles and Huberman (1994) recommend researchers create provisional data analysis categories in an effort to later refine and revise thematic categories in the aim of data analysis and interpretation. In order to categorize evidence of early childhood dispositions, perceptions, and practice, a provisional list of categories accounts for each data source in alignment to each research question. This accounting scheme has been adapted in order to meaningfully categorize each data source relevant to this research study. This accounting scheme includes: (a) a setting/context for the research study, (b) a definition of the situation and how participants understand and perceive the topics on which the study is formed, (c) perspectives of the participants, (d) sequence of events that occur during classroom observations and over the course of the study, (e) activities that support teaching and learning, (f) strategies and methods used by participants in the course of planning for instruction and observed classroom practices, (g) relationships and social structure within the context of the school and community and (h) methods of the research process that include problems, joys, and dilemmas over the course of the research.

Because the purpose of research is not to merely organize data, the use of this accounting scheme served as an initial step in breaking down each data source in order to later develop codes for each of the data sources. Throughout this process, data transcriptions were extensively read, reviewed and organized in accordance with the accounting scheme. Observation field notes along with responsive interview notes were categorized to reflect the actions and perspectives of each participant. Structured

interview responses were reviewed and organized according to activities, instructional strategies, and classroom events. School based documents and photographs were accounted form among the areas identified in the accounting scheme. In the aim of accurately portraying the evidence, I was especially cognizant of the risk in misinterpreting classroom observations of early childhood practice in accordance with the school's curriculum and therefore relied on empirical research and related literature in the field of early childhood education to guide this process. Additionally, I relied on the underlying theoretical framework to meaningfully categorize each source of evidence.

Coding

"Coding is analysis" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 56). Because coding is a process of assigning meaning to data sources, I assigned codes to each data source. In this process, I relied on each of the research questions as aligned to the theoretical framework that informs this study as well as related empirical literature in the aim of accurately interpreting the meaning of each participant experiences, practices, and interpersonal relationships with young children in the preschool setting (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Creswell, 2007; DeCuir, Marshall, & McCulloch, 2011). This task entailed generating, reviewing, and revising codes in the context of working with each data source, initial codes were identified, reviewed and revised in process of analyzing each data source. With the assistance of a professional teacher educator, each data source was coded using different colored highlighters to illustrate varying themes. In this process, I identified sub themes under each thematic category to assist me in presenting concluding themes that represent the major findings of this study. This involved an extensive process of integrating the educational theories as expressed in this study to each data source and

assisted me in accurately representing the data to enhance the validity of the findings presented. Drawing on the theoretical framework and related empirical research, I account for the relationship among each data source as evidence of saturation (Bowen, 2008).

Data Saturation

Data saturation is integral to naturalistic inquiry and involves a rigorous process of data collection and interpretation. In order to ensure data saturation, I draw on in-depth interviews, observations, and school based documents. Evidence of saturation is expressed through comparisons among individual participant interview responses, focus group discussions, and classroom observations as aligned to the theoretical framework for this study (Bowen, 2008).

Multiple Validity Measures

Validity in qualitative research provides the researcher with an analytic tool by which to identify a methodological relationship among the purposes for the research and the research questions (Cho & Trent, 2006). In the aim of confirming the evidence garnered in this study, I address issues of validity throughout data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Yin, 2009).

As a part of this study, I collected multiple sources of evidence using a variety of methods to provide a greater depth of understanding of the phenomena under study thus (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2009). In the aim of reducing the risk of bias and to ensure validity, evidence from diverse sources including interviews, observations, field notes, and school-based documents enhanced the validity and credibility of the results. As a second strategy, I solicited participant views during the course of the research as gleaned through

responsive interviewing in the aim of clarifying evidence. This process of member checking ensured classroom observation data, interview transcripts, and accounts of focus group dialogue accurately represented the evidence ensuring that the findings of this study are accurate and valid (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Additionally, Creswell and Miller (2000) offer that prolonged engagement in the field fosters trust between the researcher and the participants. Establishing relationships with each of the participants provided a degree of comfort for the participants and the researcher alike, which lends itself to better understanding the views of the participants. In order to ensure the results of this study are valid, I acted as a participant observer and conducted this research over the course of an academic year beginning in November 2011 in order to ensure credibility to this research study (Maxwell, 2005). Similarly, because the intent of this methodological design is to provide in great detail the perceptions and practices of the participants under study, long term participant observation at the research site fostered my ability to collect rich, thick data as gleaned through detailed accounts of interactions, observations and relationships between adults and children in the early childhood setting (Creswell & Miller, 2010; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 2009).

<center>**Generalizability**</center>

This study provides an account of the experience of early childhood educators given charge to positively impact children's learning in an urban preschool setting. The case under study provides an in depth account of the espoused beliefs and practices of early childhood educators to demonstate an affective disposition in the framework of of developmentally appropriate practices. I generalize the results of this study to the theories

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that inform this study and serves applicable to similar preschool settings serving diverse

learners in an urban context (Firestone, 1993; Maxwell, 2005; Yin, 2009).

Narrative Description

LeCompte (2000) offers, "the task of analysis, which make interpretation

possible, required researchers to first determine how to organize their data and use it to

construct an intact portrait of the case under study and second, to tell readers what that

portrait means" (p. 147). Because the unit of analysis represents the deliberate,

meaningful and thoughtful interactions between the early childhood educators and

children in the framework of developmentally appropriate practice, an in depth narrative

serves critical to explaining the phenomenon under study. As such, the narratives

presented in Chapter 4: Findings reflect the theoretical framework as presented in

individual case narratives constructed from interviews, observations, and reflections of

observed practices. Throughout the presentation of the findings, direct quotes from the

participant's are provided to give voice to each participant. In the aim of accurately

portraying each participant's role in demonstrating developmentally appropriate

practices, I begin with an account of each early childhood educator's role in guiding

children's learning through developmentally appropriate practices in the urban preschool

setting that demonstrates an affective disposition toward children, subject area

knowledge, and responsiveness to children's needs as presented in the overarching

research concern. Following the individual case narratives, I present a cross case analysis

representing the themes that emerged during analysis. An in-depth narrative serves as the

culminating step in the process of this research and summarizes the perceptions and

experiences of the participants to understand the context in which early childhood

educators develop nurturing relationships in the preschool setting relative to reciprocal interactions as expressed in educational theory (Auerback & Silverstein, 2003; McWilliam, 2000; Yin, 2009).

Chapter Summary

This case study relied on extensive classroom observations, interviews, and school-based documents to examine the nature of an early childhood educator's disposition as integral to children's learning in an urban preschool setting. In the aim of understanding an early childhood educator's capacity to nurture and affirm child differences, I considered the stated beliefs of early childhood educators and the relationship between the espoused beliefs of the early childhood educators and their classroom practices through the lens of developmentally appropriate practice.

This chapter provided a comprehensive description of the methodological framework employed in this study in the aim of documenting, describing, and analyzing key affective dispositions of early childhood educators in practice. In this chapter, multiple sources of qualitative evidence are presented to illustrate practices that support child growth and development in the preschool setting. Secondary data sources and school-based documents are included as a means of triangulating each data source in the aim of assuring data analysis procedures are reliable and valid. The context of the research site and the selection of participants illustrate the purposive sampling procedures employed in this study. The role of the researcher and a statement of ethical assurances are included in the design of this study. A description of the data analysis methods employed in this study are presented at the end of this chapter and serve to illustrate the

methods I employed to conceptualize the perceptions and experiences of the participants in this study.

In Chapter Four, Presentation of Findings, I present on the findings of this study as a descriptive case. Drawing on the theories that inform this study as aligned to the overarching research question, each theme is supported by multiple sources of evidence as gleaned through interview transcripts, field notes, observations, and school based documents. In the aim of honoring each participant's voice, I provide rich, thick description and direct quotations from each participant to illustrate the beliefs and practices of each participant.

Chapter 4

Findings

In this case study, I examined the role of early childhood educators to support young children's learning in the preschool setting as evidenced through developmentally appropriate practices that affirm differences among children from diverse backgrounds. Bounded by a publicly funded preschool setting in an urban geographical area, the study represents how early childhood educators enact child-centered practices as demonstrated with an affective disposition towards content knowledge, child development, and diversity in the context of the preschool setting. The unit of analysis represents the deliberate, meaningful and thoughtful interactions between the early childhood educators and children in the framework of developmentally appropriate practice. This study represents varied aspects of early childhood education including curriculum, pedagogy, and practices that correspond to an early childhood educator's beliefs, values, commitment, and professional ethos, which influence an early childhood educator's behavior towards students, families, colleagues, and the community served by the school.

In this chapter, I present on the findings reflecting each participant's practices and beliefs in fostering interpersonal relationships with diverse learners in the preschool classroom. Through interviews, classroom observations, and school-based documents, the participants express their views on instruction and their role as early childhood educators to impact children's learning. I present on the case in this chapter constructed from interviews, observations, and reflections of observed practices. Throughout the presentation of the findings, direct quotes from the participant's are provided to give voice to each of the participants. In the aim of portraying each participant's role in

demonstrating developmentally appropriate practices, I begin with an account of each early childhood educator's role in guiding children's learning through developmentally appropriate practices in the urban preschool setting that demonstrates an affective disposition toward children, subject area knowledge, and responsiveness to children's needs as presented in the overarching research concern. Summarizing their espoused beliefs in relationship to observed classroom practices, emerging themes are presented corresponding to the main foci of the research study. This chapter concludes with a presentation of the data as a cross classroom analysis representing the themes that emerged during analysis.

Katie and Christine's Preschool Classroom

Classroom Teacher Description

Katie is an experienced educator who began her teaching career in the Urban City School district. She grew up in New Jersey and studied elementary education during her college years. Katie holds a standard teaching certificate and is certified to teach preschool through third grade. Katie is a Caucasian female and the mother of two young children. She believes that her teaching reflects the needs of the children enrolled in her classroom. Currently in her eleventh year of teaching at the ABC Elementary School, Katie believes that she is responsible to "get the children ready for kindergarten." She refers to the children in her mixed age preschool classroom as "babies who need a little more, because they struggle in kindergarten." Katie expresses that she enjoys children and the affection and kind gestures she receives from the children in her classroom. Katie states, "Personality kids love is quiet energy".

Christine, an experienced paraprofessional, who has served in the Urban City School District for nearly twenty-six years who resides in the home neighborhood of many of the children, supports Katie in her efforts. Christine, an African American female, holds a CDA certificate and reports to enjoy working with children. As a resident, Christine expresses, "I know what goes on here, drugs, parents hanging around outside with their kids until midnight." She states, "We need to care for these children." Christine is set to retire in the upcoming academic year.

Affirming Differences Among Children and Families

There are 15 children enrolled in Katie's classroom. There are nine males and six females. Among the children in the classroom, three children speak Spanish as their primary or home language. While Katie reports, "we do a few things for English language learners," evidence of support for English learners appears limited to classroom signs and labeling on play materials. Katie expresses that relationships with parents are challenging due to the relocation of the school outside of the children's neighborhood. Katie offers, "relationships with parents are challenging due to the schools' location" and "in person conversations would serve to better address concerns over student progress." Although Katie believes relationships with families would better serve to address her concerns, Katie believes that the act of caring for children fosters meaningful relationships with children asserting her belief that in the course of caring for the preschool children they imitate and mimic her words, gestures, and behaviors in the classroom.

Classroom Context for Children's Development

Katie and Christine's classroom is located on the second floor of the school building. Because the classroom environment serves as to foster children's play, a variety of groupings, and classroom routines, Katie and Christine's classroom appears limiting to children's engagement in play. There are five separate learning areas that encompass language arts literacy, mathematics and manipulatives, block building, dramatic play, and the creative arts. Each learning area is relatively small in size. Posted in the classroom is a learning center chart that indicates children are limited to groups of four at each learning center. Some of the learning areas are filled with materials labeled in English, which are accompanied by pictures of materials. There are different genres of books in the language arts literacy area but few books in each of the identified interest areas to accompany learning themes. There is a large teacher's desk in the front corner of the classroom adjacent to the group meeting area at the front of the room. Technology in the classroom includes a computer located on the teacher's desk and two computers for children's use. The classroom has SMART board technology. There are three child-sized tables located throughout the classroom. There is no clearly defined area for child privacy and the classroom lacks soft furniture areas for sitting or reading. Classroom displays of two-dimensional student work are evident but many displays appear hidden behind classroom furniture most notably in the dramatic play and block building areas. A teacher display of vocabulary to describe emotions is displayed in the classroom. There are photographs of diverse groups of people displayed along the classroom's blackboard and children's photographs appear throughout the classroom.

Classroom Routines, Transitions, and Learning Experiences

Katie describes the beginning of the preschool day as a time period for kids to wake up and participate in arrival activities. Following, Katie and Christine meet with children at the large group circle area. Before lunch, the children have specialist area instruction, free choice play, clean up and a whole group read aloud. After lunchtime, Katie reports that gross motor play precedes an hour of naptime and an afternoon snack, which occurs in the classroom. In the afternoon, children are provided an hour of free choice play and whole group instruction at the circle area prior to dismissal. An adult instructional schedule is posted in the classroom along with a child friendly, pictorial instructional schedule that contains photographs of the preschool children engaged in a variety of learning experiences throughout the preschool day. The instructional schedule is written in accordance with the district's guidelines for preschool classrooms. The child friendly instructional schedule is displayed at a preschool child's eye level and reads from left to right in time sequence.

Figure 1. Child Friendly Pictorial Instructional Schedule

While Katie expresses discontent with the current curriculum to adequately address children's individual learning needs, she often leads and relies on whole group instruction to implement teacher directed learning experiences for young children. In terms of teacher roles in the classroom, Katie often leads whole group learning experiences while Christine manages children's behaviors. Because whole group instruction is limited to twenty minutes, Katie transitions children between learning activities with the support of Christine who appears harsh with children. During small group instruction, Katie and Christine separate the class into two separate groups for instruction that do not appear to be purposefully selected to accommodate children's learning needs. In most instances, the ideas and materials presented in small group learning experiences are identical and occur at child sized tables located in the classroom. Free choice play activities occur in a variety of play spaces including the block area, toys and manipulatives, dramatic play and the creative arts. Children self select available learning centers, which are limited to groups of four children. The children are not permitted to move freely among the learning centers and in several instances are reprimanded for either moving around the preschool classroom or hesitating to choose a free choice play area.

Intentionality in Planned Learning Experiences for Children

In the early learning environment, intentionality in planned learning experiences for children is evident in lessons which foster children's understanding of key concepts, skills, and knowledge across a variety of content areas and learning domains. The notion of intentionality in early childhood instruction implies that early childhood educators act

with professional knowledge to purposefully plan and implement teaching and learning experiences to foster a child's social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development as aligned to measurable learning outcomes for children (Epstein, 2007).

Technology in the Preschool Classroom

Although planned learning experiences in the preschool classroom setting should encourage support children's engagement in play activities across content areas including technology, as indicated on the instructional schedule, Katie and Christine's use of instructional time appears to lack intentionality in planning learning experiences and materials necessary to achieve developmental and learning goals for children. Similarly, throughout observations of classroom instructional practice, learning experiences are not implemented as intended on the instructional schedule. During a large group activity, Christine utilizes instructional time for an unscheduled activity. Children are assembled on the floor around the teacher's desk watching a video on the teacher's computer under the Christine's direction. Christine explains to me that Katie is running late to class.

Integrated Content Area Instruction

Considering the educator's role in demonstrating proficiency in subject matter knowledge and the responsibility of early childhood educators to communicate knowledge with enthusiasm, Katie's reliance on didactic instructional practices in language arts literacy and rote mathematics is evident in unplanned learning experiences for children. Observing a whole group learning activity, children are sitting in a straight line on the floor holding small index cards with printed numbers and letters. Katie prompts children to identify each letter and number (1–20) provided on each of the index cards. As the children say the letters and numbers, they move to the back of the line.

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Christine manages behaviors as children move through the line. She states, "sit still, stop talking or be moved to the table." While letter and print knowledge is requisite to learning to read, this learning experience appears to be chaotic and holds children to answering questions correctly in order to move ahead in the line. Similarly, although an understanding of numeracy and numerical operation is requisite to mathematical problem solving and reasoning, children are called upon to identify numbers correctly in order to move ahead in the line rather than engaging children in a meaningful and interesting activity that otherwise integrates mathematical knowledge across curricula including blocks and building, games, movement activities, and technology. Because this learning activity appears to be a missed opportunity for children to learn mathematics and letter knowledge, following this observation, I speak with Katie about the purpose of the activity. Katie replies, "The game is called train." She explains, "We are playing the game because our schedule is off because of an assembly" and "the children need to practice letters and numbers."

Visual Arts Experiences

An emphasis on the visual arts is regarded in developmentally appropriate practice and provides children with opportunities for self expression as evidenced in a child's choice of materials, children's descriptions of their artwork, and opportunities for children to collaborate with peers on various art projects in the preschool setting. Because the visual arts represent a developing child's attempts at writing in the preschool setting, visual arts activities should also stimulate verbal conversation among adults and children in the process of creating meaningful artwork (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). During small group instruction, during which children are separated into two groups at child

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sized tables, children's learning and development is limited by choose of materials, group

size, and opportunity to engage in a meaningful learning experience. In this lesson, the

children are sitting making greeting cards for the school nurse. Utilizing construction

paper and crayons under the direction of Katie and Christie, Katie instructs the children

to make a thank you card for the nurse. Katie states, "Nurse's take care of boo-boos" and

the children proceed to draw pictures onto the construction paper. A highly directed

activity, the children each create a card for the school nurse.

Figure 2. Class Sits in Two Teacher Led Instructional Groups

Supports for English Language Learners

As Katie arrives in the classroom, she quickly gathers the children at the circle area. The children are learning about wheels, a project-based study. She leads the children in singing, "Sheep in a Jeep." She then leads the children in singing, "The author writes the books" and proceeds to read aloud to the children before calling upon individual children to identify letters in posted vocabulary related to the project based study. Drawing attention to the English language learners in the classroom, several of the children appear uncomfortable in their attempts to identify the letters in the posted vocabulary and rather than attending to the language needs of the English language learners, both Katie and Christine show impatience with children who are learning English which may result in a message of indifference to diverse children in the preschool classroom.

<center>**Guiding Children's Development**</center>

Katie emphasizes her belief that children appreciate a quiet energy in their teacher's personality. Katie states, "Personality kids love is quiet energy".Observing her interactions with children, she largely assumes a passive role in children's play and learning. Aside from responding to children's immediate needs, Katie does not interact nor extend conversations with children during free choice play and small group instructional time periods. Similarly, observing Katie and Christine's instruction, many planned learning experiences are teacher directed which encompass teacher directed questioning that call for brief, or simple correct responses from children. In several instances, all children including English language learners are often prompted to respond to curriculum based questions correctly, resulting in a lack of support for children's

efforts to share ideas and to meaningfully engage with peers particularly among English Language learners.

Because early childhood educators are given charge to model and encourage children's development, providing guidance to support positive child behaviors is integral to development and learning in the preschool setting (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). In this regard, observing Katie and Christine's practices, children's social and emotional development is often hindered due to the guidance they receive from Katie and Christine. Whereas Christine is often harsh with children, Katie uses verbal encouragement to promote children's behaviors. As the preschool children transitioned from whole group instruction to free choice play, Katie stated, "catch a bubble" and "love your manners." As children moved about the classroom, Christine stated, "hurry up, can't keep changing around, you're not the boss, and there are two adults here." While Christine disciplines the children, Katie remains silent.

Barbara and Ilana's Preschool Classroom

Classroom Teacher Description

Barbara is a novice educator with limited experience working with public school children. This will be her second year working in the City of Urban as a preschool teacher. Prior to this placement, Barbara served as a private provider preschool teacher in an urban University setting. She has also served as a health and physical education teacher in an urban Charter School. Barbara holds a provisional certificate and is enrolled in an alternate route teacher certification program. Barbara is a Caucasian female in her mid twenty's. She does not have children but reports to come from a large Irish Catholic family. She describes being one of five children, as an asset to teaching and believes

teaching should be tailored to meet the needs of individual children. Barbara states that teaching and learning is a social process that fosters social and emotional development among children. Barbara also asserts that teaching is an emotional process and asserts that affection for children is relevant to teaching. Barbara believes that she is responsible to facilitate learning through play and hands on activities. She states, "I am a facilitator" "I play with children, hands on". In individual and group interviews, Barbara expresses that the curriculum makes the most sense for children. " "I enjoy small group instruction over large group instruction, in order to gather useful information." Barbara describes the use of project-based studies as relevant to children's development. Ilana an experienced paraprofessional, who possesses 11 years experience as a paraprofessional working within the Urban City School District, assists Barbara in her efforts as classroom teacher. Ilana is an African American female who resides in the City of Urban. She has held a variety of positions within the school. This is Ilana's second placement this school year. Ilana, although relatively reserved in interviews and focus group dialogue, aptly describes her beliefs about children's home lives in the classroom. She offers, "children see too much at home and parents have a responsibility for their kids." Observing Ilana's interactions with children, Ilana demonstrates great care and affect towards children at play, during routines and transitions.

Affirming Differences Among Children and Families

There are 12 children enrolled in Barbara's classroom. There are seven males and five female children. Two of the children enrolled in the classroom are bilingual and speak Spanish at home. There is one child identified with special needs child enrolled in the classroom who no longer receives services at the request of the child's family much

to Barbara's dismay. While Barbara recognizes the value in establishing relationships with families, she expresses her discontent in the resources available to engage children and their families particularly among children who demonstrate challenging behaviors. She asserts, "I need to know more about the kid's home environment, if you see parents interaction with children, you know more about the children." "Children's actions at play and in conversations with other children provide a glimpse of what happens at home." "I listen intently to the children as they interact with each other." Children will yell at other kids to go sit down, now." Barbara acknowledges the diversity among her students and the differences between the students and her own cultural background. She offers, "I am totally different from the children in my classroom." Among the children enrolled in Barbara's classroom, Barbara expresses that love, attention, care, and listening to children is requisite to children's development. Acknowledging the differences among the children in her classroom, Barbara expresses "Children lack negotiating skills, they are unable to share." She states that although the children are three to five years old chronologically, they appear much younger developmentally. Barbara states, "every day is like starting over "Giving children choice is important, and helping children negotiate through problems is a part of teaching."

Classroom Context for Children's Development

Barbara and Ilana's classroom is located on the second floor of the school building. The classroom appears bright due to partially drawn window coverings. There are five separate learning centers that encompass mathematics and manipulatives, language arts literacy, dramatic play, block building, and the visual arts. Materials are sparse and several learning areas do not contain enough materials to engage more than

one learner, although each learning area is spacious enough for children to play cooperatively in groups of two or more. There are empty shelves in each of the learning areas including the dramatic play area, which is void of materials for imaginary play. Very few materials and equipment for children are labeled in English and Spanish. There are relatively few books of various genres displayed in the language arts literacy area and fewer books displayed in each of the identified learning areas. Because early childhood educators are responsible to create a learning environment that encourages children's play with materials in either small groups or pairs of children, the lack of materials to sustain children's play appears to limit children. Similarly, due to the lack and type of materials, there are relatively provide little variety to accommodate children's developmental levels. Displayed along the classroom's blackboard are children's books to accompany the current project based study. The classroom does not contain a teacher's desk. Classroom technology is limited and does not include working computers for children or teacher use. However, the classroom has SMART board technology. There are two child-sized tables located throughout the classroom. There is a defined area for child privacy that contains several large pillows for children to sit quietly and read. Classroom displays are limited and there is very limited evidence of diversity in photographs displayed in the classroom.

Figure 3. Limited Materials and Child Related Displays

Classroom Routines, Transitions, and Learning Experiences

Barbara describes the beginning of the preschool day as a time to greet children and assist children with their belongings. Because several of the children are often late, Barbara is flexible in adjusting her whole group morning circle period to accommodate children. Specialist area instruction occurs during free choice play, which is designated for an hour in the morning. During free choice play, which Barbara refers to as interest areas, which are less defining than learning centers according to Barbara, children move about the classroom freely among five interest areas. Lunch and a period of gross motor play follow prior to naptime. In the afternoon, children are provided an hour of free choice play and whole group instruction to wrap up the learning day prior to dismissal. An adult instructional schedule is posted in the classroom. A child friendly, pictorial schedule is not posted in the preschool classroom. However, the children with the support of Barbara and Ilana appear to transition through classroom routines and learning experiences with relative ease and minimal behavior challenges.

Intentionality in Planned Learning Experiences for Children

In the early learning environment, intentionality in planned learning experiences for children is evident in lessons which foster children's understanding of key concepts, skills, and knowledge across a variety of content areas and learning domains. The notion of intentionality in early childhood instruction implies that early childhood educators act with professional knowledge to purposefully plan and implement teaching and learning experiences to foster a child's social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development as aligned to measurable learning outcomes for children (Epstein, 2007).

Supporting Children's Interests

Because Barbara is a novice preschool teacher assigned to the ABC Elementary School, in a newly created fourth classroom, district level support professionals frequently visit Barbara's classroom during instructional periods. In an observation of free choice play, Barbara is engaged in adult conversation that serves to illustrate an inappropriate use of instructional time. While the adults are engaged in conversation, children are engaged in free choice play. Among the learning interest areas, there are crickets in a container and the children are excited to talk about the crickets. While the children work independently and cooperatively with peers at the dramatic play, block building, and table games area, the adults engage in a conversation about the lack of materials in the classroom. The district master teacher assures the preschool classroom teacher that the materials will arrive soon. As the two adults are engaged in conversation, Ilana supervises the classroom and facilitates children's learning at several learning areas. Following, Ilana gathers children at the whole group meeting area and sings along with the children as she reads a book about transportation. When it is time for specialist area

instruction, Ilana lines the children up at the classroom door to travel to the science specialist's classroom located down the hall. Considering the educator's role in demonstrating proficiency in subject matter knowledge, Ilana is very capable to lead and to support children's learning across content areas in a variety of groupings.

Integrated Content Area Instruction

Observing Barbara's introduction to *Exercise,* a project based study, Barbara demonstrates an integration of content area knowledge that also demonstrates an awareness of children's interests. She states, "we move in lots of different ways" and prompts the children to exercise as music plays on a CD. As the children exercise, the preschool teacher asks, "What is exercise?" Afterwards, Barbara creates a list of vocabulary words that describe exercise in age appropriate vocabulary that stimulates children's interests in music, movement, and language arts literacy demonstrating an awareness of children's developmental abilities and intentionality in lesson planning.

<center>**Guiding Children's Development**</center>

Because warm, caring, and responsive relationships with children in the preschool setting supports children's learning, opportunities for children to play and work in small group settings and among their peers consistent with principles of developmentally appropriate practice, Barbara and Ilana demonstrate an appropriate use of instructional time to engage children in conversations about their experiences, projects, and classroom activities at play (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). In this observation, the children are learning about buildings, a project based study. As the children play in free choice areas, both Barbara and Ilana remain in the classroom, even though it is Barbara's preparation period. Children are observed dancing at the SMART board, playing a game with

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independence as Ilana facilitates a writing activity in the writing center. The children are observed writing onto whiteboards. In the block area, children are building using transportation vehicles. On the shelf above the block cabinet, there are several books on transportation. During this observation, a child approaches me and asks for help in building a helicopter out of two wooden blocks, while the child imitates the sound of a helicopter, he shows me how a helicopter propeller looks. In a second free choice play area; two children play a dog bone game at a nearby child-sized table. However, during this observation, the principal enters the room and speaks to a child about the child's behavior. He loudly reprimands the child for not listening to adults.

In interviews, Barbara expresses, "I love kids." Barbara's espoused beliefs about children are evidenced in her interactions with children in the preschool classroom. Barbara displays affection for children and spends considerable time engaging individual children and groups of children in conversations about learning experiences, projects, and play in the classroom. Children are permitted to moved freely about the classroom, talk openly, and express their feelings. Barbara and Ilana demonstrate listening to children at play and their preschool classroom is lively and relatively noisy.

Barbara and Ilana possess sensitivity to children's lived experiences in the context of home, school, and the community. After school is dismissed for the day, Barbara, Ilana, and I enter the classroom for a follow up interview. As I began interviewing Barbara, the office secretary contacted the classroom and reported that a child was left at school. Without hesitating, Ilana stated, "I know right where the child lives; I will drive by the house and knock on the door." Upon returning to the school, Ilana reported, "The parent was asleep".

Lena's Preschool Classroom

Classroom Teacher Description

Lena is an experienced early childhood educator who has served in a variety of settings across the Urban City School District for 15 years. Lena holds a standard teaching certificate and has earned a Masters of Arts in Education. Lena is an African American female and a mother. A former resident of Camden, Lena is familiar with many of the families who reside within the neighborhood and believes this serves essential in gaining support from parents particularly in resolving classroom management issues. Lena serves as the team leader for the preschool teachers at the ABC Elementary School and has recently been selected to pilot a supplemental language arts literacy program for preschool age children. "Books are organized for the children to choose from." "My books are leveled and the kids can pick from their color." Lena believes that her teaching meets the individual needs and abilities of the children in her classroom. She states, "giving children choice is important, and helping children negotiate through problems is a part of teaching." "As children interact with toys and materials in the classroom, I am taking notes and making observations." Lena expresses that parents are welcome in the classroom and believes that all parents should have opportunities to participate in their children's learning experiences at school. She regularly communicates with parents in person, by telephone, and through email exchanges. Lena does not believe school and community resources should be a challenge for teachers and expresses her beliefs that too often negative attitudes among educators are cause for change in the schools. Lena reports that she often considers her own children while interacting with the preschoolers assigned to her classroom. She expresses, "It's not my job to skill and drill children in

preparation for kindergarten; preschool is for socialization and teaching children to love school. I care about their health, welfare, and immediate needs." Karen an experienced paraprofessional, who possesses 22 years experience as a paraprofessional working within the Urban City School District, assists Lena in her efforts as classroom teacher. Karen's experiences are not reflected in the findings due to attrition.

Affirming Differences Among Children and Families

There are 15 children enrolled in Lena's preschool classroom. Seven are males and eight are female children. Among the students, one of the children enrolled in the classroom speaks Spanish at home but chooses not to communicate verbally in English or Spanish in the classroom. Observing Lena's practice, she consistently encourages the child's efforts to communicate in the classroom and makes it a priority to involve the child in classroom learning experiences. Although Lena is not fluent in a second language, she attempts to communicate with the child using basic vocabulary and key phrases in the child's home language. A second child enrolled in the classroom is classified with special needs and receives in district support services in the preschool classroom.

Classroom Context for Children's Development

Lena's classroom is located on the first floor of the school building at the entrance to the school building. There is natural lighting in the classroom although several of the windows are decorated with teacher made displays to reflect current and prior project based studies. There are six separate learning centers that encompass language arts literacy, block building, dramatic play, and the visual arts. There is an area for science that includes natural materials and a partially covered discovery table for sand and water

activities. Relatively small in size, the classroom is filled with an abundance of materials

and equipment for children. Because early childhood educators are responsible to create a

learning environment that reflects children's interests, the arrangement of space,

materials, equipment and classroom displays reflect a variety of content specific learning

centers across mathematics, creative arts, technology and music and movement. In the

dramatic play area, there are materials for imaginary play including a small kitchen with

a table and chairs and costumes for dress up. Many of the materials are teacher made and

some of the materials appear to have been donated to the classroom. Posted in the

classroom is a learning area chart that indicates the number of children allowed at each

learning center. However, Lena does not reinforce the number of children permitted at

each learning center and children are permitted to move around the classroom freely.

Located on the front bookcase is a small, clear acrylic frame with relevant information

for parents. Most materials are labeled in English and Spanish, which are accompanied

by pictures of materials. There are many different genres of books in the language arts

literacy area and a few books in each of the identified learning area including multi-

cultural literature. Technology in the classroom includes two computers for children's

use. The classroom has SMART board technology. The classroom does not contain a

teacher's desk. However, there is an adult sized chair in the middle of the room where the

paraprofessional often sits reviewing a personal hand held computer. There are two child-

sized tables located throughout the classroom and there is a child sized sink used for art

and messy play. There is a clearly defined area for child privacy and the classroom

contains soft furniture for sitting and reading. Classroom displays of two and three

dimensional student work are evident. However, there is limited evidence of diversity in

photographs or pictures displayed in the classroom aside from photographs of children, which appear throughout the classroom on attendance charts and a posted instructional schedule requisite to reflecting children's backgrounds which promotes a sense of belonging in the preschool classroom.
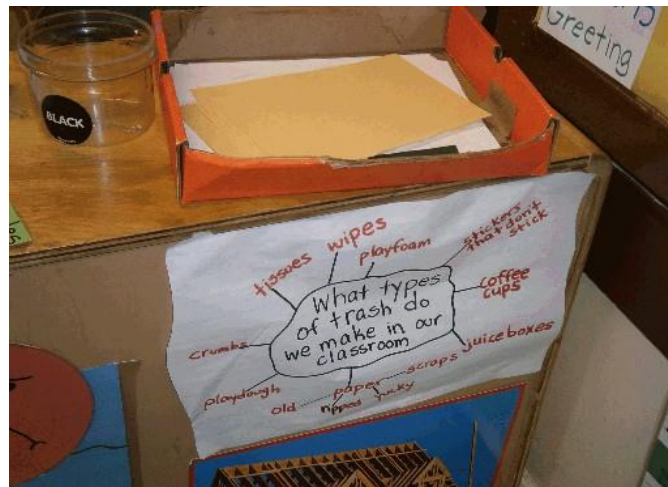
Figure 4. Teacher Made Graphic Organizers and Charts Compliment Studies

Classroom Routines, Transitions, and Learning Experiences

As Lena describes the instructional day, she relates classroom routines and procedures that demonstrate an awareness of children's needs. She is quick to explain that the children eat breakfast before class and that upon arrival to the preschool classroom, she greets and assists each child with their belongings. Although Lena takes attendance in a class roll book, "the kids write their names" [sign in] prior to morning circle time. Lena reports that she reads aloud to children as a part of circle time and begins free choice play. Similar to the other preschool classrooms, specialist area instruction occurs during free choice play. Lena reports that following specials, she reads aloud to children and continues free choice play prior to lunchtime. After lunch, Lena

reports that gross motor play occurs and the children rest for about an hour. Healthy snacks are provided to children in the classroom following naptime. Free choice play along with small group instruction occurs prior to a daily recall of classroom events along with a read aloud in a whole group setting prior to dismissal. Lena reports that she is required to read aloud to children at least three times per day from a variety of literary genres.

Intentionality in Planned Learning Experiences for Children

In the early learning environment, intentionality in planned learning experiences for children is evident in lessons which foster children's understanding of key concepts, skills, and knowledge across a variety of content areas and learning domains. The notion of intentionality in early childhood instruction implies that early childhood educators act with professional knowledge to purposefully plan and implement teaching and learning experiences to foster a child's social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development as aligned to measurable learning outcomes for children (Epstein, 2007).

Supporting Children's Interests

In an observation of morning circle, which precedes free choice, play, Lena demonstrates affection for children. While greeting each child by name, Lena gives each child a hug as the children recite thematic vocabulary to accommodate the project-based study. Upon dismissing the children to learning centers, Lena quickly facilitates learning at the block area, creative arts, and dramatic play. While she has prepared a painting activity for the children in the art area, she also provides various art materials for children choosing to work on their own. While interacting with children at a variety of learning centers, Lena demonstrates an awareness of the entire preschool classroom. While a child

in the dramatic play area is attempting to dress herself in a play clothing and boots, Lena watches from a distance. She intervenes only when the child asks for help. During this observation, a second child appears disengaged in any of the learning experiences. Lena walks over to the child and sits with the child to complete an art activity.

Promoting children's engagement with peers, this observation serves as an illustration of classroom practice that promotes social development among children. As Lena introduces learning areas to the class she explains, "I have set up an area for two buddies to work on a project together." The children are excited to play together in the special area. In spite of the teacher's intention to set up the activity for two children, several children approach the learning area and begin to work on the art project. Following this observation, I inquire about the activity. Lena stated to me, "I set up activities for two children in order to promote friendship."

Figure 5. Educator Intently Listens and Records Child's Responses

Content Area Instruction: Language Arts Literacy

Creating regular opportunities for children to actively listen and respond to children's literature from a variety of genres, Lena demonstrates the use of literacy to support children's communication and language. In this observation of Lena's whole group instruction, children are learning about trash and garbage, a project based study. Displayed on chart paper are vocabulary words related to the study, which Lena reads aloud to the preschoolers. Following, Lena reads, *Recycle That!* while prompting children to answer open-ended questions about the informational text. The children remain engaged in the story and throughout the lesson. Following, Lena leads the children in singing a about recycling which is displayed in words and pictures on chart paper posted on her easel. At the close of the lesson, Lena introduces each learning center areas, addressing each child individually. She asks, "Where are you going to go and what do you want to do?" Giving each child the opportunity to choose a learning center, Lena is providing children with choice requisite to children's development. Observing her practice, which is consistent with her espoused beliefs, Lena enables children to make decisions about their own learning promoting children's independence and critical thinking skills, Lena enables children to make decisions about their learning.

Guiding Children's Development

Observing Lena's preschool classroom, children freely move around the preschool classroom while Lena provides assistance and support to each child utilizing a variety of instructional strategies designed to foster children's development. "It's important to recognize children, I call each child by name when I speak with them and I assist children in making the most out of learning areas." She frequently engages children

in planning their learning experiences and records children's thoughts onto a clipboard that she carries with her in the preschool classroom. Lena offers, "I observe children and record observations of children's learning using the curriculum in order to identify goals for children." Affectionate towards children, Lena demonstrates patience with children and models a calm and patient demeanor.

<center>**Sarah and Yulenia's Preschool Classroom**</center>

Classroom Teacher Description

Sarah is a relatively novice preschool teacher with nearly four years experience working with the City of Urban. Sarah is a Caucasian female in her mid twenty's. Prior to her current placement, Sarah served as a private provider preschool teacher within the City of Urban. She possesses a standard preschool teaching certificate and is dually certified to teach children with special needs. In an individual interview, Sarah states, "teachers make a difference" and "urban education is more challenging than suburban education." Sarah believes that teaching should be tailored to meet the individual needs of children in her classroom. Sarah states, " teaching is a process of giving children experiences, materials, and activities" and "I want them to be ready for kindergarten." She reports enjoying children smile as they succeed in the classroom and states, "my role is to make children happy and to be helpful to children." Sarah states that she places great emphasis on meeting the needs of each dual language learner enrolled in her classroom, which is evidenced in observations of her practice. Sarah is supported in her efforts by Yulenia, an experienced early childhood paraprofessional, who possesses a bachelor's degree in industrial engineering from a University in her native Puerto Rico. Yulenia is bilingual and communicates in both English and Spanish in order to teach, assess, and

care for children in the classroom. She is eager to earn a teaching degree in the United States. Observing Yulenia's interactions with young children, she is kind, soft spoken, and attentive to children's needs.

Affirming Differences Among Children and Families

Among the 15 children enrolled in Sarah's preschool classroom, five children are English language learners who speak Spanish as their home or primary language. Eleven children are males and four are females. Two of the children have an individualized educational plan and receive integrated speech therapies in the preschool classroom. While Sarah reports difficulty relating to the parents of the preschoolers in her classroom, she understands the challenges facing parents in the community. She states, "It's difficult to relate to parents but important to provide a warm welcome to each parent in order to make parent's comfortable." Sarah reports that is difficult to engage children's families because she is unable to contact parents by email and telephone. "I send letters home with children and parents don't even respond." Sarah believes the children's home environment interferes with children's learning. She believes the school is a positive place and through modeling behaviors for children, she can make a difference. Sarah states, "Children come ready to learn, but Monday is the best day of the week for teaching."

Classroom Context for Children's Development

Sarah and Yulenia's classroom is located on the first floor of the school building at the entrance to the school building. The classroom appears relatively small in size due to the numerous materials and equipment for children in the classroom. However, the classroom appears well organized for children's use. There is natural lighting in the

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classroom although several of the windows are decorated with teacher made displays to reflect current and prior project based studies. For example, during one of the project base studies on Fish, the windows are covered in light blue tissue paper to reflect the ocean water.

There are five separate learning centers that encompass mathematics and manipulatives, dramatic play, block building, language arts literacy, and the visual arts. Each learning area is relatively small in size but appears to accommodate several children comfortably. The large group meeting area is located near the language arts literacy area adjacent to the classroom's technology including two classroom computers for child and teacher use. The classroom does not contain a teacher's desk. The classroom has SMART board technology. Many of the learning areas are filled with materials and equipment for children labeled in English and Spanish, which are accompanied by pictures of materials. There are two child-sized tables located throughout the classroom. There is a small, defined area for child privacy with soft furnishings to allow children to sit and read.

Environmental print is evident throughout the classroom and includes vocabulary to describe everyday objects, themes, and school words in both English and Spanish. There are many teacher made graphic organizers, tables, and charts displayed in the classroom to accompany current and prior project based studies. Many of the classroom displays are relatively current to the project based studies the children are studying. There is some evidence of diversity in photographs and pictures displayed in the classroom. There are many photographs of children engaged in various project based studies that appear throughout the classroom. Children's photographs also appear on attendance charts and a pictorial instructional schedule for children.

Figure 6. Two and Three-Dimensional Individualized Artwork

Classroom Routines, Transitions, and Learning Experiences

In describing her instructional day, Sarah explains the various learning experiences she provides for children. Similar to the other early childhood educators, the preschool day begins with greeting and assisting children at tabletop play activities followed by a large group meeting time in which she reads with children. Sarah explains that throughout the day she reads aloud with children a minimum of three times at large and small group instruction. Sarah reports that she provides small group instruction during free choice play periods. Offering children opportunities for buddy play, Sarah explains that she regularly sets up learning activities for pairs of children. She reports that she is flexible with instructional time periods based on the needs of her children. Sarah states, I give the learner experience with materials and activities".

Intentionality in Planned Learning Experiences for Children

In the early learning environment, intentionality in planned learning experiences for children is evident in lessons which foster children's understanding of key concepts, skills, and knowledge across a variety of content areas and learning domains. The notion of intentionality in early childhood instruction implies that early childhood educators act with professional knowledge to purposefully plan and implement teaching and learning experiences to foster a child's social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development as aligned to measurable learning outcomes for children (Epstein, 2007).

An Inclusive Classroom for Children with Special Needs

Including children with special needs in regular opportunities for play and exploration in the preschool classroom, Sarah implements a small group learning experience that fosters children's sense of confidence in mastering requisite concepts, skills, and knowledge in listening, speaking, and language development. In this observation, Sarah engages three children in a telephone game during the free choice play period. Sarah prompts each child to pick up a picture card and describe the picture. She prompts each child to recite the word represented on the card into a plastic toy telephone in order for children to hear the word. Each child took turns picking up cards and reciting the words displayed. The picture cards contain photographs and vocabulary including the names of familiar animals. While the children take turns, Sarah provides positive reinforcement to each child. A child recites aloud, "CAT" and Sarah positively responds to the child. During this observation, Sarah sat and talked with each child including children who also wish to play the game. As children walked over and sat down, Sarah engaged the children in playing the game. Afterwards, I inquired about the game in a

follow up interview with Sarah. She explained, "the game was given to me by the speech therapist to use with children identified with speech delays" and that "Two of the children receive speech integrated therapies."

Mathematics, Social Studies, and Movement: Integrating Content Areas

Integrating multiple areas and learning domains, Sarah and Yulenia provide children with learning experiences that foster children's learning across content areas. In this observation of whole group instruction, Sarah states, "Good Morning Students, today I have a surprise for you, we will do calendar first and then will have a surprise." Sarah reprimands the students as several are talking and touching each other as they sit on the carpeted area. She states, "we need to be quiet and listen, if you don't listen, we will practice sitting silently." A calendar is displayed on the SMART board and the preschool teacher recites, "May, say May" (Figure 5). She clicks on the date as announces a child's birthday. "Let's count our numbers on our bodies." Sarah prompts children to choose a body part and the children clap out the day of the month on their knees. During the lesson, Sarah stops frequently to redirect a child's behavior. She continues with the lesson and states, "Today is an orange oval day; the weather is sunny."
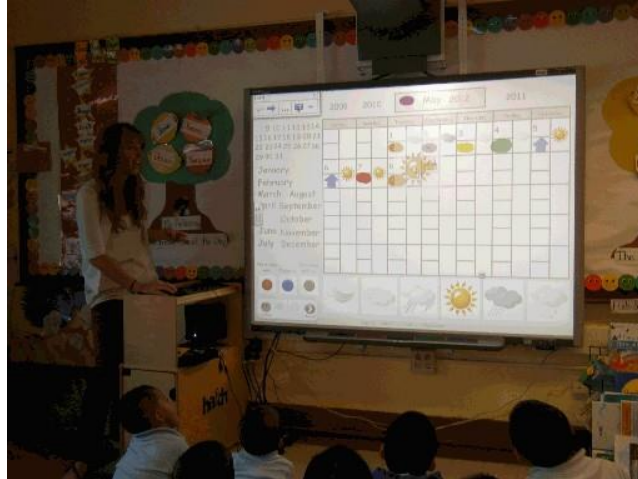
Figure 7. Technology Supports Mathematical Reasoning

The children are learning about water, a project based study. Sarah states, "Someone wrote us a letter, do you want me to open the letter?" She reads the letter as displayed on the screen and prompts children to use their body to illustrate punctuation and sentence structure. As she reads aloud, the children clap out punctuation marks. As she comes to the end of each line, she states "I have run out of space, let's swoop back to the left. As Sarah teaches the lesson, Yulenia stands nearby a behavior chart posted on the wall and moves children's names from good, very good, and super to reinforce positive behaviors. In the letter, she writes, "where can we find fish?" and states, "question marks, ask a question." Sarah makes an error in writing and reminds children, "it's ok to make mistakes." She encourages the students to always go back and re-read what they have written. Responding to a child's behavior, she redirects the child in an elevated voice and immediately lowers her voice and repeats, "Where can we find fish?" "Fish live in different types of water such as freshwater and saltwater" "Let's look for

fish and where they live." At the close of the lesson, Yulenia directed the children to learning areas.

Supports for English Language Learners

Assessing English language learners in the preschool setting, this observation serves as an illustration of an appropriate assessment task for an English language learner. In this observation, Sarah prompts a child to demonstrate their knowledge of a content specific skill in the child's home language. Sarah is working with a small group of children on the floor rolling dice. As the children roll the dice, they recite each number aloud. Sarah asks the child, "Can you identify the numbers without counting? "Do you want to count in English or Spanish?" As the child recites each number, the educator records each response onto an assessment checklist.

Guiding Children's Development

Observing Sarah and Yulenia's preschool classroom, children freely move around during learning centers while both Sarah and Yulenia provide assistance and support to children utilizing a variety of instructional strategies designed to foster children's development. Sarah frequently assesses children during the free choice play period while Yulenia provides support to children at various learning centers. Affectionate towards children, Yulenia demonstrates patience with children and models a calm and patient demeanor in providing guidance to children with challenging behaviors. At times, Sarah appears impatient with children's misbehaviors particularly during whole group instruction and relies on Yulenia to assist children with challenging behaviors.

Creating opportunities for children to share and work together on projects in the preschool classroom, Yulenia provides a positive and emotionally supportive context for

English language learners to engage in a project during small group instruction. In this observation of free choice play, a small group of mostly Spanish speaking children are working together at the art center. Communicating in both English and Spanish, Yulenia provides children with verbal directions in order to assemble a house out of pre cut construction paper mathematical shapes. With warmth, Yulenia spoke to each child in a soft tone prompting children, "this is your house, do you like your house?" The children sat quietly working together to complete the project, speaking with one another in Spanish and English. As a follow up to this observation, I interviewed Yulenia about the project and her experiences working with children. She revealed, "I share the same language with these children but we are not the same, we come from different places." Yulenia reported that the Spanish-speaking children enrolled in the classroom were from various countries including Guatemala, Mexico, Puerto Rico, and The Dominican Republic.

<div align="center">**Cross Classroom Analysis**</div>

In presenting the findings, which represent the stated beliefs and observed practices of the early childhood educators to support young learners in an urban preschool setting populated by diverse learners, the early childhood educators reveal different assumptions, expectations, and beliefs about children and their families through the lens of developmentally appropriate practice. I address these similarities and differences among the early childhood educators in the following manner: (1) Acknowledging Differences Among Children and Families, (2) Classroom Context for Children's Development, (3) Intentionality in Planned Learning Experiences, and (4) Guiding Children's Development.

Affirming Differences Among Children and Families

Young children experience rapid growth and development in the preschool years, which requires that early childhood educators ensure preschool teaching and learning promotes the development and learning of each individual child. In the preschool setting, development differences among children vary greatly due a variety of factors including prior school experiences, home environments, language, and socioeconomic status. Because children enter preschool with varying prior experiences, early childhood educators are given charge to ensure children develop and learn, while working collaboratively with diverse parents and families to enhance the learning experiences of all children as evidenced through positive and caring relationships with parents, families, and children (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Reflecting their beliefs about child differences, school readiness, and the nature of interpersonal relationships with children and families, the early childhood educators reveal more similarities than differences in acknowledging differences among children and families in the preschool setting which serves relevant to understanding the early childhood educator's disposition to positively impact children's learning.

Although the number of children enrolled in each preschool classroom minimally varies among the four preschool classrooms, the early childhood educators serve a diverse group of preschool age children between three to five years of age who are primarily African American and of Hispanic origin. The preschoolers possess varying prior school experiences, knowledge, and home language background. Among the children of Hispanic origin, many are Spanish dominant learners, for whom English is a

second language. Additionally, several children identified by the early childhood educators present with special needs.

In her role as teacher, Katie asserts that she is responsible to prepare children for kindergarten. Referring to the preschool children in her classroom as babies, Katie appears resolute in her belief that children in the preschool setting, struggle in the later school grades while espousing her belief that her instructional methods reflect the needs of children in her preschool classroom. However, there is limited evidence to suggest that Katie acknowledges and supports children's differences as evidenced in classroom instructional practices especially among the three English language learners enrolled in the preschool classroom. Considering her views on school readiness and a reliance on whole group, didactic instructional practices, Katie appears reluctant to implement developmentally appropriate practices. For Christine, a resident of the children's home neighborhood, teachers have a responsibility to care for children. However, observations of Christine's interactions with children are inconsistent and mostly harsh which hinder children's social and emotional development.

In contrast to Katie, Barbara considers that a child's social and emotional development is requisite to teaching and learning in the preschool classroom. Barbara espouses the value of children's play and choice in a variety of instructional groupings as integral to child development. Considering her views on child development, Barbara affirms children's differences integral to principles of developmentally appropriate practice. With an emphasis on small group instruction and supports for children's learning at a variety of interest areas, supports for differences among children including

children with special needs, are evident in Barbara and Ilana's practice. Barbara appears to embrace principles of developmentally appropriate practice.

Similar to Barbara, Lena espouses the value in providing children with a choice of materials, books and equipment to support children's learning. Lena believes that children's learning in the preschool setting provides children with opportunities for socialization with peers and under the direction of adults in order to foster a child's love of learning. She affirms the notion that didactic instruction is an inappropriate practice in the preschool classroom and espouses the value in establish learning goals for individual children garnered through child observations. Among the children enrolled in Lena's classroom, two are identified with special needs and receive support services in the preschool classroom. And, although Lena is not bilingual she attempts to communicate in both English and Spanish to a child identified as an English language learner. Considering her beliefs, Lena affirms child differences and values children's decision making which are integral to principles of developmentally appropriate practice.

For Sarah, preschool teaching and learning is a process of providing children with a variety of experiences, choice of materials, and individualized activities to support the children's learning. However, Sarah considers preschool teaching and learning as requisite to preparing children for kindergarten. Similar to Katie, Sarah is asserting her beliefs about school readiness. Considering her beliefs that teachers make a difference, Sarah expresses the challenges in teaching in an urban setting and believes that there are differences in urban and suburban educational settings relevant to child knowledge, children's behaviors, and classroom management issues.

Among the five English language learners enrolled in Sarah 's preschool classroom, supports for English language learners are evident in instructional practice. Under the direction of Yulenia, small group instruction, interest areas and child assessments are presented in English and Spanish. Additionally, two children have an individualized educational plan and received integrated speech therapies in the preschool classroom. Sarah appears willing to embrace principles of developmentally appropriate practice.

On the significance of nurturing children as expressed with care, concern, and sensitivity to a child's lived experience, the early childhood educators express similar views on nurturing children that are somewhat dissimilar in their classroom practices. For Katie, kind gestures and children's affection is highly valued. She espouses that caring for children in the preschool setting fosters meaningful relationships with children. However, observing Katie's classroom, interpersonal interactions are infrequent and limited to highly structured classroom learning experiences. Similar to Katie, Christine, a resident of the children's home neighborhood, espouses the need to care for the children in the preschool setting. However, in most instances, Katie and Christine limit children's conversation in the classroom during a variety of classroom groupings and the classroom climate is sullen. Similarly, Barbara also espouses that love, attention, and listening to children are requisite to children's development. In Barbara's classroom, children's conversations are valued and the classroom is lively and engaging. Children's ideas are expanded upon in a variety of groupings while Barbara and Ilana warmly interact with children as evidenced with words and physical gestures of affection.

In the case of Lena, caring for children implies caring for their health, welfare, and immediate needs in the preschool setting. Lena aptly expresses her concern for children and reveals a personal attachment to the preschoolers in her classroom. With warmth, Lena frequently interacts with children in a variety of groupings while carefully listening to children and recording her observations. Children's conversations are valued and the classroom is lively and engaging. Lena ensures each child is engaged in classroom activities as evidenced in learning experiences for small groups of children. Children's ideas are expanded upon and celebrated with physical gestures of affection.

For Sarah, being helpful to children and ensuring children's happiness and success are integral to her role as an early childhood educator. In contrast to her colleagues, Sarah does not espouse beliefs about warm interactions and physical gestures of affection. Rather, Sarah advocates for teacher modeling to foster children's appreciation for the school setting while Yulenia demonstrates warmth, concern, and attentiveness to children's needs in her mannerism and interactions with children. And, although the preschool classroom is lively and engaging to children, there is a high degree of structure and emphasis on following classroom rules and procedures.

Regarding families, each of the early childhood educators advocate for establishing relationships with families as requisite to teaching young children in the preschool setting. However, the early childhood educators reveal different assumptions about families while expressing their views on working with families in the preschool setting. In the case of Katie, relationships with parents present numerous challenges. Citing concerns over the relocation of the school outside of the children's home neighborhood, Katie believes that personal conversations with parents would serve to

address her concerns over student progress. Barbara acknowledges the value in establishing relationships with families to support children's learning. Citing concerns over a lack of resources to engage children and their families, particularly among children with challenging behaviors, Barbara believes that an opportunity to observe parent child interactions would help her to understand children's behaviors in the classroom. Similar to Barbara, Ilana shares her beliefs about children's home lives in the preschool classroom in relationship to child behaviors.

For Sarah, relationships with parents are difficult. While Sarah reports difficulties relating to parents, she understands the numerous challenges facing parents in the community. Similar to Barbara, Sarah expresses the difficulties in engaging families because she is unable to contact parents by email and telephone. However, Sarah believes it is essential to provide parents with a warm welcoming environment in an effort to make parents comfortable in the preschool setting. Sarah espouses her beliefs that children's home environment interferes with children's learning.

In contrast to her colleagues, Lena is familiar with many of the children's families. She believes this serves essential in gaining familial support particularly in resolving classroom management issues. Similar to Sarah, Lena advocates that parents are welcome in the classroom and asserts her belief that all parent have opportunities to participate in their children's learning experiences. Lena maintains regular communications with parents. She does not believe school and community resources should be a challenge for teachers.

Acknowledging differences among children and families in relation to their own cultural identities, the early childhood educators articulate dissimilar beliefs about

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diversity in their roles as early childhood educators. In the case of Katie, diversity in the context of her own identity is described as children imitating and mimicking her words, gestures and behaviors. She believes the children appreciate her quiet personality in the preschool classroom. While Sarah acknowledges she is different from the children and families in her preschool classroom, diversity is expressed in the context of relationships with families. Sarah reports to have difficulty relating to parents and families while acknowledging the need to warmly welcome parents in the preschool classroom. For Yulenia, children's similarities and differences are revealed through language. While Yulenia acknowledges a shared language, she asserts that differences exist between her and the children due to their countries of origin.

In contrast to her colleagues, Barbara acknowledges diversity in the context of her own identity. She espouses her beliefs about her own family heritage in the context of teaching. For Barbara, one of five children in a large Irish Catholic family has proven to be an asset in teaching young children. Citing concerns over children's conversations and actions at play including children's unwillingness to share toys and materials, Barbara acknowledges the differences between the preschoolers enrolled in her class in relationship to her own experiences sharing with her siblings as a child. Similar to Barbara, Lena, an African American female, acknowledges diversity is in the context of her own identity as an African American female and mother.

In sum, four of the seven educators consider differences among children and families as integral to their roles in teaching young children in the urban preschool setting. However, the early childhood educators are revealing differing beliefs on the value of affirming differences among children and families along the dimensions of

gender, ethnicity, race, language, socio economic background and lived experience as evidenced in their beliefs about curriculum and instruction, supports for English language learners, and their roles in nurturing children's development in the preschool classroom.

Regarding the ways in which the early childhood educators view their roles in nurturing children's strengths, abilities, and interests to foster child growth and development, the educators differ in their beliefs. The most salient difference among the educators is the notion of readiness and the implication of familial diversity to adversely impact children's learning. Among the early childhood educators, Katie and Sarah espouse the notion of school readiness as a paramount concern of educators whereas Barbara and Lena espouse the value in supporting children's social and emotional development as prerequisite to later school learning which is evident in instructional practices and sensitivity to children.

Considering that development differences among children vary greatly due a variety of factors including prior school experience, home environment, familial differences including language, and socioeconomic status, early childhood educators are given charge to develop reciprocal relationships with diverse children, parents, and families, to enhance child growth and development and to ensure children's experiences outside of the home environment are met particularly because the preschool setting tends to be children's first experience outside of the home environment. Citing numerous concerns about parents and families, three of the seven educators appear to hold deficit views on families. However, Sarah acknowledges difficulties in her relations with families she reports to understand the numerous challenges parents in the community face espousing the challenges in teaching in an urban setting in contrast to suburban settings.

Among the educators, Lena's beliefs are markedly different from her colleagues who report to have difficulties with families. In the case of Lena, she is familiar with many of the families in the preschool setting and maintains regular communications with the parents and families of the children enrolled in her classroom. Regarding differences among the preschoolers and their families in relation to their own identities, the educators reveal their beliefs about diversity in their roles as educators. Among the early childhood educators, three of the seven educators including Barbara, Lena, and Yulenia acknowledge diversity in the context of their identities in contrast to Sarah and Katie who acknowledge that differences exist.

In sum, four of the seven educators acknowledge the significance of nurturing children as expressed with care, concern, and sensitivity towards children in the aim of fostering child growth and development. Regarding the ways in which the educators interact with children, the educators differ in their expressions of care, concern, and affection for children as evidenced in observed practices. Lena, Barbara, Ilana, and Yulenia demonstrate great concern, care, and attentiveness to children as evidenced in warm, nurturing interactions and physical gestures of affection. While Sarah, espouses that helping children and ensuring children are happy and successful in the preschool classroom are integral to demonstrating care, concern, and sensitivity to children, Sarah does not espouse beliefs about warm interaction and physical gestures. Consistent with her beliefs, Sarah maintains a higher degree of structure and emphasis on classroom rules and procedures to ensure positive child behaviors. However, among the educators, Katie and Christine's interactions are markedly different from their colleges and although they

each espouse the value of caring for children, interpersonal interactions are infrequent, harsh and controlling, and void of sensitivity towards children.

Creating a Classroom Context for Children's Development

In developmentally appropriate practice, the classroom serves to provide a physically stimulating and engaging format for all children to learn and develop in the preschool setting. Because children develop at varying rates, the early childhood educator is given charge to cultivate a classroom context for children's development across a variety of content areas and learning domains which accommodates children's engagement in a variety of groupings including self selected learning areas. In creating a classroom context for children's development, early childhood educators create a variety of learning experiences and furnish these areas with materials, resources, and equipment to children to promote learning. Because the early childhood educator chooses materials and activities to support children's varying interests and abilities, child development knowledge is requisite to fostering children's learning. Interacting with children in a variety of groupings, early childhood educators are employing teaching strategies to promote child development and learning which is consistent with developmentally appropriate practices (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

Considering the early childhood beliefs about how young children learn, the early childhood educators reveal more similarities than differences in the arrangement of classroom space to support children's learning as evidenced in materials to accommodate a variety of groupings including free choice play across content specific areas and learning domains. However, the early childhood educators reveal more differences than similarities in the use of classroom space to accommodate children's learning which

serves relevant to understanding the early childhood educator's disposition to implement developmentally appropriate practices in the preschool setting.

In creating a classroom context for children's development, the early childhood educators maintain a classroom environment conducive to a variety of groupings including whole group, small group, and individualized instruction. Free choice play materials are evident and support children's development across varied content areas and learning domains including mathematics, science, language arts literacy, and the creative arts. With blocks for building and materials for dress up, play materials and equipment reflect children's developmental stages, interests, and abilities requisite to child development. In several classrooms, soft furnishings, and areas for child privacy offer opportunities for children to sit quietly away from other children and reflect upon their learning in a comfortable, home like environment for young children. Present in most of the classrooms are items including photographs, children's literature, and cultural references including familiar foods reflecting the diversity within the community.

In three of the four classrooms, a child friendly pictorial instructional schedule depicts a general sequence of classroom events and learning experiences, which are posted at a child's eye level. The instructional schedule which reads from left to right in time sequence, includes photographs of the preschoolers engaged in various learning activities which support children's understanding of classroom routines, transitions, and learning experiences. Each of the four classrooms shares an identical instructional schedule including arrival and departure times, specialist area instructional periods, lunch, and snack time. The time allotted for daily free choice play occurs during specialist area instruction which appears to hinder opportunities for children to engage in

sustained free choice learning experiences with adult guidance since the specialist area teachers appear unfamiliar with the curriculum. Similarly, routines and transitions occur frequently as children move from the classroom to specialist area instructional classrooms and lavatories located outside of the classroom. Lunch periods also occur outside of the classroom, which hinders children's opportunities to engage in extended conversations with their peers and among adults.

In the case of Katie and Christine's preschool classroom, there are five separate learning areas that encompass language arts literacy, mathematics and manipulatives, block building, dramatic play and the creative arts. While there are play materials, resources, and equipment for children's play across a variety of interest areas, space for play is limited and many materials are inaccessible to children which adversely affect opportunities for children to explore, imagine, and play comfortably with their peers. Additionally, the classroom lacks a clearly defined area with soft furnishings for child privacy, hindering children's opportunities for privacy and reflection. And, although the classroom furnishings and space arrangement is limiting to children; there are many adult furnishings in the preschool classroom.

There are numerous classroom displays including children's two-dimensional artwork, vocabulary, photographs, and directional signs. Although the environment is print rich, many displays appear hidden behind classroom furniture. Classroom displays and materials are labeled in English and Spanish and there is evidence of diversity displayed in photographs. However, observing Katie and Christine, there is limited evidence to suggest that supports for English language learners extend beyond labeling and directional signs. Additionally, a learning center chart is posted in the classroom,

which indicates that self-selected group sizes are limited to four children across a variety of interest areas. Similarly, a child friendly instructional schedule is displayed which reflects a daily schedule of activities in accordance with the district's guidelines for preschool classrooms. However, observing Katie and Christine's practices, the instructional schedule is not implemented in accordance with the district's guidelines.

Considering the arrangement of classroom space to accommodate a variety of learning experiences for young children, Katie and Christine's use of classroom space is limiting to children's play, classroom routines and a variety of instructional groupings to promote and support children's development. Although there are many materials, resources and classroom equipment to stimulate children's engagement in learning experiences, many learning experiences are teacher directed in a whole group setting. Similarly, small group instructional activities occur under the direction of Katie and Christine in two separate group settings. While free choice play activities occur, Katie and Christine appear to manage children's behaviors in lieu of engaging and extending conversations with children at play activities. Additionally, children are not permitted to move freely among the interest areas and are frequently reprimanded for moving about the classroom during free choice play.

In contrast to the many materials, resources and classroom equipment available to children in Katie and Christine's classroom, Barbara and Ilana's preschool classroom lacks materials, furniture, equipment, and children's literature to foster child engagement in a variety of interest areas. And, although there are there are five separate learning areas that encompass mathematics and manipulatives, language arts literacy, dramatic play, block building, and the visual arts, many interest areas are lacking materials, resources

and classroom equipment. There are empty shelves in each of the learning areas including dramatic play, which is void of materials for imaginary play. Considering the classroom arrangement, there is very little variety in materials to accommodate children's learning. However, the classroom has a clearly defined area with soft furnishings for child privacy, providing opportunities for privacy and reflection. There are very few adult furnishings in the preschool classroom. There are very few classroom displays including children's artwork, vocabulary, photographs, and directional signs in the form of teacher made charts and graphic organizers to accompany current and prior project based studies. Among the displays and materials, there are very few labeled materials and resources for children in the interest areas. There is very limited evidence of diversity displayed in the preschool classroom. Similarly, the classroom lacks a child friendly instructional schedule although the children appear at ease during classroom routines, transitions, and learning experiences.

Considering the arrangement of classroom space and lack of materials, resources, and equipment to accommodate a variety of learning experiences for young children, Barbara and Ilana's use of classroom space appears conducive to a variety of instructional groupings which promotes and support children's development. Although there are few materials, resources and classroom equipment to stimulate children's engagement in a variety of learning experiences, many learning experiences are facilitated in small group settings under Barbara and Ilana's guidance. Children are permitted to move freely among the interest areas during free choice play and child interests are supported and encouraged through extended ongoing conversations which occur frequently in the preschool classroom. However, observing Barbara and Ilana's

preschool classroom there were several instances wherein adult conversations disrupted children's learning.

In the case of Lena's preschool classroom, there are six learning areas that include language arts literacy, blocks building, dramatic play, and the visual arts. There is also a science interest area with natural materials and a science discovery table. There are many play materials, resources, and equipment for children's play across a variety of interest areas. Although relatively small in size, the arrangement of classroom space fosters opportunities for children to play comfortably with their peers and alone in a clearly defined area for child privacy and privacy equipped with soft furnishings. Additionally, Lena assigns designated interest areas for children to work in pairs away from the larger group.

There are numerous classroom displays including children's artwork, vocabulary, photographs, and directional signs in the form of teacher made charts and graphic organizers to accompany current and prior project based studies. The environment is print rich and many displays are labeled with pictures and word in English and Spanish. However there is limited evidence of diversity represented in the displays and photographs. A learning center chart is posted in the classroom, which indicates that self-selected group sizes are limited to four children across a variety of interest areas. However, observing Lena's practices, children are permitted to move freely among the interest areas. A child friendly instructional schedule is displayed which reflects a daily schedule of activities in accordance with the district's guidelines for preschool classrooms. Lena implements the instructional schedule as it is written and the children appear at ease during classroom routines, transitions, and learning experiences.

Considering the arrangement of classroom space to accommodate a variety of learning experiences for young children, Lena's use of classroom space promotes children's learning in a variety of free choice play experiences, classroom routines, and a variety of instructional groupings. Many learning experiences occur in a variety of instructional groupings including small group instruction and throughout free choice play experiences. Child interests are supported and encouraged through ongoing conversations, which occur frequently in Lena's preschool classroom as children engage in a variety of whole group, small group and free choice play learning experiences.

Similar to Lena's preschool classroom, Sarah and Yulenia's preschool classroom supports a variety of learning areas including mathematics, manipulatives, dramatic play, block building, language arts literacy and the visual areas. There are many play materials, resources, and equipment to support children's across a variety of interest areas. The arrangement of space fosters opportunities for children to play comfortably with their peers. There is a clearly defined area for child privacy equipped with soft furnishings that affords children opportunities for privacy and reflection.

The environment is print rich and there are numerous classroom displays including children's two and three dimensional artwork, vocabulary, photographs, and directional signs in the form of teacher made charts and graphic organizers to accompany relatively current project based studies in accordance with the curriculum. Many displays are labeled with pictures and word in English and Spanish. There is evidence of diversity in classroom display s including photographs and pictures of the preschoolers engaged in various project-based studies.

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A learning center chart is posted in the classroom, which indicates open interest areas. Observing Sarah and Yulenia, children are permitted to move about the classroom based on their interests. A child friendly instructional schedule is displayed which reflects a daily schedule of activities in accordance with the district's guidelines for preschool classrooms. Sarah and Yulenia implement the instructional schedule as it is written although Sarah reports that she is flexible with instructional time periods based on the children's needs. However, while the children appear at ease during classroom routines, transitions, and learning experiences, Sarah appears less flexible in observing the written instructional time periods.

Considering the arrangement of classroom space to accommodate a variety of learning experiences for young children, Sarah and Yulenia's use of classroom space promotes children's learning in a variety of free choice play experiences, classroom routines, and a variety of instructional groupings. Many learning experiences occur in a variety of instructional groupings including small group instruction and throughout free choice play experiences. Child interests are supported and encouraged through ongoing conversations, which occur frequently in the preschool classroom as children engage in a variety of whole group; small group and free choice play learning experiences. Offering children opportunities for buddy play, Sarah reports that she regularly sets up learning activities for pairs of children. Observing Sarah and Yulenia's practices, children with special needs are supported by their peers in small group instructional settings.

In sum, five of the seven educators consider classroom context as integral to children's development as demonstrated in arranging materials, resources and equipment for children's learning based on children's interests and abilities. However, the early

childhood educators are revealing their beliefs on developmentally appropriate practices as evidenced in their use of the classroom as a context for child development in the preschool setting.

Regarding the ways in which the early childhood educator's interact with children in a variety of formats including free choice play, large group instruction and small group learning experiences, the educator's differ in their approaches to teaching to enhance children's development and learning. The most salient difference among the educators is the use of materials, space, and equipment to foster children's learning. Among the early childhood educators, Katie and Christine's classroom is markedly different from her colleagues. In the case of Katie and Christine's classroom, children are not afforded opportunities for play, which may adversely impact children's development. Because children benefit from opportunities to express themselves in a variety of learning experiences for extended periods of time, Katie and Christine limit children opportunities to engage in conversations with their peers in the preschool setting. Similarly, Katie and Christine appear to hold deficit views on children's abilities to engage in free choice learning experiences as evidenced in a reliance on didactic instructional practices and controlling children's behaviors in the preschool setting.

Intentionality in Planned Learning Experiences for Children

The early childhood educators are given charge to plan learning experiences for children across a variety of content areas and domains of learning as aligned to early learning standards set forth in the district's curriculum guidelines to foster children's understanding of key concepts, skills, and knowledge. The notion of intentionality in early childhood education implies that early childhood educators act with knowledge to

purposefully plan and implement teaching and learning experiences across domains of learning including a child's social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development and across content specific areas of learning including technology . It also implies that early childhood educators integrate teaching and learning with ongoing assessments of children including observations of children at play using a variety of methods that account for children's individual abilities including English language learners (Epstein, 2007).

Considering the curriculum, the early childhood educators differ in their instructional approaches in accordance with their beliefs about children's learning. Among the differences, the most relevant difference is how the early childhood educators engage children in learning experiences while scaffolding children's learning across a variety of learning objectives as aligned to the curriculum. Reflecting her beliefs on the curriculum as inadequate in addressing children's individual learning needs, Katie's instructional practices are inconsistent with her beliefs about children's learning. Observing Katie and Christine's instructional practices, many lessons are highly teacher directed and do not appear to follow a scope and sequence of planned learning experiences in accordance with the curriculum. Rather, many lessons are presented in whole group settings for extended periods of instructional time which appear to cause children discomfort. Similarly, children are expected to be attentive and remain seated during learning experiences including technology, language arts literacy, mathematics, and the visual arts. Ongoing assessments of children's learning do not appear evident in a variety of learning experiences. However, observing Katie's lessons, children are prompted to identify letters, numbers, and words as presented on chart paper, index cards, and verbal responses. Assessments do not appear to account for English language

Learners. Children are discouraged from speaking with their peers and are often called upon to respond to teacher directed questions in lieu of ongoing conversations across a variety of learning experiences.

In contrast to Katie and Christine, Barbara encourages children's active engagement in many small group learning experiences which foster children's learning under the direction of adults and among their peers. Consistent with Barbara's beliefs about the curriculum, children's interests are celebrated across a variety of learning experiences including music and movement, language arts literacy, science, and social studies. Barbara and Ilana demonstrate an awareness of children's individual interests and abilities in the preschool classroom and instructional time is used to engage children in integrated learning experiences and both ealry childhood educators are responsive to children's interests and abilities. However, there is limited evidence to suggest that children's learning is assessed using a variety of measures.

For both Lena and Sarah, learning experiences for children foster children's engagement across a vareity of integrated content areas including language arts literacy, science, social studies and music and movement as presented in variety of groupings. In the case of Lena, children's engagement in planned learning experiences is evident at large group and small group learning experiences which occur during free choice play areas. Lena supports children's communication and language through the use of thematic vocabularly, literature, and music and movement activities to accompany learning experiences for children. While children are engaged in free choice play activities, Lena demonstrates encourages children's independence and often scaffolds information for

children with varying abilities. Observing Lena's instruction, she documents children's learning through infornmal and formal assessments measures.

In the case of Sarah and Yulenia, children's learning occurs in a variety of learning experiences which foster children's knowledge of mathematics, social studies, and music and movement learning experiences. Observing Sarah and Yulenia, planned learning experiences account for individual differences including language and children identified with special needs. Observing Sarah and Yulenia's lessons, there is considerable evidence to support planning on the part of both early childhood educators. Many lessons include technology and children's responses to open ended questions are evident. While Sarah demonstrates proficiency in implementing the curriculum to support children's knowledge, Yulenia demonstrates a sensitivity to English language learners while engaging children in extended conversations to promote communication and language development. Observing Sarah and Yulenia, child assessments are ongoing and include formal and informal assessment measures.

In sum, the early childhood educators follow a prescribed curriculum to plan learning experiences for children across a variety of content areas and domains of learning as aligned to early learning standards set forth in the district's curriculum guidelines. However, two of the seven early childhood educators are revealing their beliefs on child centered pedadogy as evidenced in their instructional strategies and methods of assessing young children's understanding of key concepts, skills, and knowledge.

Considering the curriculum, the early childhood educators differ in their instructional approaches in accordance with their beliefs about children's learning.

Among the differences, the most salient difference is how the early childhood educators plan for learning experiences which foster children's engagement in learning experiences while scaffolding children's learning across a variety of content areas and learning domains as aligned to the curriculum. Two of the seven educators demonstrate considerable child development knowledge. Among the educators, Lena, and Sarah demonstrate considerable child development knowledge and effort in planning and implementing a variety of learning experiences to promote child growth and development. Drawing on child development knowledge, Lena and Sarah demonstrate instructional strategies which promote learning among children with varying needs, interests, and abilities which exemplifies the notion of intentionality in early childhood education and therefore embraces principles of developmentally appropraite practices.

With an emphasis on engaging children, the educators demonstrate a sensitivity to children's prior knowledge, experiences, and language which is evident in ongoing child assessments. For Barbara, children's learning is encouraged and celebrated in a variety of learning experiences including small group instruction and free choice play. However, there is limited evidence to suggest that planned learning experiences are fully developed accounting for children's needs, interests, and abilities. There is very limited evidence to support child assessments through a variety of measures. In contrast to her colleagues, Katie's instructional practices and methods of assessing children's learning are often didactic without consideration of children's needs, interests, and abilities particularly among English language learners. There is very limited evidence of intentionality on the part of the Katie to purposefully plan and implement teaching and learning experiences across content areas and learning domains. While assessments of children's learning

occurs, it is often framed within the context of direct questioning and child responses which do not account for children's individual abilities especially among children who are English language learners. Katie rarely responds to children individually in extended conversations to assess children's knowledge and many lessons are presented in whole group settings with minimal scaffolding to promote children's development and learning.

In sum, three of the seven early childhood educators demonstrate sensitivity to children's prior knowledge, experiences, and language which is evident in ongoing child performance assessments that account for child differences.

Guiding Children's Development

Positive relationships with adults and among peers in the preschool setting promotes children's development. In accordance with developmentally apppropriate practice, early childhood educators serve to support and nuture children's strengths, interests and abilities as demonstated through interpersonal interactions which acknowledge children's thoughts, feelings, concerns, and encourages children's efforts to be successful in the preschool classroom. Among children from diverse backgrounds, especially children from socio economically challenged backgrounds, early childhood educators serve as models in providing children with nuturing, intensive learning experiences to encourage children's success in the early learning environment (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Considering children's social and emotional development, the early childhood educator's differ in their efforts to support children in the preschool classroom as evidenced in their interpersonal interactions with children. In her role as teacher, Katie believes children appreciate a quiet, calming personality. Reflecting her beliefs, Katie assumes a largely passive role in supporting children's learning at free choice play and

small group learning experiences. Although Katie is responsive to children's immediate physical needs in the preschool classroom, she does not make efforts to engage children in conversations. Observing her instruction, Katie's exchanges with children are limited to teacher directed questions that call for brief, or simple correct responses from children including English language learners, which result in a lack of support for children's efforts to share ideas and to engage meaningfully with adults and among their peers in the preschool classroom. With an emphasis on highly structured, teacher directed lessons which appear to lack a coherent scope and sequence of learning experiences for children, Katie and Christine spend a considerable amount of instructional time responding to children's behaviors in lieu of engaging, listening, and responding to children. Because early childhood educators are given charge to model positive guidance behaviors to encourage children's development, integral to child development, Katie and Christine hinder children's pro social behaviors as evidenced in harsh, controlling forms of disciplines which otherwise might be corrected with respect, care, and sensitivity to children's developmental needs.

In contrast to Katie and Christine, Barbara and Ilana demonstrate care, concern, and sensitivity towards children as expressed through language, affect, and nurturing interactions with children at free choice play, during classroom routines and transitions, and in the course of small group learning experiences. With an emphasis on pro social behaviors, Barbara and Ilana use verbal encouragement to promote positive behaviors setting clear limits for children's behaviors that supports children's development. For both Barbara and Ilana, affective behaviors towards children are evident to children who in turn are very responsive to the early childhood educators. While both educators

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demonstrate sensitivity towards children, Ilana appears to possess a higher degree of understanding regarding children's lived experiences, which is evident throughout her interactions with children.

In general, Sarah and Lena account for children's development in the planning and implementation of learning experiences that foster children's curiosity and engagement in a wide variety of learning experiences. Accounting for children's capabilities and interests, Sarah and Lena recognize the importance of teacher directed and child initiated learning experiences to support children's active engagement with adults and among their peers in the preschool classroom. Regarding the ways to engage children, Sarah and Lena frequently interact with children in a variety of integrated learning experiences. Observing Lena's interactions, children are consistently recognized for their efforts and are strongly encouraged to work cooperatively with one another in a variety of learning experiences. Lena models a calm and patient demeanor with children especially among children who exhibit challenging behaviors and acknowledges children's efforts with specific praise for their accomplishments. Additionally, Lena appears to possess a greater understanding of children's home lives, which is evidenced in her interactions with children. Similar to Lena, Sarah recognizes children for their efforts and encourages children to work cooperatively with one another in a variety of learning experiences.

However, there are differences in Sarah's approach to managing children's behaviors which is evident in a variety of instructional groupings including teacher directed, structured learning experiences. While Sarah provides mostly positive guidance to children who are exhibiting challenging behaviors, she demonstrates impatience with

children who display challenging behaviors often relying on Yulenia to correct children's misbehaviors. Rather, Yulenia demonstrates great patience with children providing guidance and assistance to children with challenging behaviors. Observing Yulenia's interactions, she is warm, caring, and nurturing towards all children including English language learners. Yulenia provides a positive and emotionally supportive context for English language learners that support children's understanding of concepts and skills in the preschool classroom.

In sum, five of the seven early childhood educators value positive relationships with children as integral to children's growth and development as demonstrated in warm, caring, and responsive interpersonal interactions requisite to a child's social and emotional development. However, the early childhood educators differ in their appropriates to nurturing children's interests, abilities, and curiosity as evidenced in a opportunities for children to engage in a variety of learning experiences in a supportive classroom environment.

The early childhood educators demonstrate care and concern for children evident in classroom routines, transitions, and learning experiences that acknowledge children's thoughts, feelings, and concerns. However, Katie and Christine overuse highly structured, large group instructional activities that do not provide children with opportunities for self-expression, conversation, and open ended thinking. Rather, children's efforts to share ideas and information with peers and adults are discouraged and children are held to unreasonable expectations for behaviors in accordance with developmentally appropriate practice. Similarly, while Sarah provides mostly positive guidance, she frequently

becomes impatient with children during the course of structured, large group instructional activities and during free choice play.

In sum, four of the seven early childhood educators demonstrate a calm, patient demeanor to foster children's development including guidance and positive behaviors supports for children during classroom routines, transitions, and learning experiences which reveals that the educators may hold unreasonable expectations for children's development stages.

Chapter Summary

The early childhood educators reveal different assumptions, expectations, and beliefs about teaching diverse learners through the lens of child centered practices. Table 4 represents an alignment of the conceptual categories to each preschool classroom educator.

Table 4. Alignment of Conceptual Categories to Early Childhood Educators

Conceptual Categories		Early Childhood Educators		
	Katie Christine	Barbara Ilana	Lena	Sarah Yulenia
Affirming Differences Among Children and Families	Holds deficit views on children and families; consistent with didactic instructional practice. Minimal support and encouragement for English language learners to enhance language development and promote children's positive sense of self and learning success.	Acknowledges differences among children and families. Affirms diversity through interactions; beliefs about children and families. Demonstrates care and sensitivity to children's physical, emotional, and learning needs. Ilana affirms diversity and is accepting of	Engages individual children in extended conversations including English language learners. Interpersonal interactions are characterized by warmth, sensitivity, and concern for children. Established trusting, reciprocal relations with children and families.	Inclusive environment for children identified with special needs and among English learners. Acknowledges differences among children and families. Yulenia demonstrates sensitivity to diverse learners especially among children who are English language learners.

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	Draws negative attention to English language learners.	differences among children and families in school community.		
	Limited evidence of warmth, care and responsiveness to children.			
Classroom Context for Children's Development	Physical and emotive environment limits children's engagement in free choice play.	Physical and emotive classroom environment encourages engagement in a variety of learning activities in spite of a lack of materials, resources, and equipment.	Physical and emotive classroom environment encourages engagement in a varied of learning experiences.	Physical and emotive environment stimulates child curiosity, interests, and exploration of many props, materials and equipment.
	Arrangement and use of space limits play based learning experiences.		Many props, materials and equipment support child engagement in free choice play; suited to the developmental needs of the children.	
Intentionality in Planned Learning Experiences	Emphasis on school readiness; over reliance on didactic instruction in whole group settings.	Variety of learning experiences to support child engagement in free choice play and small group instruction.	Reflecting child centered pedagogy, many opportunities to engage in a variety of learning experiences that nurture children's interests and abilities in support of child growth and development.	Reflecting child centered pedagogy, demonstrates considerable efforts foster children's growth and learning in a variety of instructional groupings to support child engagement in free choice play, small group instruction, and whole group learning across content area learning domains.
	Prohibits child choice and exploration; limits opportunities for child expression.	Fosters child engagement in a varied play based activities.		
	Emphasis on whole group learning experiences that do not follow a predictable sequence in accordance with the curriculum.	Too few structured, whole group learning experiences necessary to foster children's learning.	Creating regular opportunities for children to actively listen and respond to children's literature from a variety of genres, demonstrates the use of literacy to support children's communication and language.	Demonstrates a greater degree of proficiency in implementing the curriculum framework.
	Routines, learning activities, and transitional activities do not appear to follow a predictable scope	Ilana supports Barbara in her efforts to implement developmentally appropriate practices		

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Conceptual Categories	Early Childhood Educators			

and sequence.

Guiding Children's Development	Assumes largely passive role in children's learning,	Displays patience; calm demeanor with children.	Lena engages and is responsive to children.	Sarah displays impatience with children.
	Reliance on structured, whole group learning experiences reflects personally held beliefs.	Frequently engages children in conversations, encouraging and extending children's communication and language development.	Frequently engages children in conversations and extends child language development.	Yulenia displays warmth care and concern that demonstrates sensitivity to children's physical, emotional, and learning needs.
	Hinders opportunities for children to work alongside peers and under adult direction.	Engages children's interests across content areas and domains of learning.	Recognizing children's need for curiosity.	Extended conversations promote children's communication and language development.
	Learning experiences are chaotic and do not account for children's individual needs, interests, and abilities, results in challenging behaviors.			
	Reliance on controlling behaviors.			
	Lack of child development knowledge requisite to working with young environment.			

As the summary of findings indicates, the early childhood educators' beliefs about children and families are generally consistent with the nature of their instructional practices as evidenced in reciprocal classroom interactions. However, reflecting her

beliefs, Katie provides minimal support and encouragement for English language learners to enhance language development and to a greater extent, promote children's positive sense of self and success in the early learning classroom revealing deficit views on families served in the preschool setting. Similarly, while Christine espouses the need to care for children in the preschool community, Christine's beliefs are inconsistent with her interactions with children as evidenced in an over reliance on controlling children's behaviors and drawing negative attention to English language learners which may result from a lack of child development knowledge that is requisite to working with young children in the preschool setting. It is most evident from Lena's interpersonal interactions with children characterized by warmth, sensitivity, and concern for children, that among the early childhood educators, Lena affirms differences among children and families in the preschool setting. Sarah demonstrates considerable efforts to foster children's growth and learning in an inclusive environment for children identified with special needs and among English learners. However, Yulenia demonstrates a greater degree of sensitivity to diverse learners especially among children who are English language learners.

The early childhood educators provide a physically stimulating and emotionally supportive classroom environment to accommodates a variety of learning experiences to support children's engagement including free choice play experiences. In most of the classrooms children appear happy, lively, and engaged in a variety of content specific and domain related learning experiences. Materials, resources, and equipment are plentiful and the educators encourage and extend conversations with individual children. There are many artifacts reflecting individual and familial diversity in classroom displays, photographs, and written prompts. However, there is a lack of materials, resources and

equipment in Barbara and Ilana's classroom. Additionally, with an emphasis on school readiness, Katie's instructional practices demonstrate an over reliance on didactic instruction in whole group settings that prohibits child choice and exploration limiting children's opportunities for expression. Katie and Christine's classroom arrangement and use of space is limiting to children's engagement in play based learning experiences hindering opportunities for children to work alongside peers and under the direction adults.

The findings reveal that the early childhood educators' beliefs about developmentally appropriate practices generally influence intentionally planned learning experiences for children. Reflecting child centered pedagogy, Sarah and Lena demonstrate a great degree of proficiency in implementing the curriculum framework to engage children in a variety of intentional learning experiences including structured and unstructured learning experiences integral to children's development and interests across content areas and learning domains. Barbara's intentional learning experiences appear lacking resulting in few structured, whole group learning experiences necessary to foster children's learning. Similarly, reflecting her beliefs about curricula and instruction, Katie's classroom routines, learning activities, and transitional activities do not appear to follow a predictable scope and sequence, children's learning experiences are chaotic and do not account for children's individual needs, interests, and abilities.

Additionally, the educators mostly demonstrate genuine concern for children and appear to make considerable efforts to guide children's growth and development as evidenced with warmth care and concern for children's physical, emotional, and learning needs. However, Katie and Christine's reliance on controlling children's behaviors

appears to causes stress for children that result in child displays of challenging behaviors. Sarah does demonstrate impatience with children.

In the next chapter, I present a discussion on these findings organized around conceptual categories that emerged from these findings. I interpret the espoused beliefs of early childhood educators that correspond to requisite knowledge and skills demonstrated in classroom practice in a holistic manner. After presenting a discussion of the conceptual categories, I answer the overarching research question and sub topical concerns presented at the onset of this study. Following, I discuss the significance of the findings and provide implications for theory and early childhood communities of practice with recommendations for further research.

Chapter 5

Discussion

This case study examined the experiences of early childhood educators in cultivating children's growth and development in an urban preschool setting centered on varied aspects of early childhood pedagogy that illustrate an early childhood educator's disposition as viewed through the lens developmentally appropriate practice. This study considered the intuit responsibility of early childhood educators to demonstrate knowledge, advocacy, and sensitivity to a child's lived experience.

In the previous chapter, I presented on the findings related to the main foci of this study followed by a cross classroom analysis. I begin this chapter with a summary of the major findings representing each educator under study. Then, I discuss the findings in relationship to empirical research and scholarly literature developed from the cross classroom analysis. Each of the conceptual categories that emerged from an analysis of the data, as discussed in chapter three, respond to the overarching research question that guides this inquiry. Guided by the overarching research question, I refer to the conceptual categories that emerged from data analysis. While the conceptual categories serve to address the overarching research question and sub topical concerns, there is some overlap between the conceptual categories. For example, diversity in materials, equipment, plays items, and classroom displays relates to developmentally appropriate practice in creating a classroom context for child development as represented in the overarching research question. Similarly, because an understanding of diversity in the construct of child development and interpersonal relationships is presented in alignment to the sub topical questions, diversity informs each of the research concerns in varying aspects.

In presenting key dispositions of the early childhood educators, there is overlap between the conceptual categories. For example, an educator's disposition to impart knowledge in classroom practice informs each of the research questions in varying aspects of child development, interpersonal relationships, and affirming differences among children and families. In answering the research question, I refer to the conceptual categories derived from the data. Based on the discussion of findings, I draw implications of this study for early childhood professional learning communities of practice. I provide recommendations for further research. This chapter ends with a summary conclusion.

Summary of Findings

The research problem examines an educator's disposition to positively impact children's cognitive and social emotional developments as evidenced in child centered practices that arouse curiosity, foster social interaction, and promote children's learning as expressed in interpersonal interactions that affirm differences among young children. Through the lens of developmentally appropriate practice, this study considered the interrelatedness of pedagogical knowledge, diversity, and affective educator traits including warmth, care, affection, and sensitivity as essential to an early childhood educator's disposition. In the aim of interpreting the early childhood educator's dispositions, I considered the espoused beliefs of early childhood educators and how such beliefs were reflected in demonstrations of intentional, thoughtful, and reciprocal interactions with young children as observed in child centered practice.

The early childhood educators in the present case under study represent a diverse group of individuals. The educators possess varying years of professional experience across educational settings, levels of educational attainment, and professional credentials.

Such perspectives inform their beliefs about children's unique learning needs, interests, and abilities. A summary of the findings is provided below and represents each educator in the present case under study.

The descriptive categories emerging from Katie's beliefs and the nature of her instructional practices include: (1) An over reliance on didactic instruction in a whole group setting that prohibits child choice, exploration, and opportunities for expression, (2) A classroom environment that is limiting to children's engagement in play based learning experiences under the direction of warm, caring adults and among their peers, (3) Minimal supports for English language learners to enhance children's language development, and (4) Classroom learning experiences do not follow a predictable sequence and therefore routines and transitional activities either interrupt children's play or cause stress for children and the adults in the classroom.

Katie's beliefs about children, families, and child-centered pedagogy are generally consistent with the nature of her instructional practices as evidenced in the preschool classroom. With an emphasis on school readiness, Katie's instructional practices demonstrate an over reliance on didactic instruction in whole group settings that prohibits child choice and exploration limiting children's opportunities for expression. Considering the classroom environment, Katie's arrangement and use of space is limiting to children's engagement in play based learning experiences hindering opportunities for children to work alongside peers and under the direction adults. Assuming a largely passive role in children's learning, Katie is revealing her beliefs about developmentally appropriate practice to support child growth and development. Her reliance on structured, whole group learning experiences appears to reflect her beliefs about children in the

urban preschool setting. Reflecting her beliefs about children, Katie provides minimal support and encouragement for English language learners to enhance language development and to a greater extent, promote children's positive sense of self and success in the early learning classroom. Considering her views on families, Katie is revealing deficit views on families served in the preschool setting. Emphasizing whole group learning experiences that do not follow a predictable sequence in accordance with the curriculum, Katie hinders children's development. Because routines, learning activities, and transitional activities do not appear to follow a predictable scope and sequence, children's learning experiences are chaotic and do not account for children's individual needs, interests, and abilities, which causes stress for children resulting in challenging behaviors. Considering the physical and emotive environment, children's engagement in free choice play is limited.

The descriptive categories emerging from Christine's beliefs and the nature of her instructional practices include: (1) An over reliance on controlling children's behaviors, (2) Drawing negative attention to English language learners, and (3) Lack of child development knowledge. Christine beliefs are mostly inconsistent with the nature of her instructional practices and interactions with children. While Christine espouses the need to care for children in the preschool community, Christine's interpersonal interactions with children indicate an over reliance on controlling children's behaviors and drawing negative attention to English language learners in classroom learning experiences, routines, and transitions. Christine appears to lack child development knowledge requisite to working with young children in the early learning environment.

The descriptive categories emerging from Barbara's beliefs and the nature of her instructional practices include: (1) A variety of instructional groupings supports child engagement in free choice play, (2) Engaging children in conversations, encouraging and extending children's communication and language development, and (3) Intentionality in planning learning experiences relevant to engaging children's interests across content areas. Barbara beliefs and the nature of their instructional practices in the preschool classroom suggest that Barbara's beliefs are mostly consistent with her instructional practice. Reflecting principles of developmentally appropriate practices, Barbara provides children with a variety of learning experiences to support children's engagement in free choice play and small group instruction to foster children's engagement in a variety of play based activities. Considering the physical and emotive classroom environment, children are happy, lively, and engaged in a variety of learning activities in spite of a lack of materials, resources, and equipment. Reflecting her views on children and families, Barbara frequently interacts with children for extended periods of classroom instructional time. She is patient and displays a calm demeanor with children. Barbara with support from Ilana engages children in extended conversations and therefore encourages and extends children's communication and language development relevant to engaging children's interests across content areas and domains of learning. However, Barbara's intentional learning experiences appear lacking resulting in fewer structured, whole group learning experiences necessary to foster children's learning.

The descriptive categories emerging from Ilana's beliefs and the nature of her instructional practices include: (1) Care and sensitivity to children's physical, emotional, and learning needs, and (2) Engaging children in conversations, encouraging and

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extending children's communication and language development. Ilana provides supports Barbara in her efforts to implement developmentally appropriate practices. Ilana's practices and her beliefs about children and families are consistent throughout her interactions with children. Ilana demonstrates care and sensitivity to children's physical, emotional, and learning needs and frequently engages children in conversations, encouraging and extending children's communication and language development. Ilana affirms diversity and is accepting of differences among children and families in the community served by the school.

The descriptive categories emerging from Lena's beliefs and the nature of her instructional practices include: (1) A variety of props, materials, and classroom equipment support children's development in the classroom environment, (2) A variety of instructional groupings support children's engagement in free choice play, (3) Engaging children in conversations, encouraging and extending children's communication and language development, (4) Recognizing children's curiosity and responding to children with warmth, sensitivity, and care to foster trusting relationships with children, and (5) Intentionality in planning learning experiences relevant to engaging children's interests across content areas. Lena's beliefs and the nature of her instructional practices are consistent. Reflecting child centered pedagogy, Lena provides children with many opportunities to engage in a variety of learning experiences that nurture children's interests and abilities in support of child growth and development. Considering the physical and emotive classroom environment, there are many props, materials, and classroom equipment to support children's engagement in free choice play activities suited to the developmental needs of the children enrolled in the classroom. Recognizing

children's curiosity, Lena engages and is responsive to children. Lena frequently engages individual children in conversations, and extends extending children's communication and language development including English language learners. It is evident from Lena's interpersonal interactions with children as characterized by warmth, sensitivity, and concern for children, that Lena has established trusting, reciprocal relationships with children and families.

The descriptive categories emerging from Sarah's beliefs and the nature of her instructional practices include: (1) A variety of instructional groupings to support child engagement in free choice play, (2) Proficiency in implementing the curriculum framework to engage children in a variety of learning experiences, (3) Intentionality in planning structured and unstructured learning experiences integral to children's development and interests across content areas, and (4) A supportive learning environment necessary to stimulate children's curiosity, interests, and exploration of materials and equipment. Sarah's beliefs and the nature of her instructional practices are generally consistent. Reflecting child centered pedagogy, Sarah demonstrates considerable efforts to foster children's growth and learning in an inclusive environment for children identified with special needs and among English learners. Acknowledging differences among children and families, Sarah encourages children's learning as presented in a variety of instructional groupings to support child engagement in free choice play, small group instruction, and whole group learning. Among the educators, Sarah demonstrates a great degree of proficiency in implementing the curriculum framework to engage children in a variety of intentional learning experiences including structured and unstructured learning experiences integral to children's development and

interests across content areas and learning domains. Considering the physical and emotive environment, Sarah provides a supportive learning environment necessary to stimulate children's curiosity, interests, and exploration of materials and equipment. However, Sarah does display impatience with children.

The descriptive categories emerging from Yulenia's beliefs and the nature of her instructional practices include: (1) Care and sensitivity to children's physical, emotional, and learning needs, (2) Engaging children in conversations, encouraging and extending children's communication and language development, and (3) Demonstrating sensitivity to diversity, especially among children who are English language learners. Yulenia's practices are consistent throughout her warm, caring, interactions with children that demonstrate sensitivity to children's physical, emotional, and learning needs as evidenced in extended conversations with children to promote children's communication and language development. Among the educators, Yulenia demonstrates a greater degree of sensitivity to diverse learners especially among children who are English language learners. Yulenia displays a calm and patient demeanor with children.

The findings reveal that educator beliefs about how young children learn is reflected in classroom arrangement, pedagogy, and reciprocal interactions in the preschool classroom requisite to interpreting key dispositions of the early childhood educators. Such findings reveal significant differences in how the educators thoughtfully consider the environment to engage children in varied learning experiences and scaffold children's learning across a variety of learning objectives as aligned to the prescribed curriculum and early learning standards. The findings indicate that although the educators value children's social and emotional development, the educators' differ in their efforts to

support children's needs, interests, and unique abilities as demonstrated in reciprocal interactions. The early childhood educators consider diversity in the preschool setting and the need to respond to children with sensitivity to differences. Thus, reflecting their beliefs about children, school readiness, and the nature of interpersonal relationships with children and families, the early childhood educators reveal personally held beliefs and corresponding actions that serve relevant to understanding an early childhood educator's disposition to positively impact children's growth and development.

Discussion of Findings

Through the lens of developmentally appropriate practice, this study considers the interrelatedness of pedagogical knowledge, diversity, and emotional affect as essential to an early childhood educator's disposition. Analyzing the data, the case under study represents the beliefs and observed practices of the early childhood educators to support young children in an urban preschool setting. The early childhood educators reveal different assumptions, expectations, and beliefs about teaching young children in the urban preschool setting. Such diverse perspectives reveal the complex nature of individual teacher beliefs and practices. I address the similarities and differences among the educators in relation to the literature: (1) Affirming Differences Among Children and Families, (2) Classroom Context for Children's Development, (3) Intentionality in Planned Learning Experiences, and (4) Guiding Children's Development.

Affirming Differences Among Children and Families

Children transitioning from the home environment to the preschool setting differ in their needs, interests, and abilities. Early childhood educators are given charge to ensure individual children learn. Because children experience such rapid growth and

change educators recognize that child growth and learning is significantly influenced by varied factors including prior knowledge, culture, language, socio economic status, and lived experience (Copple & Bredekamp, 1996). It is assumed that early childhood educators possess requisite child development knowledge and a willingness to respond to child differences acting in partnership with parents and families to promote, support, and encourage children's success in the preschool setting through reciprocal and affirming relationships with children and families.

Analyzing the data, the early childhood educators reveal dissimilar beliefs about children. Such beliefs serve to guide classroom practice. I discuss the findings in relation to the empirical research and scholarly literature on conceptualizing an educator's disposition in the presence of diversity in the educational setting and in relation to developmentally appropriate practice. First, although the early childhood educators articulate child centered beliefs, the early childhood educators demonstrate dissimilar classroom practices. Second, the educator's beliefs about English language learners and ability diverse children enrolled in the preschool classrooms vary in relation to observed practices. Third, although reciprocal relationships with parents and families are highly regarded by the early childhood educators, there is limited evidence of reciprocal relationships with families. Fourth, although the early childhood educators acknowledge diversity in the context of their responsibilities as early childhood educators, the educators minimally acknowledge their own cultural identities in their roles as early childhood educators. Finally, although the early childhood educators espouse notions of affective concern, such beliefs are inconsistent in observed practices.

As a professional occupation, early care and education practitioners represent a diverse population of caregivers and teachers employed in a variety of early care and educational settings including community based childcare centers, publicly funded preschool programs and family childcare settings who are given charge to cultivate a child's capacity to develop and learn in the early learning setting in the presence of similarities and differences among children (Brown, Bergen, House, Hittle, & Dickerson, 2000; Fails-Nelson & Roger, 2010; Han & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2010; Kowalski, Pretti-Frontczak, and Johnson, 2001; McMullen, 1999; McMullen & Alat, 2002; Prawat, 1992) As I stated in Chapter Three, Methodological Framework, the early childhood educators identified in the case under study represent a relatively diverse population of early childhood practitioners.

Katie is an experienced educator who began her teaching career in the Urban City School district. She grew up in New Jersey and studied elementary education during her college years. Katie holds a standard teaching certificate and is certified to teach preschool through third grade. Katie is a Caucasian female and the mother of two young children. She believes that her teaching reflects the needs of the children enrolled in her classroom. Christine, an experienced paraprofessional, who has served in the Urban City School District for nearly twenty-six years and resides in the neighborhood, supports Katie in her efforts. Christine, an African American female, holds a CDA certificate and reports to enjoy working with children. She is set to retire in the upcoming academic year.

Barbara is a novice educator with limited experience working with public school children. This will be her second year working in the City of Urban as a preschool

teacher. Prior to this placement, Barbara served as a private provider preschool teacher in an urban University setting. She has also served as a health and physical education teacher in an urban Charter School. Barbara holds a provisional certificate and is enrolled in an alternate route teacher certification program. Barbara is a Caucasian female in her mid twenty's. She does not have children but reports to come from a large Irish Catholic family. She describes being one of five children, as an asset to teaching and believes teaching should be tailored to meet the needs of individual children. Ilana, an experienced paraprofessional, who possesses 11 years experience as a paraprofessional working within the Urban City School District, assists Barbara in her efforts as classroom teacher, supports Barbara in her efforts. Ilana is an African American female who resides in the City of Urban. She has held a variety of positions within the school. This is Ilana's second placement this school year.

Lena is an experienced early childhood educator who has served in a variety of settings across the Urban City School District for 15 years. Lena holds a standard teaching certificate and has earned a Masters of Arts in Education. She serves as the team leader for the preschool teachers at the ABC Elementary School. Lena has also been selected to pilot a supplemental language arts literacy program for preschool age children. Lena believes that her teaching meets the individual needs and abilities of the children in her classroom. A former resident of Camden, Lena is familiar with many of the families who reside within the neighborhood. Lena is an African American female and a mother.

Sarah is a relatively novice preschool teacher with nearly four years experience working with the City of Urban. Sarah is a Caucasian female in her mid twenty's. Prior to

her current placement, Sarah served as a private preschool provider teacher within the City. She possesses a standard preschool teaching certificate and is dually certified to teach children with special needs. Sarah believes that teaching should be tailored to meet the individual needs of children in her classroom. She places great emphasis on meeting the needs of each dual language learner enrolled in her classroom. Sarah also reports to value technology as a tool to reach young learners. Sarah is supported in her efforts by Yulenia, an experienced early childhood paraprofessional, who possesses a bachelor's degree in industrial engineering from a University in her native Puerto Rico. Yulenia is an English language learner who communicates in both English and Spanish in order to teach, assess, and care for children in the classroom. She is eager to earn a teaching degree in the United States.

Reflecting the diversity in the educators under study, it is assumed that as a professional occupation, early childhood educators are knowledgeable practitioners who are intrinsically motivated and therefore accountable for the developmental learning outcomes of an ever growing, diverse population of young children present in the preschool setting (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Much of the research on teacher beliefs and corresponding instructional practices is situated in an analysis of teacher knowledge, educational attainment, and professional experience. Scholars assert that educational attainment and professional experience impact a teacher's willingness to adopt child-centered practices suggesting that highly qualified caregivers and educators of young children possess child development knowledge and therefore adopt a philosophical orientation towards developmentally appropriate practice as evidenced in curriculum,

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delivery of content, integrated content area learning, and child initiated learning with greater emphasis on accommodating child differences and learning styles (Wien, 1996).

While there are very few studies on the role of paraprofessionals to embrace principles of developmentally appropriate practice, Han and Neuharth-Pritchett's (2010) study considers how paraprofessionals support early childhood practitioners in the preschool setting. The researchers suggest although credentialed teachers direct paraprofessionals to act in an instructional or non-instructional capacity, a willingness to embrace principles of developmentally appropriate practices including valuing children's enthusiasm, interests, abilities, and encouraging children's conversations is most often the result of educational attainment.

Such diverse perspectives are revealed in the present case under study. The early childhood educators represented in this study view themselves as caring, thoughtful, and knowledgeable individuals responsible for the growth and development of young children in the preschool classroom. Analyzing the data, I found that although the early childhood educators each espouse the value of affirming child differences, the early childhood educators articulate differing beliefs and demonstrate dissimilar classroom practices thus revealing the complexities in conceptualizing dispositional characteristics of early childhood practitioners.

Many researchers argue that an educator's value, beliefs, and professional ethos serve to guide an educator's interpersonal interactions with children, families, and communities of practice in the educational setting. Such perspectives support the notion of education as a humanistic endeavor. Because of the complex nature of identifying and assessing an educator's disposition, scholars advocate that educator's be morally,

ethically and socially aware whereas other scholars advocate that a sense of care,

concern, and sensitivity to diverse learners is embedded in essential character traits of

teachers. (Brown, Morehead, & Smith, 2008; Fallona, 2000; Hansen, 1993; Lee &

Herner-Patnode, 2010; NCATE, 2008; Nieto, 2006; Osguthorpe, 2008; Schecter, 2011;

Sockett, 2009; Shulte, Edick, Edwards & Mackiel, 2004; Shiveley & Misco, 2010;

Shulman, 1987; Thornton, 2006; Welch, Pitts, Tenini, Kuenlen, and Wood, 2010).

Scholars acknowledge that beliefs and practices often have a contradictory nature.

Accordingly, there is a greater need to holistically interpret an educator's disposition

across domains including intellect, knowledge, professional ethos and cultural awareness

(Borko, Liston, & Whitcomb, 2007; Damon, 2007; Gordon & Fittler, 2004; Schussler,

2006; Schussler, Stooksberry, & Bercaw, 2010; Talbert-Johnson, 2006; Welch, Pitts,

Tenini, Kuenlen, & Wood, 2010).

Essential Beliefs about Children's Development

Each educator espouses the value of responding to children's needs, diverse

abilities, and interests in the preschool classroom. The educators consider a child's social

and emotional development as a most salient concern in teaching young children in the

preschool classroom. Referring to the value of supporting a child's social and emotional

development as a function of teaching young children, the educators regard children's

learning as an opportunity for children's socialization in the preschool setting.

As reflected in the findings of the present case under study, researchers assert that early

childhood educators value social and emotional development as a domain of learning

along the early learning continuum. In a (2001) study, Kowalski, Pretti-Frontczak, and

Johnson examined the beliefs of early care and educational practitioners to determine

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how child development knowledge influences teacher decision making in the classroom. Concerning the development of individual children, the authors claim that teacher emphasis on academic content in the early learning setting adversely impacts children's development. The researchers determined that the educators placed a significantly higher value on children's social emotional development relative to language arts literacy and mathematical skill development suggesting that early care and educational practitioners are capable of distinguishing between traditional academic skills and developmental abilities. It is Lena who demonstrates the most accordant beliefs and practices, which reveal a child centered philosophical orientation. Lena affirms the notion of love in early care and education and the responsibility of early childhood educators to instill a love of learning in young children in contrast to academic skill development.

As Prawat (1992) affirms, teacher beliefs can positively or adversely affect child centered, constructivist practices in the early learning classroom. Such views influence classroom decision making and instructional practices in several key areas: curriculum, delivery of integrated content area learning, and child initiated learning. Positing that active, inquiry based learning experiences impacts children's learning, the researcher refers to a growing need for early care and educational practitioners to foster children's learning with greater attention to child differences. Prawat suggests a capacity to attend to children's learning as articulated in teacher knowledge, actions, and willingness to form trusting relationships with children honors children's efforts to explore, ask questions, and make mistakes. Such a perspective is evident in Lena's desire to instill a love of learning in children.

Barbara affirms the notion of responsiveness to children especially those identified with special needs. As reflected in Barbara's beliefs, early childhood educators are responsible to engage children identified with special needs in varied instructional groupings including play.

Advocates of developmentally appropriate practice embrace the notion of inclusion. Brown, Bergen, House, Hittle, and Dickerson's (2000) examined the daily practices of preschool general education, special education teachers, and instructional assistants employed in an integrated preschool program for preschool age children. Asserting that preschool programs embrace a philosophy of inclusion in the early learning environment, the researchers considered how typically developing children and those children identified with communication, motor skills, adaptive behaviors and social emotional delays learn together throughout a preschool day.

The researchers determined that typical preschoolers and preschoolers with special needs shared mostly similar classroom experiences including classroom routines and transitions, calendar activities, play based learning activities, and whole group learning experiences. Brown, Bergen, House, Hittle, and Dickerson determined that inclusive preschool programs support children's early academic and social emotional behaviors for both typically developing children and among children identified with special needs.

In accordance with McMullen's (1999) study, self competency influences teacher practice. Considering professional preparation, experience, and work conditions, the researcher examined how teacher beliefs influence developmentally appropriate practice. McMullen determined that teacher self competency in the presence of varied factors such

as a lack of control over children, familial circumstances, and pressure from administrators to meet standardized learning outcomes impact teacher beliefs and practices. Such a perspective revealed that educators identified with an early childhood educational degree or child development education degree combined with professional experience, were found most likely to fully embrace and implement developmentally appropriate practices as compared to primary teachers with an early childhood education or elementary education degree combined with professional experience. Secondly, whether teachers believe they can make a difference in the lives of children served to influence displays of self-confidence in classroom learning experiences. Such perspectives are revealed in the beliefs and observed actions of each of the educators in the present case under study. However, Barbara reveals an uncertainty about children and relative inconsistency in her beliefs and practices, which I attribute to a lack of confidence based on her professional experience.

Each of the early childhood educators in the present case under study consider children's play and integrated content area learning experiences as opportunities for children to self-select materials, books, and equipment in varied instructional groupings under adult direction and among peers as significant to embracing a child centered philosophy. As reflected in the findings of the present case under study, McMullen and Alat (2002) also claim that educators possess a limited understanding of child centered, developmentally appropriate practice.

McMullen and Alat (2002) found that higher levels of educational attainment impact caregiver and teacher approaches to classroom management, child assessment methods, didactic instructional practices and materials such as flash cards, worksheets,

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and seatwork. While the authors concluded that educational attainment impacts teacher beliefs and a willingness to adopt child-centered practices, the researchers advocate that highly qualified caregivers and teachers of young children adopt a philosophy of developmentally appropriate practice beyond limited notions of child centeredness often advocated by schools of education.

The implications of how teacher education preparation programs influence teacher beliefs about child development knowledge and instructional practices upon entering the early care and educational workforce is the focus of Han & Neuharth-Pritchett's (2010) quantitative study on teacher beliefs about developmentally appropriate practices in publicly funded pre-kindergarten classrooms. The researchers considered how teacher assistants support children in the early learning environment suggesting that teacher perceptions on developmentally appropriate practices influence how teachers view the role of teacher assistants in the early learning classroom and whether assistants are considered as integral to supporting children's learning or in a non instructional capacity. Positing that teaching assistants form their own beliefs working in the field of early childhood, the authors examined teacher and assistant beliefs about developmentally appropriate and inappropriate classroom practices to identify key principles of developmentally appropriate practices to support children's development in the early learning setting: Valuing children's enthusiasm and interests for learning, exploratory play and encouraging children's conversation with adults and among their peers, and a demonstrated willingness to accept child verbal responses. The author's found that many teaching assistants endorse the use of inappropriate practices such as homework, worksheets, independent seatwork, and didactic instructional strategies in the

context of a quiet classroom. Based on the results, the author's determined that teacher education and professional experience in the field of early childhood education was insufficient to determine teacher beliefs and practices in contrast to the educational level of the teaching assistants whose beliefs were found to be the result of educational attainment.

Such perspectives are revealed in the present case under study. Christine espouses the need to care for children enrolled in the preschool setting due to factors present in the children's home neighborhood. However, Christine is the least knowledgeable of the paraprofessionals and often displays harsh criticism of children while Ilana and Yulenia demonstrate care, concern, and empathy for learners. Ilana demonstrates a capacity to lead whole and small group instructional lessons and appears to embrace child centered practices and often extends conversations with children. Yulenia, a degreed professional demonstrates proficiency in facilitating children's learning in varied learning experiences with great care, concern, and sensitivity to diverse learners. She appears to embrace child centered practice and often encourages and celebrates children's accomplishments.

Although the educators espouse principles of child centered practices, each educator acts in accordance to their unique beliefs. Such differences are evident in Sarah's unique beliefs and corresponding practices. While Sarah espouses that preschool teaching and learning is a process of providing children with a variety of experiences, choice of materials, and individualized activities to support children's learning, she affirms her beliefs that preschool teaching and learning is requisite to kindergarten readiness. Such contradictory beliefs are evident in observations of Sarah's classroom

practices and it is difficult to define her beliefs and practices as embracing a child centered philosophy.

The most discordant is Katie who espouses that her instructional methods reflect the needs of the children in her classroom while asserting her responsibility to prepare children for kindergarten. Referring to the preschool children in her classroom as babies, Katie appears resolute in her belief that the children enrolled in the preschool setting, struggle in the later school grades. Katie reveals deficit views on children that are evident in frequently implemented, highly didactic instructional practices observed in classroom practice. Wien's (1996) study on tensions surrounding developmentally appropriate practice considers age appropriateness, individual uniqueness and responsive teacher practices. The study reports on the experiences of three diverse teachers to determine how instructional time, organization, and knowledge impact teacher beliefs and practices in the presence of differences in teacher professional experience, structural program characteristics, and educational preparation. Similar to the findings in the present case under study, the authors concluded that an educator's child development knowledge, willingness, and responsiveness to children's interests serve essential to implementing child centered practice. The author's findings, however, suggest that program structural characteristics can impede an educator's ability to fully embrace developmentally appropriate practice. Although Wien's finding supports an assumed finding of the present case under study, relative to Katie and Christine's beliefs and practices during the instructional day, additional research on the relationship of program structural characteristics are necessary in order to deepen an understanding about the nature of the

relationship between program structure and Katie and Christine's willingness to adopt child centered philosophy.

Researchers assert that teacher perspectives on accountability in varied contextual settings are an important factor in determining an educator's instructional practice. Parker and Neuharth-Pritchett (2006) argue that contextual factors including geographical context and accountability demands on early childhood teachers' impact instructional decisions and practices. Reflecting principles of developmentally appropriate practice, attributed to the theories of Vygotsky and Piaget, often referred to as constructivism in relation to developmentally inappropriate practice, often attributed to behaviorism, Parker and Neuharth-Pritchett's (2006) study found that educators cite the need to prepare children for standardized assessments in the later grades as cause for highly structured, didactic instructional practices with greater emphasis on curriculum standards and measurable learning outcomes for children while teachers identified as child centered, expressed the greatest feelings of control over classroom decision making and curricula decisions. The author's determined that demands for teacher accountability in kindergarten cause a shift in how educators implement developmentally appropriate practices regardless of their orientation. Such perspectives reveal teacher tensions about accountability and the pressure to prepare students for later school success increases along the continuum of teacher directed to child centered practices in spite of the teacher espoused beliefs about developmentally appropriate practice often adversely impacting children's development.

As reflected in the present case under study, tensions about the implementation of child centered, developmentally appropriate practices persist in relationship to educator's

beliefs about academic readiness. Such perspectives reveal that highly structured, teacher directed practices are a response to beliefs about readiness. Reflecting their beliefs, Sarah and Katie consider kindergarten readiness as integral to children's growth and development in the preschool classroom. Scholars consider that readiness is strongly influenced by familial differences and through nurturing interactions with people in their home environment prior to entering formalized early care and educational settings, particularly among children of socio economically, culturally and linguistically diverse families (Early, Pianta, Taylor, & Cox, 2001; Freeman & Powers-Costello, 2011; Magnuson, Meyers, Ruhm, & Waldfogel, 2004; Wesley & Buysee, 2003). As Winsler et al. (2008) assert, diverse learners enrolled in funded preschool programs make considerable school readiness gains in cognitive, language, fine motor and social emotional development. The authors concluded that individual children make considerable readiness gains because of participation in preschool regardless of whether credentialed early childhood educators emphasize academic skills development as presented in curriculum standards.

Chien et al.'s (2010) study also proves that children enrolled in early care and educational settings make considerable school readiness gains. In an effort to ascertain whether children from disadvantaged backgrounds make school readiness gain in the early care and educational setting as measured by children's engagement in a variety of child initiated early learning experiences, assert that child initiatied learning experiences under the direction of sensitive, caring, adults support children's readiness in the early learning setting. Informed by constuctivist theories in education and socio cultural theories emphasizing a holistic, person centered approach to learning, the authors found

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that while children may spend a considerable amount of instructional time in free choice play and whole group, didactic learning experiences centered on language, literacy, and mathematical skill development, such practices do not ensure children's academic skill development and readiness gains. Citing teacher beliefs that influence actions, the researchers found that the teachers delivered instruction via individual seatwork while others preferred to deliver instruction via group work. Because of a lack of high quality interactions, resulting from teacher stressors including the scope and sequence of a standardized curricula and hurried pace of classroom routines and transitions, children received less personalized attention in whole group, didactic learning experiences. The researchers concluded that impoverished children who receive considerable individual attention in smaller group settings make considerable learning readiness gains as evidenced in opportunities for peer interactions and instructional scaffolding. Thus, suggesting that free play when accompanied by high quality adult and peer interactions is most conducive to children's learning and later school readiness. Similar to prior studies, the present case under study shows that Katie and Sarah beliefs about children influence their instructional practices, which adversely impacts children's development in spite of their intent to ensure children learn.

Responding to English language learners

Many researchers have argued that effective educators respond to cultural and linguistic differences in children served in the early care and educational setting. Because of the impact of culture and language on children's learning, scholars have examined teacher beliefs and practices in responding to cultural and linguistic diversity with sensitivity to differences (Cheatham & Jimenez-Silva, 2012; Hanson and Gutierrez, 1997;

Hanson & Lynch, 1992; Holloway, Rambaud, Fuller, & Eggers-Pierola, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Miller & Vortuba-Drzal, 2012). As reflected in the findings of this study, however, early childhood educators' beliefs about children are essential in understanding a teacher sensitivity to diversity as well as an educator's disposition to effectively promote children's growth and development. Such perspectives are revealed in the diverse beliefs and corresponding actions of the early childhood educator's in attending to the needs of English language learners in the present case under study.

In accordance to Espinosa (2008), preschool age children possess a capacity to develop and interpret linguistic and contextual clues in multiple languages, which implies that effective educators align curricula and instructional practices to familiar cultural and linguistic references while immersing children in early reading, listening, and speaking activities to maintain a child's home language and to support early fluency in English. Lena, Sarah, and Yulenia acknowledge and respond to cultural and linguistic differences with knowledge and sensitivity to differences. Although Lena and Sarah are not bilingual, each educator attempts to communicate in English and Spanish while working with children identified as English language learners. There are five English Language Learners enrolled in Sarah and Yulenia's preschool classroom and instructional support for English Language Learners is evident in practice. In accordance with the literature, English language classrooms present numerous challenges among children for whom English is a second language including the ability to interact with peers and adults in varied learning experiences resulting in feelings of social isolation (Sowa, 2009) Responding to children in their home language, Yulenia communicates with children in their home language. Under her direction, small group instruction, free choice interest

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areas and performance assessments are presented in English and Spanish. Yulenia creates opportunities for children to share and work together on projects in the preschool classroom while providing a positive and emotionally supportive context for English language learners. Reflecting her beliefs, Yulenia acknowledges cultural and linguistic diversity and reveals a deeper self awareness of cultural differences. "I share the same language with these children but we are not the same, we come from different places." She reveals that although she and the children speak the same language, they are from diverse countries. Villegas's (2007) narrative study examines such perspectives on culturally relevant teaching. As Villegas claims, culturally relevant teaching requires a broad range of knowledge, skills, and a deeper understanding of how children develop in different cultural settings. Yulenia affirms a growing need for educators to respond to children's language and cultural references aside from language.

Similarly, Sowa (2009) asserts that educational practitioners reflect on personally held beliefs, assumptions, and knowledge to support the academic achievement of linguistically diverse children. Sowa's study indicates the need for educators to adapt child assessments in accordance with culture and language. Reflecting her beliefs, Sarah demonstrates the use of a mathematical performance assessment to accommodate English language learners. Such a perspective reveals that Sarah's beliefs and knowledge of culture and language are reflected in an observable disposition to embrace diversity. Observing Sarah's interactions with an English Language Learner, she fosters children's learning and affirms linguistic diversity.

There are three children identified as English Language Learners enrolled in Katie and Christine's classroom. Reflecting her beliefs, Katie espouses the need to

affirm cultural and linguistic differences. However, there is very limited evidence to suggest that Katie and Christine either acknowledge or support children's cultural and linguistic differences as observed in Katie and Christine's mathematics and language arts literacy lessons. The result is accordant with prior research on addressing the needs of English language learners, which questions the professional judgment and corresponding actions of educators in responding to diverse learners (Johnson & Reiman, 2007). As Johnson and Reiman claim, a disposition to engage students with sensitivity to the diverse needs of learners as expressed with established classroom norms, rules, and routines is evident in a teacher's judgment and corresponding actions.

The need to respond to culturally linguistically and ability diverse children in the preschool setting is relevant to conceptualizing an educators disposition to affirm differences (Barrera, 1993; Brown, Bergen, House, Hittle, & Dickerson, 2000; Hanson & Gutierrez, 1997). Because children from diverse socio cultural environments are enrolled in inclusive preschool settings, researchers have examined how educators nurture children's sense of emotional security requisite to growth and development in the preschool setting because children's language learning and development occurs within the context of culture, home, and community environment. As reflected in the findings of the present case under study, responding to ability diverse children is essential to nurturing children's development in the preschool setting. The educator's in the present case under study espouse the value in accepting, embracing, and supporting children's cultural, linguistic, and ability diverse behaviors. Such perspectives are revealed in the beliefs and observed actions of Lena and Sarah.

Lena is accepting of child differences and provides an emotionally sensitive context for ability diverse children as evidenced in her attempts to communicate with children identified with special needs. There are two children identified with special needs enrolled in Lena's preschool classroom. Among the students one is an English language learner who is selectively mute. Lena consistently encourages the child to communicate and makes it a priority to involve the child in classroom learning experiences. Although Lena is not fluent in a second language, she attempts to communicate with the child using basic vocabulary and key phrases in the child's home language. A second child enrolled in the classroom is classified with special needs and receives in district support services in the preschool classroom. Observing classroom practices, there are no visible differences in the children's ability to participate in regularly scheduled classroom routines, transitions, and varied learning experiences in comparison to other children enrolled in the preschool classroom.

According to Hanson and Gutierrez (1997), a growing number of children are identified with special needs in the early care and educational setting. In their study of culturally, linguistically, and ability diverse children enrolled in early care and educational settings, Hanson and Gutierrez claim that while children benefit from participations in preschool inclusion programs that foster children's cognitive and social emotional development such as a child's sense of belonging in the classroom, few educators provide opportunities for children to participate in small group settings among their peers.

However, as reflected in the present case under study, Sarah and Yulenia promote children's peer interactions and social skills in the preschool classroom. Because

language, culture, and ability can adversely impact children's participation in classroom learning activities, Sarah affirms child differences in the use of small group learning to support children identified with speech and language delays. Sarah provides an inclusive setting that fosters a child's sense of confidence in mastering requisite concepts, skills, and knowledge in listening, speaking, and language development. The result in the present case under study is discordant with Hanson and Gutierrez's findings suggesting that research on affirming differences through the lens of developmentally appropriate practices is essential for ability diverse children in the preschool setting.

Many researchers assert that early care and educational program expectations often differ in accordance with familial beliefs, practices, and expectations because culture, language and lived experiences impact children prior to entering early care and educational settings (Cheatham & Jimenez-Silva, 2012; Espinosa, 2008; Fleer & Hedegaard, 2010; Goodfellow, 2001; Holloway, Rambaurd, Fuller, & Eggers-Pierola, 1995). Such perspectives reveal that early childhood educators possess a greater understanding of children and families served in the early care and educational settings and embrace familial diversity to affirm differences in the aim of child growth and development.

As reflected in the findings of this study, the early childhood educators espouse the value of establishing relationships with families as essential to teaching the preschoolers enrolled in their classrooms. However, the early childhood educators reveal different assumptions about families while expressing their views on working with families in the preschool setting. Katie, Sarah, and Barbara reveal that relationships with parents are an ever present concern. For Katie, the relocation of the school to outside of

the children's home neighborhood is a barrier to establishing relationships with families that hinders Katie's ability to communicate concerns over children's progress. Sarah acknowledges that relationships with parents are difficult. Sarah expresses the difficulty in engaging families, as she is unable to reach parents and families contact parents by email and telephone. Sarah also reveals her beliefs on children's home environments as interfering with children's learning. Sarah openly expresses her difficulty in relating to parents. However, Sarah affirms an understanding of the numerous challenges facing parents in the mostly impoverished community. Reflecting this view, Sarah espouses the value of providing parents with a warm, welcoming environment in an effort to make parents comfortable in the preschool setting. Barbara espouses the need for parental supports in assuring children in the presence of classroom management concerns. Citing concerns over a lack of school resources to engage children and their families, Barbara espouses her desire to observe parent child interactions to better understand children's behaviors in the classroom. Similarly, Ilana shares her beliefs about the affect of children's home lives on child behaviors in the preschool classroom. However, Ilana is familiar with many of families in the neighborhood and acknowledges the need to accept differences among parents and families.

Scholars have examined the influence of diverse geographical contexts on child growth and development to ascertain whether environments impact academic skill development (Hanson & Lynch, 1992; Miller & Votruba-Drzal, 2013). Miller & Votruba-Drzal (2013) argue that geographical differences accounts for access to publicly funded early care and educational program among disadvantaged children and their families. Such perspectives reveal the growing need for educators to holistically address

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child and familial needs through social services in the home and early care and educational setting. Among children living in urban geographical areas, characterized by higher levels of poverty, difficult home environments, and varied caregiver arrangements, a child's ability to adjust to the school setting is subject to an educator's ability to form reciprocal relationships with families in spite of barriers. However, such findings do not preclude the many similarities children along the urban, rural, and suburban continuum share, which suggests that educators embrace familial, and socio cultural differences to accommodate children's academic outcomes across diverse settings.

As reflected in the findings of the present case under study, how children grow and develop in diverse geographical contexts characterized by population, cultural, and socio economic differences can adversely impact cognitive, social and emotional development. The early childhood educators in the present case under study express such differences in varied ways. The educators possess varied views on parents and families, which are informed by their personal beliefs, feelings, and knowledge of the community. Based on their beliefs about families, children's home environment and the educator's own degree of comfort in establishing relationships with families, the educators are revealing their beliefs on perceived disparities in early learning due to parents and families, and socio cultural aspects present in the urban setting.

Since in the view of scholars familial expectations may differ from educators, how parents and families view early care and educational programs impact reciprocal relationships with early childhood educators. Holloway, Rambaud, Fuller, and Eggers-Pierola (1995) argue that maternal views on early care and education are mostly consistent with constructivist or developmental views advocated by scholars in early

childhood education. Holloway, Rambaud, Fuller, and Eggers-Pierola's study indicates that in spite of socio economic differences and levels of maternal education, parents value early care and education as requisite to children's learning in the early care and educational setting as an indicator of a child's future success in the school setting. Such perspectives revealed the sense of trust women placed in their child's early care and educational provider to accommodate the needs of children. Reflecting on curricula and instruction, the researchers determined that women expect educators to engage children in didactic, highly structured instructional lessons aimed at teaching children literacy and numeracy skills while also valuing play, field trips, art, and music in children's early learning experiences. The authors concluded that despite a higher level of knowledge, education and socio economic resources, maternal views on preparing children for school and a willingness to work alongside teachers serves as evidence of the value of children's early care and education. Whether the parents of children enrolled in the preschool setting in the present case under study value early care and education is unclear. Reflecting on the early childhood educator's beliefs, prior research in this topical area indicates that parents value early care and education in spite of assumed familial differences. Therefore, additional research about familial views on preschool education would be necessary in order to deepen an understanding of the nature of such perspectives on affirming relationships with parents and families in the urban context.

However, in contrast to her colleagues, Lena is familiar with many of the children's families enrolled in the preschool setting and believes this serves essential in gaining familial support particularly in resolving classroom management issues. Similar to Sarah, Lena advocates that parents are welcome in the classroom and asserts her belief

that all parents should have opportunities to participate in their children's learning experiences. Lena maintains regular communications with parents and does not believe school and community resources should be a challenge for teachers. As observed in Lena's preschool classroom, a table with parent communications is displayed at the entrance of the classroom. In accordance with research on affirming differences among diverse families, Lena's beliefs are essential to affirming differences among diverse children and families (Goodfellow, 2001; Kidd, Sanchez, & Thorp, 2008). In their study, Kidd, Sanchez, and Thorp consider cultural self-awareness as requisite to working with culturally, linguistically, socio economically and ability diverse young children and families in the educational setting. Such perspectives reveal that how educators view themselves through the lens of their own cultural identities and in the course of interacting with diverse students in the community, impact beliefs and corresponding actions. In accordance with the research, Lena is revealing personal beliefs that result in culturally responsive engagement with children and families. Because Lena integrates family and culture into the preschool classroom, she is demonstrating sensitivity to differences.

In an urban school context, the need for adequately prepared teachers is a foremost concern. Many scholars have examined the impact of diversity in the educational setting as evidenced in a teacher's cultural knowledge and responsiveness to the needs of students from diverse cultural, linguistic, and socio economic backgrounds and have determined that a sensitivity to context is essential to working with children and families (Burant & Kirby, 2002; Frederick-Steele, 2011; Hughes et al., 2004; Johnson & Reiman, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Lee & Herner-Patnode, 2010; Villegas, 2007). As

reflected in the findings of the present case under study, an early childhood educator's sensitivity to context is essential to understanding an educator's disposition in serving diverse learners. Such perspectives are revealed in the feelings, experiences, and professional knowledge of the early childhood educators as observed in their interpersonal interactions in the urban preschool setting serving mostly impoverished children and families.

For Sarah, teachers make a difference in the lives of children. However, Sarah expresses that teaching children in an urban setting is challenging and that such challenges differ across urban and suburban educational settings relevant to children's prior knowledge, behaviors, and subsequent classroom management issues. As Talbert-Johnson (2006) asserts, highly qualified educators of diverse learners in urban settings should possess an essential understanding of diversity requisite to responding to children with knowledge and empathy for learners. In accordance with Talbert-Johnson's findings, Sarah is a highly qualified preschool educator who possesses an understanding of the larger social context in which she serves as an educator of preschool age children. Recognizing the uniqueness of the culturally, linguistically, and ability diverse children enrolled in the preschool classroom, Sarah is responsive to child differences as evidenced in her knowledge of content area instruction and subject matter.

Whereas Sarah demonstrates an awareness of diversity present in the preschool setting, Katie appears to lack sensitivity to context. Talbert-Johnson refers to an educator's individual capacity to communicate content knowledge with skill and to demonstrate a greater sense of accountability for learners. Katie appears reluctant to respond to the diverse needs of children and often relies on highly structured,

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developmentally inappropriate practices to support children's learning needs which reveals that Katie may hold deficit views on teaching young children in an urban geographical setting (Cook & Van Cleaf, 2000; Milner, 2006; Nieto, 2006; Sockett, 2009).

Scholars assert that how educators think, act, and respond in the educational setting is subject to an individual's professional knowledge, personal identity, and self-awareness that represent multiple domains including intellect, culture, and moral virtues (Kidd, Sanchez, & Thorp, 2008; Schussler, Stooksberry, & Bercaw, 2010). Kidd, Sanchez, and Thorp claim that cultural awareness and responsiveness to culturally, linguistically, socio economically and ability diverse children and their families is a learned disposition that results from professional knowledge, pedagogy, direct engagement and reflective practice. The researchers' findings suggest that to meet the learning needs of diverse learners, educators consider themselves in the context of their cultural identity rather than perceiving diversity in the educational setting as an obligation of teaching that often results in cultural stereotyping, a prevalent concern for schools and communities serving diverse learners and families which creates tension in the classroom. Such a perspective reveals that diversity as viewed through the lens of an educator's personal cultural identity impacts how educators respond to differences.

As reflected in the findings of the present case under study, the early childhood educators represent a diverse group of individuals with varying experiences and professional knowledge. Concerning their own cultural identities, the educators reveal the uniqueness of their beliefs about children and families in relation to their own cultural

identities. Barbara, Lena, and Yulenia acknowledge diversity in the context of their identities in contrast to Sarah and Katie who acknowledge that differences exist.

However, it is Barbara who readily acknowledges diversity in the context of her own cultural identity and family heritage in relation to children's observed behaviors in the preschool classroom. For Barbara, one of five children in a large Irish Catholic family has proven to be an asset in teaching young children. Citing concerns over children's conversations and actions at play including children's unwillingness to share toys and materials, Barbara acknowledges the differences between the preschoolers enrolled in her class in relationship to her own experiences sharing with her siblings as a child.

Similar to Barbara, Lena, an African American female, acknowledges diversity is in the context of her own identity as an African American female and mother relating the desire to demonstrate care, concern, and sensitivity towards children whereas Yulenia, children's similarities and differences are revealed through language. Yulenia acknowledges diversity in the construct of language. Yulenia asserts that while she shares a language with children in the preschool setting, cultural differences exist due to the diversity in the children's countries of origin. The finding is discordant with prior research on diversity in the educational setting. In a (2010) study, Lee and Herner-Patnode claim that educators solely consider visible aspects of cultural diversity including race.

For Katie, diversity is described as children imitating and mimicking her words, gestures and behaviors. She believes the children appreciate her quiet personality in the preschool classroom. While Sarah acknowledges she is different from the children and families in her preschool classroom, she describes diversity in the context of tensions in

establishing relationships with families. Similar to the participants in Kidd, Sanchez, and Thorp's (2008) study, the present case under study confirm that early childhood beliefs about diverse children and their families are an influencing factor in how the early childhood educator's perceive and respond to differences.

Nieto (2006) advocates that educators possess heart, conviction, and the courage in the service of teaching diverse learners. With passion for social justice in the educational setting, equal to subject matter knowledge, pedagogical skills, and strong communication and organizational skills in the classroom, responsiveness to students and a deep sense of care serves as a measure of a teacher's conviction that education is a profession of service requiring educators ensure that every child is valued and respected in the classroom as evidenced through teacher traits including empathy, knowledge, courage, and respect for differences. Because children experiences in the preschool setting tend to represent a child's initial experiences outside of the home environment, effective early childhood educators act to ensure children's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical needs are met in the preschool setting. As reflecting in the findings, each of the early childhood educators affirms the value of nurturing children with care, concern, and sensitivity in the aim of fostering child growth and development. Such perspectives reveal that educators consider care in the profession of teaching as a humanistic endeavor, characterized by awareness, knowledge, and responsiveness to children's developmental needs (Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Swick, 2007).

Lena's beliefs about caring for children suggest that Lena acknowledges the holistic nature of early care and education. With an emphasis on children's health, welfare, and immediate needs in the preschool setting, Lena espouses a broader concern

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for children. Katie places a high value on kind gestures and affection as expressions of care that foster meaningful relationships with children. Christine advocates that children enrolled in the preschool setting need proper care. For Barbara, love, attention, and listening to children are requisite to children's development. Colker's (2008) study asserts that an early care and educational practitioners' desire to enter the profession to love and nurture children represents much more than caring for adorable children and includes an authentic desire to inspire children's learning. In accordance with Colker's study, early childhood educators often possess emotional and spiritual character traits unique to those entering the profession of early childhood in concert with a desire impart pedagogical knowledge. Colker affirms that desire on the part of early childhood educators, described as passion, joy, patience, drive, dedication, and perseverance, is evident in practice because young children possess an intuit understanding of an adults disposition to demonstrate genuine care and concern. Such perspectives are revealed in the present case under study.

As Sarah describes, being helpful to children and ensuring children are happy and successful are integral to the role of early childhood educator. However, in contrast to her colleagues, Sarah does not espouse beliefs about warm interactions and physical gestures of affection. Rather, Sarah advocates for teacher modeling to foster children's appreciation for the school setting. Scholars assert that caring for students is an internal and learned characteristic influenced by an educator's personal beliefs and lived experiences.

As reflected in Sarah's beliefs, Webb and Blond (1995) claim that teachers who value students' lived experiences and affirm student needs, interests, and abilities

demonstrate concern for students in the educational setting. Considering the complexities of establishing trusting relationships with students, the authors assert that relationships with students require knowledge, thoughtfulness and intention on the part of educators, which serves to influence classroom decisions particularly in student choice and personal responsibility for knowledge and learning. Concerning intellect and thoughtfulness in classroom decisions, Goldstein's (1998) study examines the ethic of care in the early care and educational setting in the construct of developmentally appropriate practice that make explicit the important role played by caring early childhood educators in the early childhood learning environment. The author determined that demonstrations of care be relevant to children's developmental abilities, interests, and learning needs suggesting that an early childhood practitioners' intellect forms the basis of a caring centered curricula which is responsive to children's needs and reliant upon a teacher's investment in children and willingness to nurture children's learning. Such perspectives reflect Sarah's beliefs and corresponding actions.

Each of the early childhood educators demonstrate interpersonal interactions centered on an ethic of care, concern, and emotional affect as evidenced in observed practices. However, the present case under study proves that educators often possess requisite knowledge that is unrealized in instructional practice. Many scholars assert that nurturing young children ensures a young child's sense of well being, safety, and secure attachment to adults in the educational setting (Howes & Smith, 1995; Kugelmass & Ross-Bernstein, 2000). Such perspectives are revealed in how each of the educators individually interacts with children. Lena, Barbara, Ilana, and Yulenia demonstrate great concern, care, and attentiveness to children as evidenced in frequent warm, nurturing

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interactions and physical gestures of affection. In a 2012 study, Sidle-Fuligni et al. found that emotionally responsive interactions promote child growth and learning in the early care and educational setting. The researcher's claim that children's engagement in classroom routines, learning experiences and instructional time are influenced by the type and amount of time educators spend interacting with children across varied learning experiences including free choice play.

Lena, Barbara, Ilana, and Yulenia demonstrate emotionally responsive interactions throughout a variety of instructional groupings. With warmth, each of the educators frequently interacts with children for extended periods of classroom time. However, it is Lena who engages children in lively and engaging classroom activities to foster children's peer relations in smaller group settings while carefully listening and expanding upon children's verbal responses which are recorded onto anecdotal records.

Consistent with her beliefs, Sarah maintains a higher degree of structure and emphasis on classroom rules and procedures to ensure positive child behaviors. Vitiello, Booren, Downer, and Williford (2012) assert that how preschool teachers organize instructional time, group sizes, and learning activities in consideration of child factors including age and gender, influence a child's willingness to positively engage in classroom tasks with teachers and among peers. Acknowledging individual child differences, the researchers determined that individual children uniquely respond to varied learning experiences throughout the course of the preschool day, which suggests a higher degree of sensitivity and responsiveness on the part of educators. In accordance with the author's findings, Sarah frequently engages children in highly structured, large instructional groupings which results in minimal opportunities for children to positively

engage with adults and peers which results in children's challenging behaviors adversely impacting classroom engagement.

In contrast to her their colleagues, Katie and Christine's interactions are markedly different. The nature of Katie and Christine's interpersonal interactions with children are inconsistent and very limited to highly structured classroom learning experiences and verbal prompts and directions. Rather than extending conversations with children throughout the preschool day, the classroom climate is sullen and appears limiting to children's social and emotional development. Howes and Smith's (1995) prior study reveals such findings on children's play in the early care and educational setting. In the authors study, child development and secure attachment to adults is considered requisite to children's play across content areas and learning domains. The authors assert that a child's sense of safety, security, and trust is determined by an educator's responsiveness to children's needs as characterized by a willingness to respond to children in prolonged conversations at play accompanied by warm, nurturing, and sensitive interactions in contrast to teachers exhibiting a harsh tone, willingness to provide only short verbal prompts and answers to children's questions. The authors found that educators were insensitive to children's cultural norms including eye contact and displays of affection. They concluded that a willingness to listen, engage, and respond to children is as integral to an educator's disposition as the ability to plan and provide appropriate learning experiences for children given that other conditions such as properly equipped classrooms and resource rich environments for children and early care and educational practitioners are in place in the early learning setting.

In summary, the early childhood educators consider differences among children and families in their roles in teaching young children in the urban preschool setting. However, they articulate differing beliefs on the value of affirming differences among children and families along the dimensions of gender, ethnicity, race, language, and socio economic background and lived experience. The major findings in relation to the to affirming differences among children and families are the diverse beliefs of the educators relative to observed practices. Such perspectives are evidenced in the findings on affirming differences as embedded in curriculum and instruction, supports for English language learners, and nurturing children's development with care, concern, and sensitivity to differences.

Creating a Classroom Context for Children's Development

In the early care and educational setting, the early learning classroom environment serves to provide a physically stimulating and engaging format for all children to learn, grow, and develop in the preschool setting (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Because children develop at varying rates, early childhood educators are given charge to cultivate a classroom context for children's development across a variety of content areas and learning domains which accommodates children's engagement in a variety of groupings including self selected learning areas. It is assumed that early childhood educators possess requisite child development knowledge to create an engaging classroom context to foster a variety of learning experiences to meet children's developmental needs.

Abundant with materials, resources, and equipment for children's learning presented in varied instructional areas, it is assumed that early childhood educators

intentionally select materials, resources, and thoughtfully plan developmentally appropriate activities to facilitate children's learning interests, needs, and unique abilities. Reflecting the diversity in the community and representing children's family, culture, and language to promote a child's sense of belonging consistent with principles of child centered practice, it is assumed early childhood educator create a physically and emotive environment to promote reciprocal interactions that support a child's social and emotional development among adults and their peers.

Analyzing the data, the early childhood educators reveal more similarities than differences in the arrangement of classroom space to support children's learning as evidenced in materials to accommodate a variety of groupings including free choice play across content specific areas and learning domains. However, the early childhood educators reveal more differences than similarities in the use of classroom space to accommodate children's learning which serves relevant to understanding the early childhood educator's disposition to implement developmentally appropriate practice in the preschool setting. I discuss the findings in relation to the empirical research and scholarly literature on creating a classroom community to support children's growth and development in the early care and educational setting in relation to developmentally appropriate practice.

First, the early childhood educators consider classroom context as integral to children's development as demonstrated in arranging materials, resources, and equipment for children's learning based on children's interests and abilities. Secondly, although the early childhood educators articulate child centered beliefs, the educators demonstrate dissimilar practices as evidenced in their use of materials, space and equipment to foster

children's growth and development in the preschool setting. Third, although the early childhood educator's prepare lessons for children in varied instructional groupings, the educators differ in their interactions with children as evidenced in a variety of formats including free choice play, large group instruction, and small group learning experiences to enhance children's development and learning.

Scholars advocate the early care and educational settings meet children's developmental needs for safety, security, and well being. Such perspectives reveal that early care and educational classroom settings mirror a child's home environment including cultural references. Rich with opportunities to successfully develop, early learning environments affect the care and education children receive in the early learning setting. Many researchers have examined the impact of materials, resources, and equipment on children' individual learning experiences because physically stimulating and emotionally supportive classrooms support's children's cognitive, social and emotional growth and development (Clifford, Reszka, & Rossback, 2010; Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 2004; Sylva et al., 2006).

Slutsky and Pistorova (2010) study claims that authentic, intentional, and supportive early learning environments positively influence children's learning outcomes if the physical and emotive classroom environment is considered as a third teacher to support language rich instruction and opportunities for play in the early learning setting.

> When the environment is perceived with such intent, it has the potential to illustrate the value we place on all our children, their families, and the teachers within a community of learners. The environment becomes more than simply a space, but also takes on the role of a third teacher. Creating an aesthetic space that reflects the children and the community supports and stimulates the relationships and interactions of children within their cultural context (p. 50).

The researcher's determined that teacher commitment, professional knowledge and a desire to holistically nurture children's sense of curiosity begins with a high quality physical environment wherein all children feel successful.

As reflected in the findings of the present case under study, the early childhood educators strive to create a classroom community for children's learning. The results are mostly accordant with prior studies on the impact of the environment to support children's growth and development (Sylva et al., 2006). The preschool classrooms are conducive to children's engagement in a variety of groupings including whole group, small group, and individualized instruction. Free choice play materials are evident in most of the classrooms and serve to support children's development across varied content areas and learning domains including mathematics, science, language arts literacy, and the creative arts. Many materials support children's natural inclination for play and reflect children's developmental stages, interests, and abilities requisite to early learning.

To accommodate a child's sense of belonging, several classrooms contain soft furnishings, and areas for child privacy offer opportunities for children to sit quietly away from other children and reflect upon their learning in a comfortable, home like environment for young children. Also present in most of the classrooms are items including photographs, children's literature, and cultural references including familiar foods reflecting the diversity within the community. Many displays are labeled with pictures and word in English and Spanish. Such print rich environments include classroom displays of children's two and three dimensional artwork, vocabulary, and directional signs in the form of teacher made charts and graphic organizers to accompany relatively current project based studies in accordance with the curriculum. In three of the

four classrooms, a child friendly pictorial instructional schedule depicts a general sequence of classroom events and learning experiences, which are posted at a child's eye level. The instructional schedule reads from left to right, in time sequence, and includes photographs of the preschoolers engaged in various learning activities to support a child's understanding of classroom routines, transitions, and learning experiences.

Unfortunately, however, the findings from this study reveal that such perspectives are not consistent in all of the preschool classrooms. Barbara and Ilana's preschool classroom is markedly different from their colleagues. Barbara and Ilana's learning environment lacks materials, furniture, equipment, and children's literature to foster child engagement in a variety of interest areas. There are five separate learning areas that encompass mathematics and manipulatives, language arts literacy, dramatic play, block building, and the visual arts, however, many interest areas are lacking materials, resources and classroom equipment and there are many empty furniture shelves in each of the learning areas including dramatic play, which is void of materials for imaginary play. Considering the classroom arrangement, there is very little variety in materials to accommodate children's learning in Barbara and Ilana's classroom. There are very few classroom displays including children's artwork, vocabulary, photographs, and directional signs in the form of teacher made charts and graphic organizers to accompany current and prior project based studies and very few materials and resources are labeled for children's independent use in each of the free choice interest areas. The classroom lacks a child friendly instructional schedule and there is very limited evidence of diversity displayed in the preschool classroom.

Katie and Christine's preschool classroom is also lacking in materials, resources, and equipment to foster children's engagement in varied learning experiences. Although there are five separate learning areas that encompass language arts literacy, mathematics and manipulatives, block building, dramatic play and the creative arts, many play materials, resources, and equipment are inaccessible to children which adversely affect opportunities for children to explore, imagine, and play comfortably with their peers. The classroom lacks a clearly defined area with soft furnishings for child privacy, hindering children's opportunities for privacy and reflection. Classroom displays and materials are labeled in English and Spanish and there is evidence of diversity displayed in photographs. While there are numerous print rich classroom displays including children's two-dimensional artwork, vocabulary, photographs, and directional signs, many displays appear hidden behind classroom furnishings.

In accordance with research, children's access and opportunities to experience varied learning activities are requisite to child growth and development. Researchers assert that children have ample opportunities to experience varied active and engaging learning activities to develop content area skills and knowledge childhood educators in an emotionally supportive classroom context (Justice, Mashburn, Hamre, & Pianta, 2007; Ostrosky, Gaffney, & Thomas, 2006; Wolfgang, Stannard, & Jones, 2009).

Jeon et al. (2010) assert that child learning outcomes are strongly influenced by children's personal characteristics and classroom quality as characterized by reciprocal interactions and developmentally appropriate learning experiences. The researchers found that children's access to resources and use of the early learning environment as measured through materials alone, did not support high quality individual experiences. The author's

determined that an early childhood educator's intentions; to create learning environments and to facilitate small group classroom learning experiences characterized by meaningful, reciprocal interactions assure that children are fully engaged in classroom learning experiences and play based learning activities.

In a (2008) narrative study, Goldstein asserts that children's learning is influenced by prior knowledge, familial background, culture, and lived experience. Therefore, materials, resources, and equipment for young children should provide children's with opportunities for developmentally appropriate learning experiences that celebrate children's preferences and interests. Responding to children, Goldstein (2008) asserts that intentionally planned learning experiences and reciprocal interactions support children's learning goals and expectations as expressed in early learning standards often advocated in public educational settings, thereby supporting child centered, developmentally appropriate practice. In contrast to Goldstein's assertions, Stipek (2006) claims that standards based early childhood education hinders children's development. Stipek argues that an increased emphasis on academic skill development as articulated in early learning standards causes children considered at risk for learning difficulties due to poverty and lived experience to perform poorly in language arts literacy and mathematics. Stipek suggests that clearly articulated early learning standards support the developmental skills, abilities, and interests of young children in an emotionally supportive classroom context. Stipek acknowledges that although developmentally appropriate learning experiences require a great deal of effort and motivation on the part of early childhood practitioners, standards based early learning can be embedded in meaningful, play like learning experiences which ensure children's learning needs are met.

As reflected in the findings of the present case under study, the early childhood educators articulate child centered beliefs and demonstrate dissimilar practices as evidenced in their use of the classroom environment to foster children's growth and development in the preschool setting. Such perspectives reveal that although the early childhood educators have created early learning environment conducive to authentic learning experiences, they demonstrate dissimilar use of the classroom environment to support developmentally appropriate practices. Thus, although the finding supports the ideal of the environment as integral to children's learning, additional studies are necessary to deepen an understanding about the nature of the environment in conceptualizing an educator's disposition.

The early childhood educators share an instructional schedule with designated instructional periods for free choice play, specialist areas, classroom routines and transitions, and varied learning experiences including music movement. An instructional period is allotted for free choice play twice daily. The free choice play period occurs during specialist area instructional time which appears to hinder opportunities for children to engage in sustained free choice learning experiences with adult guidance since the specialist area teachers appear unfamiliar with the curriculum. Routines and transitions occur frequently as children move from the classroom to specialist area instructional classrooms and lavatories located outside of the classroom. Lunch periods also occur outside of the classroom, which hinders children's opportunities to engage in extended conversations with their peers and among adults. However, most children enrolled in the four the preschool classrooms appear at ease during classroom routines, transitions, and learning experiences.

Sarah and Yulenia implement the instructional schedule. Although, Sarah believes she demonstrates flexibility in adhering to the instructional schedule based on the learning needs of children Sara appears less flexible in adhering to instructional time periods and often appears hurried to complete planned learning experiences. The most discordant use of instructional time occurs in Katie and Christine's preschool classroom. Although a child friendly instructional schedule is displayed in the classroom reflecting a daily time schedule of activities in accordance with the district's guidelines for preschool classrooms, the instructional schedule is not implemented in accordance with district mandates for early childhood education (Appendix L).

As the findings of the present case under study reflect, Barbara and Ilana's classroom environment is conducive to a variety of instructional groupings. Many learning experiences are facilitated in small group settings under Barbara and Ilana's guidance. Children are permitted to move freely about free choice interest areas. Children's needs, interests, and abilities are celebrated and encouraged through conversations with adults and among their peers. Barbara and Ilana spend instructional time engaging and extending conversations with children in the preschool classroom. However, adult conversations often disrupt children's learning and intentionally planned learning experiences do not appear fully developed to support learning outcomes.

For Lena, children's engagement in varied instructional grouping occurs in accordance with the instructional curriculum. Lena intentionally plans interest areas designated for children to work in pairs away from the larger group setting during free choice play to encourage social relationships. Considering the arrangement of space, children's needs, interests, and abilities are accommodated at varied interest areas. Many

learning experiences occur in a variety of instructional groupings including small group

instruction and throughout free choice play experiences. Child interests are supported and

encouraged through ongoing conversations, which occur frequently in Lena's preschool

classroom as children engage in a variety of whole group, small group and free choice

play learning experiences.

Sarah and Yulenia engage children in a variety of learning experiences in

accordance with the instructional curriculum. Sarah offers children opportunities for

buddy play and reports that she regularly sets up learning activities for pairs of children.

Considering the arrangement of classroom space, children's needs, interests, and abilities

are accommodated at varied interest areas. Many learning experiences occur in a variety

of instructional groupings and throughout free choice play experiences, classroom

routines, and whole group instructional settings. However, Sarah does rely on lengthy,

whole group instruction to foster children's academic skill development. Child interests

are supported and encouraged through ongoing conversations, which occur frequently in

Sarah and Yulenia's preschool classroom. Sarah and Yulenia's intentionally plan small

group instructional experiences to support the learning needs of ability diverse learners.

The instructional groupings are heterogeneous and children identified with special needs

participate in small group instructional lessons along with their peers.

Katie and Christine's use of classroom space is limiting to children's play,

classroom routines, and a variety of instructional groupings to promote and support

children's development. Although there are many materials, resources and classroom

equipment to stimulate children's engagement in varied learning experiences, Katie and

Christine's actions reflect deficit views on children's developmental needs, interests, and

abilities. Many learning experiences occur in structured, teacher directed whole group instructional settings and Katie often splits the class into two groups for instructional lessons. Opportunities for free choice play are limited and children are not permitted to move freely among interest areas during the play period. Frequently children are reprimanded and both Katie and Christine discipline children's behaviors, rather than engaging children in extended conversations at play.

The result is accordant with prior research on early childhood educators' child centered beliefs and corresponding instructional practices (Ostrosky, Gaffney, & Thomas, 2006). Katie and Christine actions do not support a child's need for exploration, inquiry, and concrete learning experiences which necessitates early childhood educators to intentionally plan and create learning experiences for children reflecting children's developmental needs, interests, and abilities. Ryan (2004) asserts that children grow and develop through personal interactions with physical materials, concrete learning experiences and through application of ideas. Such a perspective reveals that the promotion of child centered, developmentally appropriate practice is not curriculum specific. In the 2004 study, Ryan articulates the experiences of preschool educators implementing a prescribed curriculum model. The curriculum identifies key learning experiences framed around daily routines, transitions, and activities for children wherein preschool teachers assume a facilitative role in supporting children's learning. The researcher found that that teacher responsiveness to curricula mandates varied on the basis of personal beliefs and experiences. Such perspectives revealed that teacher beliefs on readiness fostered highly structured, teacher directed instruction in specific academic skill development. However, the researcher found that preschool teachers were confused

on how to build learning experiences around children's interests that resulted in many teacher determined, highly structured whole group learning experiences. Ryan determined that mandated curriculum models do not guarantee teacher compliance with policies regarding pedagogy.

On the merits of responding to children's interests, skills, and abilities, Ostrosky, Gaffney & Thomas (2006) also prove that authentic conversations with adults and peers in the early childhood setting support children's early development in content area instruction while addressing the social and emotional needs of developing children. The researchers found that caring relationships with adults support children's emergent literacy skills in contrast to academic skill development. The researchers determined that children's learning is either supported by caring, knowledgeable, skillful teachers or hindered in the early learning environment due to a teacher lack of child development knowledge requisite to cognitive, social and emotional instructional learning experiences.

In summary, the early childhood educators consider classroom context as integral to children's development as demonstrated in arranging materials, resources, and equipment for children's learning based on children's interests and abilities. Thus, although the findings of this study supports the ideal of materials, resources, and equipment to support children's early growth and development in a variety of instructional groupings, additional empirical studies about the nature of play and reciprocal interactions are necessary to deepen an understanding of the value of the early learning environment to foster children's learning interests, needs, and unique abilities.

The early childhood educators articulate child centered beliefs that are mostly demonstrated in the use of materials, space and equipment to foster children's growth and

development in the preschool setting. However, the findings from this study reveal that the early childhood educators differ in their interactions with children as evidenced in a variety of formats including free choice play, large group instruction, and small group learning experiences to enhance children's development and learning.

Intentionality in Planned Learning Experiences for Children

The early childhood educators are given charge to plan learning experiences for children across varied content areas and domains of learning as aligned to early learning standards set forth in the district's curriculum guidelines to foster children's understanding of key concepts, skills, and knowledge (Epstein, 2007). Because children develop at varying rates, early chilhdood educators recognize and respond to children's learning needs to engage and encourage children's learning and development. It is assumed that early childhood educators are knowledgable practicioners who purposefully and thoughtfully plan learning experences across content areas and learning domains to scaffold children's learning providing support to children to enable every child to make progress in the preschool setting.

The notion of intentionality in early childhood curricula implies that early childhood educators act with knowledge to purposefully plan and implement teaching and learning experiences across domains of learning including a child's social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development and across content specific areas of learning including technology (Epstein, 2007). It is assumed that that early childhood educators integrate planned teaching and learning experiences with ongoing assessments of children including observations of children at play using a variety of methods that

account for the diversity present in the preschool setting including ability diverse children and English language learners.

The early childhood educators follow a prescribed curriculum to intentionally plan learning experiences for children across varied subject areas and learning domains as aligned to early learning standards set forth in the district's curriculum guidelines. Because of the holistic nature of early childhood education, it is assumed that early childhood educators consider the curriculum as they meaningful interact with children in varied classroom routines, transitions, and instructional groupings to observe and assess children's understanding of key concepts, skills, and knowledge.

Analyzing the data, the early childhood educators reveal more differences than similarities in planned learning experiences to meet the developmental needs of individual children enrolled in the preschool classroom. Considering the curriculum, the early childhood educators mostly plan learning experiences that effectively implement comprehensive curricula for young children. However, the educators demonstrate diverse content area knowledge and pedagogical skills in accordance with their beliefs, which serves relevant to understanding an early childhood educator's disposition to child centered practices that affirm differences among children in the preschool setting. I discuss the findings in relation to the empirical research and scholarly literature on teacher knowledge, skills, abilities, and developmental understanding of children.

First, the most salient difference among the early childhood educators is how each educator intentionally plans for learning experiences which foster children's engagement in learning experiences while scaffolding children's learning across a variety of content areas and learning domains as aligned to the curriculum. Second, the early childhood

educators demonstrate disimilar teaching methods in accordance with their beliefs about children's learning. Third, although the early childhood educator's intentionally plan learning experiences for children across varied content areas and domains of learning in varied instructional groupings; the educators differ on engaging children in meaningful, relevant, learning experiences to achieve learning goals for children as aligned to the curriculum.

Researchers advocate that preschool education positively impacts children's development particularly among children from diverse backgrounds including socio economically disadvantaged children and families (Ackerman, 2004; Barnett, 2008; Magnuson, Meyers, Ruhm & Waldfogel, 2004) . Because of the increasing need for early care and educational programs, many advocates of early childhood education have examined how early childhood programs serve children's needs holistically across the social, emotional, and cognitive domains in an effort to promote quality in the early care and educational setting. Such perspectives reveal that knowledge, teacher qualifications, educational context, and culturally relevant pedagogy serve as measures of teacher quality along with affective traits such as care, concern, responsiveness, and sensitivity towards learners.

Scholars advocate that early childhood practitioner knowledge impacts children's learning in the early care and educational setting (Brown, Bergen, House, Hittle, & Dickerson, 2000; Fails-Nelson & Roger, 2010; McMullen, 1999; McMullen & Alat, 2002; Prawat, 1992; Shulman, 1987; Thornton, 2006; Wien, 1996). Paraprofessionals also serve integral to meeting the needs of children and families in the early care and educational setting. Although research on the role of paraprofessionals in the field of

early childhood minimally exists, studies have examined the beliefs and practices of teacher assistants and have determined that paraprofessionals possess varying beliefs, and abilities because of a lack of opportunities for further education and professional development particularly due to language barriers and socio economic concerns (Ackerman, 2004; Han & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2010).

The early childhood educators in the present case under study appear as knowledgable practicioners given charge to purposefully and thoughtfully plan preschool learning experinces for diverse learners enrolled in their preschool classrooms. As reflected in the findings, the most salient difference among the early childhood educators is how the educators is intentionally plan and implement integrated content area learning experiences to foster positive learning outcomes for children. Lena and Sarah demonstrate considerable child development knowledge and effort in planning and implementing a variety of learning experiences to foster children's engagement in varied integrated learning experiences across content areas and learning domains as aligned to the preschool curriculum.

Drawing on child development knowledge, Lena and Sarah demonstrate instructional strategies which support childrens' learning needs, interests, and abililities best exemplyfing intentionality in planned learning experiences in early childhood. In constrast, Barbara appears to lack pedagogical skills and knowledge requisite to fully developing intentional learning experiences for children informed by children's children's needs, interests, and abilities. However, she appears earnest in her desire to foster children's cognitive, social, and emotional development and children's learning is encouraged and celebrated in varied instructional groupings including small group

instructional and free choice play. There is limited evidence to support intentionality on the part of Katie to purposefully plan and implement integrated content area learning expereinces aside from whole group language arts literacy instruction. Such findings are accordant with prior studies on teacher knowledge (Gordon & Fittler, 2004; Shulman, 1987; Thornton, 2006).

Lena and Sarah demonstrate proficiency in intentionally planning learning experiences for children that foster children's engagement across a vareity of integrated content areas including language arts literacy, science, social studies and music and movement as presented in variety of groupings. For Lena, children's engagement is strongly encouraged throughout planned learning experiences and is evident at large group and small group learning experiences which occur during free choice play. During large group learning experiences, Lena supports children's communication and language through the use of thematic vocabularly, literature, and music and movement activities to accompany learning experiences for children. While children are engaged in free choice play activities, Lena demonstrate encourages children's independence and often scaffolds information for children with varying abilities. Observing Lena's instruction, she documents children's learning through infornmal and formal assessments measures.

In the case of Sarah with the support of Yulenia, children's learning occurs in a variety of learning experiences which foster children's knowledge of mathematics, social studies, and music and movement learning experiences. Observing Sarah and Yulenia, planned learning experiences account for individual differences including language and children identified with special needs. Respect for differences are evident in Sarah and Yulenia's considerable efforts to foster children's growth and learning in an inclusive

environment for children identified with special needs and among English learners. Many learning experiences are integrated and include technology and the creative arts. Children's responses to throughtfully planned open ended questions are evident throughout learning experiences.

Among the educators, Sarah demonstrates a greater degree of proficiency in implementing the curriculum framework to engage children in a variety of intentional free choice play, small group instruction, and whole group learning experiences integral to children's development across content areas and learning domains to stimulate children's curiosity, interests, and exploration of materials. While Sarah demonstrates proficiency in implementing the curriculum to support children's knowledge, Yulenia demonstrates a sensitivity to English language learners while engaging children in extended conversations to promote communication and language development. Observing Sarah and Yulenia, child assessments are ongoing and include formal and informal assessment measures.

As Thornton explains, teacher beliefs and instructional practices significantly influence student learning outcomes. Educators who exhibit traits including knowledge, pedagogical skill, and responsiveness to students promote critical thinking and inquiry oriented dialogue in an empowered classroom setting for educators and students alike. Shulman's (1987) study also asserts that teacher knowledge wholly represents the capacity of practitioners to enact instructional practices requiring teachers to possess a complex body of knowledge and requisite skills in order to function as an effective teacher. However, Shulman's assertion recognizes knowledge as a foremost concern while acknowledging that competent, effective teachers possess qualities, traits, and

sensibilities as evidenced in classroom teaching. Such a perspective reveals that an educator's capacity to instruct students involves opportunities for learning that begins with teacher knowledge categorized as content, general pedagogical knowledge, classroom management, and organizational skills to integrate content knowledge with pedagogy to meet the diverse interests and abilities of learners across varied contexts including the classroom and wider school community. Shulman claims that teaching is a learned profession which requires an in depth understanding of curriculum, materials, and subject matter.

In accordance with Shulman's assertions, Barbara does not appear to possess an in depth understanding of curriculum, materials, and subject matter requisite to meeting the diverse needs, interests, and abilities of preschoolers due to a lack of professional experience and pedagogical knowledge. Because scholars advocate that knowledge is a foremost concern, studies on teacher knowledge have examined how novice educators integrate knowledge of curriculum, culture, and school context to determine the beliefs and practices of educators and have found that awareness of wider socio political concerns and responsiveness to children embedded in practices is evidence of teacher knowledge (Gordon & Fittler, 2004).

However, Barbara with Ilana's support encourages children's active engagement in many small group free choice play experiences that foster children's learning under their guidance. Consistent with Barbara's beliefs about child centered practices, children's interests and abilities are celebrated across a variety of learning experiences including music and movement, language arts literacy, science, and social studies.

Barbara is responsive to children's needs and instructional time is allocated to engage children. There is limited evidence of child assessments using a variety of measures.

In contrast to Barbara, Katie is an experienced educator. As reflected in the findings, Katie believes the curriculum is inadequate in addressing children's individual learning needs. As a result, Katie's planned learning experiences and instructional methods are accordant with her beliefs about children's learning without consideration of children's needs, interests, and abilities particularly among English language learners. Many learning expereinces are highly teacher directed and do not appear sequential in accordance with the curriculum. Children sit for extended periods of instructional time in whole group settings which appears to cause children discomfort due to the varying ages and individual stages of development present in the preschoolers. Because children are expected to be attentive and remain seated during didactic technology, language arts literacy, mathematics, and visual arts learning experiences, Katie with the support of Christine frequently discipline children. Children are discouraged from speaking with their peers and are often called upon to respond to teacher directed questions in lieu of ongoing conversations across a variety of learning experiences. Within the context of teacher directed questions, child responses do not acccurately account for children's individual abilities especially among children who are English language learners and there is very limited evidence of teacher scaffolding. Children are prompted to identify letters, numbers, and words as presented on chart paper, index cards, and verbal questioning. Ongoing assessments of children's learning do not appear evident across varied learning experiences and do not appear to account for the diverse abilities of

English language learners. The result is accordant with prior research about early childhood educators knowledge and beliefs about child centered instructional practice (Shulte, Edick, Edwards, & Mackiel, 2004; Sowa, 2009).

Shulte et al. claim that it is essential to identify an educators' disposition relevant to content knowledge and pedagogical skill in concert with humanistic behaviors including teacher behaviors opinions, attitudes, beliefs and values to determine a teacher's desire to communicate knowledge and to make accommodations for learners. Such a perspective reveals that Katie's beliefs, which are informed by her feelings, experiences, and knowledge, influence her expectations of children.

Among scholars in the field of early childhood education, young children should have ample opportunities to experience a variety of active and engaging learning activities to develop content area skills and knowledge as characterized by intentionally planned, thoughtful, and responsive teaching. Advocates of child-centered approaches to early learning assert that developmentally appropriate practices do not preclude skill development in mathematics and language arts literacy (Goldstein, 2008; Ostrosky, Gaffney, & Thomas, 2006; Stipek, 2006; Wolfgang, Stannard, & Jones, 2009). As reflected in the findings of the present case under study, although the educators' plan learning experiences for children across varied content areas and domains of learning in varied instructional groupings, the educators differ on intentionally planning learning experiences to engage children in meaningful, relevant, experiences as aligned to measurable learning goals for children in accordance with the curriculum (Prawat, 1992; Wien, 1996).

Wien's study claims that educators act accordance to their beliefs and circumstances in the early care and educational setting. In an examination of three early childhood educators, possessing varying abilities, knowledge and professional development, a need to adhere to instructional time, program structural characteristics, and teacher beliefs resulted in appropriate and inappropriate classroom practices. Such perspectives revealed that educators are conflicted about child centered developmentally appropriate practices. Prawat's study confirms that teacher beliefs positively or aversively affect child centered, constructivist practices in the early learning classroom. The author suggests that although delivery of content, curriculum, and integrated content area instruction burdens teachers to make learning meaningful and relevant to children, child centered practices serve essential to an individual child's sense of freedom to explore, ask questions, and make mistakes in the early care and educational setting.

Whereas neglecting individual child differences adversely impacts children's development, the educators' unique practices in this study support the significance and necessity of in depth research on the interrelatedness of curricula, pedagogy, and reciprocal interactions in the early care and educational setting to deepen an understanding of the essentiality an early childhood educator's role in nurturing children's growth and development.

Katie's reliance on didactic instructional practices is evident in an unplanned learning experience for children. Katie prompts children to identify letters and numbers displayed on small index cards. While an understanding of understanding of numeracy and numerical operation is requisite to mathematical problem solving and reasoning, rather than engaging children in a meaningful and interesting activity that integrates

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mathematical knowledge across curricula including blocks and building, games, movement activities, and technology, Katie demonstrates her beliefs in academic skill development. Because this learning activity appears to be a missed opportunity for children to learn mathematics and letter knowledge, Katie confirms Wien's and Prawat's assertions about instructional time and confirms how beliefs positively or aversively affect child centered, constructivist practices in the early learning classroom.

Barbara demonstrates how child centered practice integrates content area knowledge and how teacher awareness of children's developmental needs is integrated through varied subject areas including physical education, music and movement, and language arts literacy. Accepting children's responses, Barbara creates a list of vocabulary words that describe exercise in age appropriate vocabulary that stimulates children's interests in a project based study while affirming a child's sense of freedom to explore, ask questions, and make mistakes in the early care and educational setting.

Because teacher beliefs influence the nature of an educator's disposition to embrace children's differences, some scholars advocate early childhood educators value a child's social emotional development in relation to mastery over academic skill development in language arts literacy and mathematics including writing letters and early counting and numeracy. Such a perspective reveals that preschool teachers make a distinction between skills and abilities traditionally thought of as academic and those skills that serve as a precursor to mastery over academic skills in the early care and educational setting (Kowalski, Pretti-Frontczak, & Johnson, 2001; Justice, Mashburn, Hamre, and Pianta, 2007).

In an observation of morning circle, which precedes free choice, play, Lena demonstrates affection for children while children recite thematic vocabulary to accommodate a current project based study. Such a perspective reveals that Lena values children's social emotional development while emphasizing content area knowledge. As she dismisses children to free choice play, Lena quickly facilitates children's learning at several interest areas including block play, creative arts, and dramatic play. Lena demonstrates how child centered pedagogy integrates content area knowledge while displaying an awareness of children's needs, interests, and abilities during free choice play.

A child's freedom to choose, requisite to early childhood curricula, is also evident in Lena's practice. While she has prepared a painting activity for the children in the art area, she also provides various art materials for children choosing to work on their own. While interacting with children at a variety of learning centers, Lena demonstrates an awareness of the entire preschool classroom. While a child in the dramatic play area is attempting to dress herself in a play clothing and boots, Lena watches from a distance. She intervenes only when the child asks for help. Observing Lena, a child who appears disengaged is encouraged to participate in an art activity under Lena's direction and among their peers. Such perspectives reveal Lena's knowledge, beliefs, and disposition to promote the social and emotional development of children relevant to content area instruction that confirms assertions by Kowalski et al. and by Justice et al. (2008) about valuing a child's social emotional development in relation to mastery over academic skills.

Integrating multiple content areas and domains of learning, Sarah and Yulenia provide children with learning experiences that stimulate children's needs, interests, and abilities while fostering children's learning. Sarah demonstrates how instructional practices align to materials, resources and equipment in support of measurable learning outcomes for young children. Observing Sarah's integrated content area lesson including language arts literacy and mathematical reasoning, Sarah displays teacher modeling and use of vocabulary which are research based instructional strategies to promote children's critical thinking skills, phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, print awareness, and mathematical numeracy. Using a calendar displayed on a smart board and a teacher made letter to children, Sarah engages children with her enthusiasm for subject matter. Responding to a child's natural sense of curiosity, Sarah leads children in counting numbers and clapping out days of the month on their knees. Illustrating early literacy skills she prompts children to use their bodies to illustrate punctuation, sentence, structure, and the need to go back and re read what is written. Accepting children's responses, Sarah models early literacy and encourages children. However, exemplary Sarah has a tendency to become impatient with children. Such a diverse perspective is supported in the literature on children's learning in the early care and educational setting (Justice et al., 2008; Kowalski et al., 2001; Prawat, 1992; Wien, 1996).

In summary, the early childhood educators follow a prescribed curriculum to plan learning experiences for children across a variety of content areas and domains of learning as aligned to early learning standards set forth in the district's curriculum guidelines. As reflected in the findings, the most salient difference is how the early childhood educators plan for learning experiences which foster children's engagement in

learning experiences while scaffolding children's learning across a variety of content areas and learning domains as aligned to the curriculum.

The early childhood educators in the present case under study articulate diverse beliefs and cooresponding actions. Such perspectives reflect their beliefs on child centered philosophy as evidenced in the intentionally planning of purposeful, throughtful learning experiences for children. Considering the curriculum, the educators differ in their instructional strategies and methods of assessing young children's understanding of key concepts, skills, and knowledge. Thus, the findings of this study support that the early childhood educators significantly differ in their interactions with children as evidenced in a variety of formats including free choice play, large group instruction, and small group learning experiences to enhance children's development and learning in accordance with knowledge, beliefs, and values requisite to understanding an educator's disposition.

Guiding Children's Development

Positive relationships with adults and among peers in the preschool setting promote children's development. In accordance with developmentally apppropriate practice, early childhood educators serve to support and nuture children's strengths, interests and abilities as demonstated through interpersonal interactions which acknowledge children's thoughts, feelings, concerns, and encourages children's efforts to be successful in the preschool classroom (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). It is assumed that early childhood educators recognize that positive reciprocal relationships with children are essential for a child's growth and development.

Among children from diverse backgrounds, especially children from socio economically challenged backgrounds; early childhood educators serve as models in providing children with nuturing, intensive learning experiences to encourage children's success in the early learning environment. Because early care and education is often a child's first experience outside of the home setting, early childhood educators actively seek out relationships with children to support and encourage children's success in the early learning setting. It is assumed that early childhood educators are warm, caring, and sensitive individuals who actively seek reciprocal and affirming relationships with individual children and families to promote, support, and encourage children's success in the preschool setting.

Analyzing the data, the early childhood educators articulate the value of positive relationships with children as integral to child growth and development. As evidenced with warmth, care, and demonstrations of concern for children, the educators differ in their approaches to nurturing children in an emotive classroom environment. The most salient difference among the educators is responsiveness to children and how each early childhood educators models a calm, patient demeanor to guide and support children's pro social behaviors during classroom routines, transitions, and planned learning experiences. Such diverse beliefs and corresponding actions reveal whether the educators' hold developmentally appropriate expectations of children.

Acknowledging children's thoughts, feelings, and concerns, the early childhood educators demonstrate an affective disposition towards children in classroom routines, transitions, and learning experiences that acknowledge children's thoughts, feelings, and concerns. I discuss the findings in relation to the empirical research and scholarly

literature on an educator's disposition to demonstrate a desire to nurture children's growth and development in the preschool setting as articulated in thoughtful, responsive classroom learning experiences and reciprocal interactions with children. First, although the early childhood educators espouse the value of nurturing children, the early childhood educators demonstrate dissimilar classroom practices consistent with their beliefs on developmentally appropriate practice. Second, the educator beliefs about English language learners and ability diverse children enrolled in the preschool classrooms vary in relation to displays of sensitivity towards differences. Third, although the educators articulate the value of engaging, actively listening, and responding to children, the educators demonstrate dissimilar practices.

Many researchers claim that an implicit understanding of child development and a intuit desire and willingness to nurture children's growth and development is articulated in an educator's knowledge, care, concern, and sensitivity towards young children in the early learning setting (Howes & Smith, 1995; Kugelmass & Ross-Bernstein, 2000). Sidle-Fuligni et al, (2011) assert that frequent interpersonal interactions with caring adults and among their peers at free choice, gross motor and fantasy play and during small group, literacy and mathematics learning experiences significantly influence children's engagement in daily preschool experiences requisite to child growth and learning in the early care and educational setting in contrast to highly directed learning experiences. The researchers suggest that a higher degree of child choice and emotionally supportive interactions serve as evidence of quality instruction and emotional support requisite to child development.

In consideration of children's engagement with adults and peers, Vitiello et al. (2012) determined that instructional quality, demonstrations of care, and frequency of adult child interactions influence children's task engagement in culturally and linguistically diverse preschool settings. The researchers concluded that varying instructional times, group sizes, and developmentally appropriate learning experiences, cause children to respond differently suggesting that early childhood educators be sensitive and responsive to the individual needs of children throughout the course of a preschool day. Of particular significance, the authors suggest that educators place a greater emphasis on engaging children during free choice play and limiting classroom transitions, such as moving about the classroom, to avoid negative engagement among teachers and children.

The ethic of care in early childhood education articulates a growing need for educators to possess empathy, commitment, and a willingness to value and respond to students' lived experience; while affirming children's needs, interests, and abilities (Swick, 2007; Webb & Blond, 1995). Webb and Blond claim that a higher ethic of care is as relevant as teacher knowledge in the early care and educational setting. The authors assert that caring behaviors such as actively listening to children, thoughtfulness, and intention become evident in a teacher's actions in the classroom revealing the complexities among even the most experienced teachers. Webb and Blond advocate that an educator's personal beliefs influence a teacher's desire to care and to assume responsibility for students. Such concerns influence classroom decision making. In a similar study, Swick asserts that as children enter the school setting, caring early childhood educators serve to develop a child's conception of care through teacher

modeling, interactions, and relationships with peers and adults. However different from Webb and Blond, Swick claims that teacher modeling significantly influences children's feelings of safety, security, and trust in caregivers that is rooted in love.

As reflected in the findings of the present case under study, the educators' promote the value of nurturing the preschoolers' development and learning in the presence of such diversity including culture, language, familial background, and children's lived experience (Swick, 2007; Vitiello et al., 2012; Webb & Blond, 1995). However, considering the characteristics of preschool age children, the early childhood educators demonstrate dissimilar practices consistent with their beliefs on developmentally appropriate practice (Bergin & Bergin, 2009; Sidle-Fuligni et al., 2011).

Barbara and Ilana demonstrate care, concern, and sensitivity towards children as evidenced in language, physical gesturing, and emotional affect. With an emphasis on children's pro social behaviors, Barbara and Ilana nurture children growth and development throughout free choice play experiences and during classroom routines and transitions. Actively listening and responding to children in extended conversations with children, Barbara and Ilana frequently use verbal encouragement to set clear limits for children that promote children's sense of well being and positive behavior supports. For both Barbara and Ilana, affective behaviors towards children are evident to children who in turn are very responsive to the early childhood educators. While both educators demonstrate sensitivity towards children, Ilana appears to possess a deeper understanding of children's lived experiences, which is evident throughout her interactions with children.

The early childhood educators share many similarities in caring for children. With specific praise, active listening, and supports for positive behaviors the early childhood educators demonstrate reciprocal interactions in the preschool classrooms that communicate an understanding of family, culture and linguistic diversity. Requisite to children's developmental stages, the educators provide an emotionally supportive context for children's learning.

However, the most discordant finding is revealed in Katie and Christine's preschool classroom. Because young children grow and develop when they experience secure, safe, and trusting relationships with adults and among their peers, Katie considers that children appreciate a quiet, calming personality. As evidenced in the type and frequency of her interactions with children, Katie assumes a largely passive role in supporting children's learning at free choice play and small group learning experiences. Although, Katie is is responsive to children's immediate physical needs in the preschool classroom. With an emphasis on teacher directed, structured learning experiences that call for brief or simple correct responses from children, including English Language Learners, Kate does not frequently engage children in extended conversations and there is a lack of encouragement for children's efforts to share ideas with peers in the preschool classroom. Katie and Christine frequently respond to children's behaviors in lieu of engaging, listening, and responding to children. Because early childhood educators are given charge to model positive guidance behaviors to encourage children's development, integral to child development, Katie and Christine hinder children's pro social behaviors, opportunities for self expression and open ended responses as evidenced in harsh,

controlling forms of disciplines which otherwise might be corrected with respect, care, and sensitivity to children's developmental needs.

Such perspectives reveal that both Katie and Christine may possess unreasonable expectations for children's behaviors in accordance with child centered pedagogy which values a child's sense of safety, security, and attachment to caring adults in the preschool setting. Bergin and Bergin claim that a child's sense of secure attachment; defined attachment as a deep and enduring affectionate bond between children and caregivers fosters a child's capacity to learn. The authors assert that insecurely attached children, particularly from high-risk populations, suffer most in the early care and educational setting which implies that an early childhood educators' willingness to hold high expectations of children, avoid punitive discipline, and to minimize classroom transitions promotes a child's sense of secure attachment as characterized by warmth, respect, sensitivity, and concern. While insecurely attached children demonstrate lower verbal and mathematical competencies, avoidant behaviors, and a lack of enthusiasm for learning which manifests itself in exaggerated emotions such as tantrums, sullenness, or helplessness, the researchers determined the need for educators to hold reasonable expectations of children in accordance with a child's prior knowledge and lived experiences. The findings of the present case under study support the author's claims and suggest the need for Katie and Christine to form nurturing relationships with children to foster children's secure attachment in the aim of children's growth and development.

In summary, the early childhood educators value positive relationships with children as integral to children's growth and development as demonstrated in warm, caring, and responsive interpersonal interactions requisite to a child's social and

emotional development. However, the early childhood educators differ in their appropriates to nurturing children's interests, abilities, and curiosity as evidenced in a opportunities for children to engage in a variety of learning experiences in a supportive classroom environment.

The early childhood educators demonstrate mostly similar interactions with children. They differ on how they model and encourage a calm, patient demeanor to foster children's development including guidance and positive behaviors supports for children during classroom routines, transitions, and during the course of learning experiences. Among the educators, many interactions demonstrate care and concern for children evident in classroom routines, transitions, and learning experiences that acknowledge children's thoughts, feelings, and concerns. However, Katie and Christine hinder children's opportunities for self-expression, conversation, and open ended thinking. Similarly, while Sarah provides positive guidance, she frequently becomes impatient with children during the course of structured, instructional activities and during free choice play.

Implications for Early Childhood Communities of Practice

This study has examined the nature of an early childhood educator's role in cultivating children's growth and development in an urban preschool setting. Utilizing a case study methodology to provide a compelling interpretation of the case under study, the implications of this study contribute to a growing body of literature that illustrate key assertions about children's development and the responsibility of early childhood educators to demonstrate knowledge, advocacy and concern for children.

With a greater need for early childhood educators to acknowledge and to respond to developmental differences among children with care, concern, and sensitivity, the defined unit of analysis represents the interactions of early childhood educators and preschool age children in an urban preschool setting as viewed through the lens of developmentally appropriate practice. In answering the overarching research question, I considered the interrelatedness of pedagogical knowledge, diversity, and emotional affect as essential to an early childhood educator's disposition.

The evidence from this study provides meaningful implications for early childhood professional learning communities of practice and heightens awareness of teacher affect as essential in the service of teaching young children. The evidence is derived from four conceptual categories: (1) Acknowledging Differences Among Children and Families, (2) Classroom Context for Children's Development, (3) Intentionality in Planned Learning Experiences for Children, and (4) Guiding Children's Development. The underlying theme present in the evidence suggests a need for teacher knowledge of child development and a greater need for early childhood educators to thoughtfully respond to children's unique needs, abilities, and interests in intentional, thoughtful, and reciprocal interactions with young, preschool age children.

Theoretical Implications

In the following section, I address the theoretical implications of this study in alignment to the research concerns. The theoretical implications of this study pertain to how early childhood educators nurture children's individual strengths, interests, and diverse abilities to holistically address children's needs and how early childhood educators foster children's learning through varied learning experiences which affirm

differences in the preschool classroom. The educational theories of John Dewey, Jean Piaget, and Lev Vygotsky inform the theoretical framework of this study as articulated in principles of developmentally appropriate practice. The theoretical framework is embedded in the literature of several complimentary fields of empirical research and scholarly knowledge which serves to enhance an in depth understanding of the results of this research study.

What key dispositions of early childhood educators' support developmentally appropriate practice and affirm differences among children in the early childhood setting?

Educational theory affirms the notion of education as a humanistic, social, and democratic process wherein children's learning occurs as a result of personally shared experiences and nuturing interpersonal relationships with caring adults and among peers in the early care and educational setting. It is essential for child growth and development that educators of young children possess an intuit desire to empathize, care, and demonstrate sensitivity to children's interests, abilities, and lived experience while enthusiastically communicating knowledge to children as articulated in developmentally appropriate learning experiences for preschool age children.

The educators in this study consider themselves as knowledgable, caring practicioners who serve responsive to the individual needs of preschool age children in an urban preschool setting. As the findings show, the educators embody personal qualities including fairness, honesty, and responsibility for children that extends beyond pedagogical knowledge to include nurturing and affirming child differences in the preschool setting. Such findings indicate that the early childhood educators consider the moral and ethical concerns present in education. However, the findings reveal that that the educators differ in their essential beliefs about young children's learning and

therefore demonstrate differing instructional practices in accordance with their beliefs. I discuss the implications of such findings in relation to the theoretical perspectives that inform an educator's desire to foster children's learning and to honor children's burgeoning interests as the foci of curricula decisions as articulated in the educational philosophy of John Dewey and principles of developmentally appropriate practice.

For those who aspire to the profession of teaching young children, along the continuum of birth through eight years of age, child development theory articulates that early childhood educators possess requisite skills, traits, and knowledge to intentionally respond to children's unique needs, interests, and abilities, in the early care and educational setting. John Dewey (1916) imparts that effective educators are essential to child growth and development. On the essential role of educators, Dewey asserts that effective educators embody humanistic qualities that extend beyond pedagogical knowledge and include multiple aspects of love as an essential disposition of those who aspire to the profession of teaching. An intuit desire to empathize, care, and a desire to nurture children's learning in the educational setting, characterize essential personal traits of educators. Proficiency in subject matter knowledge and a desire to communicate knowledge with enthusiasm for subject matter characterize essential professional traits of educators. Dewey articulates that personal and professional traits represent requisite dispositions of educators that demand emotional affect in the service of teaching young children. He asserts, in the absence of love, educators misinterpret the educational needs of children relating a message of indifference to children (Dewey, 1938).

Dewey (1916) articulates that an educator's desire to instill a love of learning in children is evident in a teacher's knowledge, actions, and a willingness to foster

reciprocal relationships with children that honor children's efforts to explore, to ask questions, and to make mistakes. Dewey's theory considers the integral role of early childhood educators in fostering a child's love of learning in a stimulating early learning environment and through teacher demonstrations of child centered curricula and pedagogical skill. Although the early childhood educators articulate the growing need to respond to children with empathy, care, and sensitivity to lived experience while espousing desire to enthusiastically communicate knowledge that results in child curiosity and active engagement in varied learning experiences, the findings of this study reveal the uniqueness of the educator's beliefs in determining the nature of instructional practices, teacher actions, and reciprocal interactions with diverse learners and their families in the urban preschool setting.

The findings of this study also indicate that the early childhood educators hold diverse beliefs on the nature and abilities of children. Such perspectives reveal that the desire to instill a love of learning in children as articulated in an educators' passion for curricula and desire to communicate knowledge differs among the early childhood educators. Thus, the implications of this study suggest that early childhood educators critically examine personally held beliefs about early childhood curricula and child development theory necessary to foster children's development.

In the framework of developmentally appropriate practice, educators holistically address all aspects of a child's physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development in accordance to chronological age, individual characteristics, and culturally appropriate references in a physical and emotionally supportive early learning environment abundant with materials, resources, and equipment to facilitate intentionally planned, meaningful,

and relevant learning experiences that serves responsive to the rapid growth, change, and development present in preschool age children (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009).

It is essential to child growth and development that early childhood educators create a classroom environment that fosters child growth and developmental learning across a variety of content areas and learning domains. In accordance to the findings, personally held beliefs greatly influence classroom arrangement and use of space to foster learning. The findings of this study indicate that the educators mostly structure instructional time, space arrangement, materials and equipment to implement varied learning experiences to support the individual learning needs and diverse abilities of children including materials, equipment, and props for learning which mimic the linguistic, social, emotional, and cultural context of a child's lived experience in the early learning environment. Reflecting their beliefs on child centered practice, the educators serve responsive to children's needs. However, the evidence suggests that although the early childhood educators espouse the value of the environment in nurturing children's learning, observed reciprocal interactions differ among the educators. Thus, use of the environment merits additional attention on teacher development in early learning communities of practice.

Reflecting the diversity in the community and representing familial influences including culture, language, and socio economic status to promote a child's sense of belonging consistent with principles of child centered practice; reciprocal adult child interactions support a child's social and emotional development. In accordance with principles of developmentally appropriate practice, early childhood educators act on

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knowledge about individual children, families, and communities represented in the preschool setting to create a physical and emotive classroom environment that reflects child diversity including authentic multicultural materials, photographs, play materials, children's literature, and the creative arts. The findings of this study indicate that the educators acknowledge cultural and linguistic diversity as articulated in a willingness to create a physical classroom environment that reflects diversity in multicultural materials, photographs, play materials, and children's literature including supports for English language learners and ability diverse children. The implications of this study suggest a need for teacher development on sensitivity in diverse learning environments among early learning communities of practice.

Dewey (1940) articulates that a child's natural curiosity about the world is developed in classroom conversations and learning experiences that embrace a child's inclination for experiential learning experiences that offer children multiple opportunities to collaborate with peers under the direction of caring responsive adults. Dewey's philosophy suggests that children's interests serve as a framework for curricula and instructional decisions. As the evidence suggests, the preschool classrooms accommodate children's engagement in a variety of groupings including whole group, small group, and individualized instruction. To accommodate a child's sense of belonging, several classrooms contain soft furnishings, and areas for child privacy offer opportunities for children to sit quietly away from other children and reflect upon their learning in a comfortable, home like environment for young children. Free choice play materials are evident in most of the classrooms and serve to support children's natural inclination for play reflecting children's developmental stages, interests, and abilities requisite to early

learning. Thus, the findings of this study reveal that the educators possess requisite knowledge to foster a child's natural inclination for play and sense of secure attachment in the preschool learning environment. However, this study reveals that requisite knowledge and a willingness to respond to children's need for play are inconsistent.

In accordance to principles of developmentally appropriate practice, intentionality in early childhood curricula implies that early childhood educators act with knowledge to purposefully plan and implement teaching and learning experiences across content specific areas of learning and domains of learning in response to children's needs, interests, and abilities in accordance with developmentally appropriate child observations and formative child assessments (Copple and Bredekamp, 2009; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009).

As reflected in the findings of this study, the educators implement child centered curriculum to intentionally plan learning experiences across varied content specific areas and learning domains in alignment to prescribed early learning standards set forth in the district's curriculum guidelines. The findings of this study indicate that the early childhood educators often consider the prescribed curricula rather than attend to the individual learning needs of children in curriculum planning and lesson implementaton. Rather than focusing on children's unique interests, abilities, and learning needs, the early childhood educators differ on engaging individual children in meaningful, relevant, learning experiences to encourage and ensure children achieve individual learning goals. Thus, the educators place a greater emphasis on academic content skills in language arts and mathematics than other content specific domains of learning. Therefore, the implications of this study suggest that the educators mostly demonstrate adherence to

curricula without regard for individually appropriate learning experiences which merits

attention in the research on teacher development in scaffolding children's learning across

content areas and learning domains in accordance to children's developmental needs.

In accordance to developmentally appropriate practices, effective early childhood

educators nurture children's growth and development as articulated with specific praise,

active listening. physical gesturing, and responsiveness to individual children in

accordance to children's developmental age and stage of development (Copple &

Bredekamp, 2009). Because care, concern, and responsiveness towards children are

integral to an educators' disposition as expressed in the framework of developmentally

appropriate practice, the findings of this study indicate that the educators in this study

demonstrate differing reciprocal interactions with children.

However, the implications of this study suggest a greater need for demonstrations

of care including affective expression and physical gesturing in reciprocal interactions

during varied learning experiences including free choice play and small group learning

experiences to encourage and support multiple opportunities for extended dialogue with

children including English language learners. Such perspectives also reveal a greater need

for educators to critically; self reflect on developmentally appropriate, positive guidance

behaviors to encourage children's language and communication development in the early

care and educational setting.

In accordance with principles of developmentally appropriate practice,

understanding children's development requires early childhood educators to embrace,

respond, and affirm child differences most often present in settings populated by racially,

culturally, socio-economically, and linguistically diverse children and families to lessen

the achievement gap that may exist among diverse preschool children transitioning from home to the school environment because young children experience such rapid growth and development in the preschool years that is significantly influenced by culture, language, socio economic status and lived experience (Bredekamp, 1987; Copple and Bredekamp, 2009; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009).

Evident in the philosophy of John Dewey is the notion of diversity present in contemporary early care and educational settings and the belief that education should reflect the broader communities in which schools and educators serve children and their families as garnered through an educators awareness and knowledge of the physical, historical, and occupational aspects of child's community (Dewey, 1938). In the aim of fostering child learning experiences that mimic the linguistic, social, and cultural context of a child's lived experience, the findings of this study indicate that educators possess general knowledge about the children, families, and community served in the preschool setting and therefore interpret children's needs and abilities based on their beliefs; such perspectives inform their interactions with children.

The educator's in this study articulate the value in accepting, embracing, and supporting children's cultural, linguistic, and ability diverse behaviors. The evidence suggests that the early childhood educators are mostly sensitive and responsive to English language learners and ability diverse children as demonstrated in familiar cultural and linguistic classroom references for children and immersion in early reading, listening, and speaking activities to maintain a child's home language and to support early fluency in English. Thus, the implications of this study suggest that to affirm child differences, early childhood educators must possess a deeper understanding of diversity and familial

influences on learning to holistically address child differences to foster positive child outcomes.

How do early childhood educators perceive and respond to developmental differences among children in the early childhood setting?

Educational theory affirms the value of nuturing children's strengths, interests and unique abilities to holistically address children's needs in the early care and educational setting (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009). It is essential for early childhood educators' to possess an understanding of child development and therefore demonstrate evidence of child development knowledge along a continuum of varied teacher directed, structured, child initiated and open ended learning experiences in accordance to prescribed curricula and learning standards which acknowledge and respond to children's ages and individual stages of development.

The early childhood educators in this study mostly affirm a child centered, philosophical orientation in their roles as educators of preschool age children. The findings from this study suggest that based on their personally held beliefs, values and professional knowledge, the educators interpet and respond to children's interests and unique abilities. As the findings reveal, the educators demonstrate diverse subject matter knowledge and pedagogical skill relevant to implementing integrated content area and domain specific child centered learning experiences. The early childhood educators demonstrate differing strategies on engaging children in meaningful learning experiences to support differentiated learning goals for children in alignment to the prescribed curricula and learning standards. I discuss the implications of such findings in relation to the theoretical perspectives that inform an educator's disposition to acknowledge and

thoughtfully respond to the developmental needs of individual children as articulated in child development theory.

The educators in this study consider themselves as knowledgable responsive practioners because they offer children a variety of experiences, choice of materials, and individualized activities to support children's learning. Child development theories articulate that early childhood educators acknowledge and respond to children's developmental needs in the early learning setting. Developmentally appropriate practice consider how educators holistically address all aspects of a child's physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development in accordance to chronological age, individual characteristics, and culturally appropriate references in a physical and emotionally supportive early learning environment abundant with materials, resources, and equipment to facilitate intentionally planned, meaningful, and relevant learning experiences that serves responsive to the rapid growth, change, and development present in preschool age children (Copple and Bredekamp, 2009; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009). The framework of developmentally appropriate practice is informed by the educational theory of Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky which stipulate that child growth and development follows a predictable sequence of rapid growth in children and represents a child's sense of reasoning in acquiring new skills, abilities, and knowledge under the direction of caring, knowledgeable adults and throughout social interactions with adults and other children (Copple and Bredekamp, 2009).

Piaget's theory of cognitive development stipulates that child growth and development follow a relatively stable, sequence of growth in children and represents a child's understanding of the world around them in accordance with chronological age and

individual stage of development through experiences and environment influence (Blake

and Pope, 2008; Daniels and Shumov, 2003; Lubeck, 1996; Lutz and Huitt, 2004; Piaget,

1981).

According to Piaget's theory, children between two to seven years of age are in

the preoperational stage of development which is characterized by a child's increasing

self interest in imaginary play experiences which are further developed through social

interactions with peers. Piaget's theory supports the notion that an early childhood

educator's role is to thoughtfully consider and respond to children's developmental

differences. Requisite to the development of every child, effective early childhood

educators model, guide, and facilitate meaningful learning experiences that foster

children's curiosity and engagement in play like experiences to stimulate cognitive

growth and development in children. In accordance with Piaget's theory, frequent

opportunities for children to acquire key skills, concepts, and content area knowledge

across integrated learning domains in a variety of teacher directed, structured learning

experiences and child initiated learning experiences arouses children's curiosity and

stimulates a child's inclination for imaginary play.

Vygotsky's (1978) theory of social cognition stipulates that a child's individual

capacity to acquire key skills, concepts, and knowledge to attain learning goals is

achievable under the direction of caring, knowledgeable, and responsive adults and

throughout peer interactions requisite to child growth and development. The theory of

social cognition affirms that child development occurs as the result of engagement in

meaningful learning experiences occurring in a child's zone of proximal development.

The zone of proximal development represents the distance between a child's individual

developmental level and a level of potential development which is attained as children

engage in learning activities with peers and under the guidance of adults, in contrast to

working alone suggesting that learning is a social behavior (Blake and Pope, 2008;

Follari, 2007; Hudson, 2002). The theory imparts that a child's capacity for learning is

greatly influenced by a child's lived experience with particular emphasis on play, prior to

attending formalized schooling.

Although the early childhood educators affirm a child centered, philosophical

orientation in their roles as educators of preschool age children, the findings of this study

indicate that early childhood educator beliefs and professional knowledge significantly

influence how educators acknowledge and respond to the developmental needs of

individual children enrolled in the preschool classroom. As indicated in the findings, the

educators serve a diverse group of preschool age children between three to five years of

age who are primarily African American and of Hispanic origin. The number of children

enrolled in each preschool classroom minimally varies among the four preschool

classrooms. The preschoolers possess varying prior school experiences, knowledge, and

home language background. Among the children of Hispanic origin, many are Spanish

dominant learners, for whom English is a second language. Additionally, several children

identified by the early childhood educators present with special needs.

In accordance with theories of child development, individual children grow and

develop at varying rates although many aspects of children's growth and learning follows

a relatively predictable sequence of skills and abilities that flourish with prior knowledge

and experience. With emphasis on child centered learning experiences to support a

child's natural inclination for play and teacher led structured learning experiences

necessary to cultivate child growth and development, theories of child development articulate that educators possess child development knowledge and embrace a child's lived experience including the social and cultural context in which children live as requisites to planning learning experiences. Knowledgeable early childhood practitioners consider all interrelated domains of cognitive, physical, social and emotional development while recognizing that children are rapidly developing human beings biologically, culturally, linguistically and socially in the earliest years of life. Effective educators are capable to holistically address children's diverse needs in classroom practice (Vygotsky, 1978).

The early childhood educators consider children's social and emotional development as fundamental to teaching and learning in the preschool setting. However, the findings of this study indicate that the educators generally place emphasis on academic content skills in language arts and mathematics than demonstrate concern for the developmental levels and abilities of individual children in curricula and instructional strategies to achieve individual learning goals for children.

Because children grow and develop at varying rates due to individual differences in child temperament, environmental influences, special learning needs, and diverse abilities, the implications of this study suggest a greater need for educators to reflect on the need to intentionally plan learning experiences that promote the growth and development of individual children by scaffolding instruction, supplementing learning experiences with increasingly complex tasks, and implementing varied instructional methods to support self directed and adult guided learning experiences. It is Lena demonstrates the most accordant beliefs and practices, which reveal a child centered

philosophical orientation as evidenced in her professional knowledge, actions, and willingness to form trusting relationships with children that honor children's efforts to make sense of the world around them. Thus, the evidence suggests that such diverse teacher perspectives and responsiveness to individual children merits attention in the research on child development knowledge in the early childhood setting.

According to child development theory, learning experiences for preschool age children should stimulate children's thought processes including magical thinking, reasoning, and other cognitive capacities which represent the preoperational stage of development in children (Piaget, 1981). It is essential to child growth and development that early childhood educators act as sensitive practitioners who consider children's needs, behaviors, and dispositional characteristics including child temperament to scaffold instruction of key concepts, skills, and knowledge that promote children's understanding and mastery of skills and abilities in a physically and emotionally supportive environment. Child development theories consider an early childhood educator's role in creating a physically and emotive environment of learners to support children's varying interests and abilities which emerge from a child's experiences with classroom materials, resources, and equipment within the learning environment. Child development theory values children's play to guide teachers in planning the physical learning environment, curricula and instructional decisions, and pedagogical practices to promote language, communication, and social emotional development in children (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Piaget, 1981).

The findings from this study indicate that the educators possess a general understanding of child development theory requisite to subject matter knowledge and

pedagogical skills integral to subject matter knowledge and domains of learning. The early childhood educators articulate the value of providing children with many opportunities for free choice play as requisite to responding to the varied developmental needs of individual children. As indicated in the findings, the educators follow a prescribed curriculum to intentionally plan learning experiences for children across a variety of content areas and domains of learning as aligned to early learning standards set forth in the district's curriculum guidelines. Because of the holistic nature of early childhood education, it is essential that early childhood educators consider children as the center of the curriculum in planning and implementing learning experiences for children (Dewey, 1940). As the evidence suggests, the early childhood educators demonstrate dissimilar instructional practices reflecting their developmental understandings of preschool children. Such findings indicate that the educators differ on engaging individual children in meaningful, relevant, learning experiences to enable every child to make progress and to achieve learning goals for children as aligned to the curriculum.

It is Lena and Sarah who demonstrate considerable child development knowledge and effort in planning and implementing varied learning experiences to foster children's engagement in varied integrated language arts literacy, science, social studies and music and movement learning experiences as aligned to the preschool curriculum to foster children's development. Such perspectives reveal that the educators purport to embrace principles of developmentally appropriate practices rather than fully implement developmentally appropriate practices. Thus, implications of this study suggest a greater need for early childhood to thoughtfully consider the field of early childhood education as a distinct discipline in education that upholds essential beliefs about young children's

learning including experiential learning, opportunities for peer engagement, and accommodating children's unique interests to honor and celebrate children's efforts in the presence of differences including chronological age, individual characteristics, and cultural and linguistic differences.

In accordance to principles of developmentally appropriate practice, intentionality in early childhood curricula implies that early childhood educators act with knowledge to purposefully plan and implement teaching and learning experiences across content specific areas of learning and domains of learning in response to children's needs, interests, and abilities in accordance with developmentally appropriate child observations and formative child assessments (Copple and Bredekamp, 2009; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009). The findings of this study indicate that the early childhood educators in this study articulate child centered beliefs and demonstrate differing instructional strategies and methods of assessing young children's understanding of key concepts, skills, and knowledge.

The educators acknowledge and respond to differences including ability diverse children and English Language Learners as demonstrated in familiar cultural and linguistic references for children in the preschool environment and immersion in early reading, listening, and speaking activities to maintain a child's home language and to support early fluency in English. However, Yulenia acknowledges cultural and linguistic diversity thus revealing a deeper awareness of cultural differences that exemplifies knowledge of how children develop in different cultural settings. Because language, culture, and ability can adversely impact children's participation in classroom learning activities, Yulenia and Sarah provides an inclusive setting that foster a child's sense of

confidence in mastering requisite concepts, skills, and knowledge in listening, speaking, and language development. Thus, the implications of this study suggest that early childhood educators reflect on intentionality in implementing free choice play, large group instruction, and small group learning experiences to engage children in support of support children's developmental differences including lingusitically and ability diverse learners.

How do early childhood educators form and nurture relationships with children whose background may be different from their own background?

Educational theory affirms the value of reciprocal relationships to support children's growth and development in the early care and educational setting. It is essential for early childhood educators to acknowledge, respect, and affirm differences among children, families, and community in the educational setting (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). The findings of this study indicate that the early childhood educators acknowledge the value of nurturing children's development and learning in the presence of diversity including culture, language, familial background, and lived experience which serves to influence how the early childhood educators perceive and affectively respond to differences. I discuss the implications of the findings in relation to the theoretical perspectives that inform an educator's disposition to demonstrate a desire to nurture children's growth and development in the preschool setting as articulated in thoughtful, responsive, and reciprocal interactions with children.

The early childhood educators articulate the value of nurturing children's social and emotional growth and learning in the presence of diversity including culture, language, familial background, and lived experience. The framework of developmentally appropriate practice imparts that early childhood educators be warm, caring, and sensitive

individuals who actively seek to form reciprocal and affirming relationships with individual children. Integral to principles of developmentally appropriate practice, early childhood educators recognize that positive reciprocal relationships with children serve as an important context through which children develop and learn particularly for children living under difficult circumstances in the home environment (Copple and Bredekamp, 2009).

Early care and educational settings often represent a young child's initial experience outside of the home setting; reciprocal relationships with caring adults promote a preschool age child's sense of well being, safety, pro-social behaviors, and a positive disposition towards early learning in formalized school settings. Early childhood educators foster interpersonal relationships with children through classroom instruction and formative assessments including observation, dialogue, work sampling, and ongoing communications with children and their families. Relationships serve as a powerful determinant of positive learning outcomes and child development (NAEYC, 2009).

The notion of warmth, concern, and sensitivity is evident in the educational philosophy of John Dewey. Therefore, with warmth, care, and concern for young children early childhood educators who seek to develop trusting relationships with young children, promote positive learning outcomes for young children and impart a sense of respect for diverse children and their families in the preschool school setting. Dewey advocates that effective educators embody qualities that extend beyond pedagogical knowledge and include an educator's intuit capacity to empathize, care, and enjoy interpersonal interactions with children that serves to nurture children's interests as articulated in reciprocal interactions that are deliberate, purposeful, and meaningful to children

(Dewey,1916; Simpson, Jackson and Aycock, 2005). Such perspectives reveal that the educators consider moral, ethical, and socially just concerns in the educational setting and affirm that educators possess an ethic of care for children.

The early childhood educators in this study represent a diverse group of individuals with varying experiences and professional knowledge. According to principles of developmentally appropriate practice, establishing relationships with young children promotes secure attachment and trust in the early learning setting essential for child development including self-regulatory behaviors, language, communication and cultural identity. As early childhood educators come to know and understand children, caring relationships influence how educators respond to children's learning needs (Copple and Bredekamp, 2009).

While the early childhood educators serve essential to supporting and nuturing children's strengths, interests and abilities as demonstated through interpersonal interactions, the findings indicate that the educators interpet children's interests and abilities to learn based on personally held beliefs, values, and professional knowledge. The educators articulate the value of engaging, actively listening, and responding to individual children and demonstrate differing developmentally appropriate expectations of children in accordance with their beliefs.

The findings of this study also reveal that essential care, concern, and responsiveness towards children as evidenced in language, physical gesturing, and emotional affect is present in the preschool classrooms. In accordance to developmentally appropriate practices, effective early childhood educators nurture children's growth and development as articulated with specific praise, actively listening to children, physical

gesturing, and responsiveness to individual children in accordance to children's developmental age and stage of development. However, requisite to children's developmental stages, the findings indicate educator differences, which may adversely impact child growth and development. Several of the educators assume a largely passive role in supporting children's learning at free choice play and small group learning experiences. Such perspectives also indicate an over emphasis on teacher directed, structured learning experiences that call for brief or simple correct responses from children, including English language learners.

Early childhood educators are given charge to model positive guidance behaviors to encourage children's development. As indicated in the findings, harsh controlling forms of discipline which otherwise might be corrected with respect, care, and sensitivity to children's developmental needs indicate unreasonable expectations for children's behaviors in accordance with developmentally appropriate practice. Thus, the implications of this study suggest that the educators' beliefs are reflected in some opportunities for children's socialization under the direction of caring adults and among their peers in the preschool setting requisite to children's social and emotional development.

Dewey (1916) articulates that an educator's desire to instill a love of learning in children is evident in teacher knowledge, actions, and a willingness to foster reciprocal relationships with children that honor children's efforts to explore, ask questions, and make mistakes. The early childhood educators promote children's positive approaches to learning as evidenced in the physical and emotive preschool classroom learning environment, curricula, and pedagogical skills to instill a love of learning in children.

However, the early childhood educators articulate diverse beliefs on the nature and abilities of children. Thus, the findings from this study suggest that a desire to instill a love of learning in children as articulated in an educators' passion for curricula and desire to communicate knowledge is somewhat evident.

It is essential for educators to embrace cultural and linguistic diversity in reciprocal interactions with young children in the early care and educational setting in accordance with educational theory. Because children and especially culturally and linguistically diverse children significantly grow and develop cognitively, socially, and emotionally as a result of extended conversations with adults particularly at free choice play and during small group instructional times, reciprocal interactions foster children's development. To be effective, early childhood educators consider diversity.

The educator's in this study articulate the value in accepting, embracing, and supporting children's cultural, linguistic, and ability diverse behaviors. The findings of this study indicate that the early childhood educators are mostly sensitive and responsive to English language learners and ability diverse children. The educators interpret children's needs and abilities based on their beliefs; such perspectives inform their interactions with children. Because language, culture, and ability can adversely impact children's participation in classroom learning activities, the evidence also suggests that the educators acknowledge and respond to cultural and linguistic differences with knowledge and sensitivity to differences as evidenced in supports for children's home language in classroom displays, small group instructional settings, free choice interest areas and performance based assessments to foster a child's sense of confidence in

mastering requisite concepts, skills, and knowledge in listening, speaking, and language development.

Very few of the early childhood educators acknowledge diversity in the context of self-identity. The educators acknowledge cultural identity and family heritage referring to children's language, pro social behaviors including cooperation with peers, and teacher demonstrations of care, concern, and sensitivity towards children. Such perspectives also reveal tensions in establishing reciprocal relationships with children and families.

In accordance to developmentally appropriate practice, effective early childhood educators recognize that among some culturally diverse families, educators are highly regarded as experts in teaching children and therefore relationships with educators are uncomfortable for some families in the preschool setting. As the findings indicate, there is a tendency to blame parents for children's lack of progress and challenging behaviors. Effective early childhood educators work with families to understand the goals and expectations parents and families hold for children. Thus, the implications of this finding suggests that the early childhood educators seek to better understand familial perspectives relative to reciprocal relationships with children and families in the preschool setting.

Practical Implications

In the following section, I address specific implications for early childhood educators. Because the findings of this study suggest that an individual's beliefs, assumptions, knowledge, and professional experience in early care and education significantly influences how educators foster child growth and development in the preschool setting, this study illustrates that a personal sense of advocacy, knowledge,

intention, and desire to thoughtfully interact with children represent key dispositions of early care and educational practitioners.

Education is a Humanistic Endeavor

The belief that education is a humanistic endeavor represents a key disposition of an early childhood educator. Because children's experiences in the preschool setting tend to represent children's initial experiences outside of the home environment, effective early childhood educators act to ensure children's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical needs are met in the preschool setting while thoughtfully considering children's lived experiences. The evidence from this study suggests that early childhood educators consider the moral and ethical concerns present in the preschool setting among children from diverse cultural, linguistic, and socio economic backgrounds.

Such concerns reveal a greater need for early care and educational practitioners to possess requisite beliefs, values, and character traits such as a sense of fairness, empathy, honesty, and professional responsibility for children that extends beyond curricula and pedagogical knowledge and includes a desire to nurture and affirm child differences with care, concern, and sensitivity to a child's lived experience in the preschool setting (Bergin and Bergin, 2009; Brown, Morehead, & Smith, 2008; Burant Chubbuck, Whipp, 2007; Fallona, 2000; Goldstein, 2008; Hansen, 1993 Nieto, 2006; Osguthorpe, 2008; Swick, 2007). Thus, aspiring future educators and practicing early childhood educators should thoughtfully consider the value of a child centered, socially just early learning environment as integral to all aspects of a child's growth and development in an urban geographical preschool setting.

Sensitivity to Context

Sensitivity to context represents a key disposition of an early childhood educator. As educators of young preschool age children in an urban geographical area wrought with numerous challenges for children and families including poverty, difficult home environments, and varied caregiver arrangements that may adversely affect a child's cognitive, social, and emotional development, the early childhood educators are held accountable to positively impact children's growth and development in the preschool classroom (Hanson and Lynch, 1992; Miller & Votruba-Drzal, 2012).

Perceptions of diversity influence teacher practice (Burant and Kirby, 2002; Hughes, Cowley, Copley, Finch, Meehan, Burns, Kusimo, Keyes, Orletsky, and Holdzkom, 2004; Frederick-Steele, 2011; Johnson and Reiman, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Lee and Herner-Patnode, 2010; Villegas, 2007). Because child growth and learning is significantly influenced by multiple factors including prior knowledge, culture, language, socio economic status and lived experience it is essential that early childhood educators possess requisite child development knowledge and a willingness to respond to child differences acting in partnership with parents and families through reciprocal and affirming relationships.

Although the educators articulate the value in accepting, embracing, and supporting children's cultural, linguistic, and ability diverse behaviors, the evidence from this study suggests that perceived disparities about children and their families may result in deficit views on children and families that become evident in how the educators interpret and respond to children. Secondly, the evidence indicates that the early childhood educators possess an understanding of children served in the preschool setting

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and differ on how they embrace and respond to child and familial diversity with respect, concern and sensitivity (Barrera, 1993; Cheatham & Jimenez-Silva , 2012; Espinosa, 2008; Fleer and Hedegaard, 2010; Goodfellow, 2001; Hanson and Gutierrez, 1997; Holloway, Rambaurd, Fuller, and Eggers-Pierola, 1995; Sowa, 2009).

The evidence suggests that reciprocal relationships with parents and families are highly regarded by the early childhood educators; there is limited evidence of observed reciprocal relationships with families. Such perspectives reveal an impetus for early childhood educators to pursue professional development knowledge, opportunities for direct engagement, and critically self reflect on sensitivity to culturally, linguistically, socio economically and ability diverse children and families rather than perceiving diversity in the educational setting as an obligation of teaching diverse learners. As the findings indicate, there is a tendency to blame parents for children's lack of progress and challenging behaviors.

To be effective, early childhood educators consider diversity. Effective early childhood educators recognize that among some culturally diverse families, educators are highly regarded experts in teaching and therefore relationships with educators are uncomfortable for some families in the preschool setting. Thus, the implications of this study suggest that aspiring future educators and practicing early childhood educators critically reflect on the need to embrace and accept familial differences to holistically address the needs of all children in the educational setting.

Child Centered Beliefs

A child-centered philosophy represents a key disposition of an early childhood educator. As educators of young children enrolled in a publicly funded preschool setting

subject to district and state department early learning guidelines and standards that avows child centered curricula and pedagogy, the early childhood educators affirm a child centered, philosophical orientation to foster child growth and development (Barnett & Ackerman, 2011; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009; New Jersey Department of Education, 2013; Trister-Dodge, Colker, & Heroman, 2002).

The educators consider themselves as child centered, knowledgable, and responsive practioners because they offer children varied learning experiences abundant with materials, resources, and equipment to facilitate intentionally planned, meaningful, and relevant learning experiences which serve responsive to the rapid growth, change, and development present in preschool age children (Copple and Bredekamp, 2009; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009).

Although the educators articulate a desire instill a love of learning in children and to honor children's efforts to explore, ask questions, think critically, and make mistakes, the evidence from this study suggests personally held values, accountability concerns, and a willingness to embrace child centered pedagogy in classroom curricula and instructional practice influences educators behaviors and classroom decision making. Such perspectives reveal a greater need for early childhood educators to acknowledge and respond to the developmental needs of individual children, including English language learners and ability diverse children in the construct of developmentally appropriate practices.

Thus, the implications of this study suggest that aspiring future educators and practicing early childhood educators should thoughtfully consider the field of early childhood education as a distinct discipline in education that upholds essential beliefs

about young children's learning including experiential learning, play based learning, opportunities for peer engagement and accommodating children's unique interests that honor and celebrate children's efforts to be successful in the preschool setting in the presence of differences including chronological age, individual characteristics, and diversity (Brown, Bergen, House, Hittle and Dickerson, 2000; Fails-Nelson and Roger, 2010; Han and Neugharth-Pritchett, 2010; Kowalski, Frontczak, and Johnson, 2001; McMullen, 1999; McMullen and Alat, 2002; Parker and Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006; Prawat, 1992; and Wien, 2003).

Knowledge

Knowledge represents a key disposition of an early childhood educator. It is essential to the profession of early care and education that early childhood educators be knowledgeable practitioners who are intrinsically motivated and accountable for the developmental learning outcomes of an ever growing, diverse population of young children in the preschool setting (Ackerman, 2003; Barnett and Yarosz, 2007; Barnett, 2008; Chien, Howes, Burchinal, Pianta, Ritchie, Bryant, Clifford, Early, and Barbarin, 2010; Jeon, Langill, Perterson, Luze, Carta, and Atwater, 2010; Winsler, Tran, Hartman, Madigan, Manfra, and Bleiker, 2008).

The early childhood educators consider themselves to be proficient in subject matter knowledge and related learning domains. The educators articulate a desire to arouse children's curiosity and engage children in varied learning experiences that foster children's social and emotional development. Although the educators mostly demonstrate proficiency in language arts literacy and mathematical subject matter knowledge, the evidence from this study suggests that early childhood educators should possess a greater

understanding of child development knowledge requisite to child centered, developmentally appropriate practice across content areas. Such perspectives also reveal a greater need for early care and educational practitioners to possess and apply knowledge of children, families, culture, and community in preschool setting to meet the needs of individual children.

Secondly, the evidence from this study reveals the uniqueness of educators' beliefs about curricula knowledge and pedagogy as demonstrated in classroom practices. Since there are many factors that influence an educators practice including professional knowledge, credentialing, and educational attainment, the notion of knowledge in early childhood education implies that early childhood educators apply professional knowledge to all aspects of the early learning environment including structured, teacher directed learning experiences, classroom routines, transitions, and child initiated play. Such perspectives reveal the value of knowledge and intentional teaching in the early care and educational setting. Thus, the implication of this finding suggests that aspiring future educators and practicing early childhood educators should consider the interrelatedness of curricula, pedagogy, and reciprocal interactions as requisite knowledge in the role of early care and educational practitioner.

Intentionality

Intentionality represents a key disposition of an early childhood educator. The notion of intentionality in early childhood education suggests that early childhood educators possess and apply knowledge to all aspects of child growth and development in the early learning environment. How educators view the classroom environment reflects a developmental understanding of preschool age children. It is essential for early childhood

educators to intentionally select materials, resources, and thoughtfully plan developmentally appropriate activities to facilitate children's learning interests, needs, and unique abilities while acknowledging a child's family, culture, and language to promote a child's sense of belonging consistent with principles of child centered practice (Clifford, Reszka, and Rossback, 2010; Epstein, 2007; Harms, Clifford, and Cryer, 2004; Slutsky and Pistorovava, 2011; Sylva, Siraj-Blatchford, Taggart, Sammons, Melhuish, Elliot and Totsika, 2006).

The evidence from this study indicates that the early childhood educators cultivate a classroom context for children's development across a variety of content areas and learning domains and demonstrate diverse curricula knowledge and pedagogical skill to foster a variety of authentic learning experiences in a physically stimulating and emotionally supportive environment. Such perspectives reveal that the educators place a greater emphasis on the value of materials and resource rich physical learning environments than thoughtfully consider how to engage and scaffold children's learning across a variety of learning objectives in alignment to the early learning standards set forth in the prescribed curriculum while attending to the learning needs of individual children in curriculum planning, lesson implementation, and individualized child assessments. Thus, the implication of this finding suggests that aspiring future educators and early childhood practicioners should throughtfully consider how to meaningfully engage individual children in the early learning environment during varied learning experiences including free choice play.

Secondly, the evidence from this study suggests that although the educators espouse the value of nuturing children's social and emotional development, they differ in

their efforts to support children's needs, interests, and unique abilities as evidenced in reciprocal interactions and extended conversations with children. Such perspectives reveal that although the educators articulate the value of play in responding to the varied developmental needs of individual children the evidence suggests that the early childhood educators place a greater emphasis on academic content skill development in language arts and mathematics rather than integrating content area knowledge from several domains of learning in classroom instruction. Thus, the implication of this finding suggests that aspiring future educators and practicing early childhood educators thoughtfully consider how to integrate content area learning to support the varied developmental needs of children including teacher scaffolding in a physically and emotionally supportive classroom context.

As the findings indicate, the educators are accountable to follow a prescribed curriculum to intentionally plan, implement, and assess children's learning. It is essential that planned learning experiences align to the early learning standards set forth in the district's curriculum guidelines to ensure children are successful in the preschool setting (Goldstein, 2008; Jeon, et al. 2010; Justice Mashburn, Hamre, & Pianta, 2008; Ostrosky, Gaffney & Thomas, 2006; Ryan, 2004; Stipek, 2006; Wolfgang, Stannard, and Jones, 2009). Such perspectives reveal that child assessments include observations of children at play and account for the diversity including ability diverse children and English language learners. Although the early childhood educators mostly account for child differences, the educators differ in valuing children's interests as the center of the classroom decisions, curriculum planning, and assessement. Thus, the implications of this study suggest that aspiring future educators and practicing early childhood educators thoughtfully consider

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how to engage individual children in meaningful, relevant learning experiences to enable every child to make progress and to achieve learning goals for children as aligned to the curriculum guidelines.

Additionally, teacher intentionality in planned learning experiences influences child learning outcomes. The evidence from this study suggests that an educators' beliefs significantly influences children's academic skill development. Such perspectives reveal that concerns over school readiness due to poverty and lived experience cause conflicted beliefs about developmentally appropriate practices (Prawat, 1992). Thus, the implications of this study suggest that aspiring future educators and practicing early childhood educators thoughtfully consider nurturing children's developmental needs, skills, and abilities, whereas neglecting individual child differences adversely impacts children's development.

Fostering Reciprocal Relationships

An ethic of care, which is rooted in love, represents a key disposition of an early childhood educator. An ethic of care characterized as actively listening to children, teacher modeling, specific praise and reciprocal interactions significantly influences children's feelings of safety, security, and trust in caregivers. It is essential that early childhood educators possess a desire to nurture children's strengths, interests, and abilities as articulated in emotional affect, physical gestures, and positive guidance behaviors that affirm children's thoughts, feelings, and concerns (Howes and Smith, 1995; Kugelmass & Ross-Bernstein, 2000; Sidle-Fuligni, Howes, Huang, Hong, and Lara-Cinisomo, 2011; Swick, 2007; Webb and Blond, 1995).

Because positive relationships with caring adults support children's learning, reciprocal interactions are evident in varied classroom routines, transitions, and instructional groupings and mostly serve to nurture children's understanding of key concepts, skills, and knowledge. The evidence from this study suggests that the educators affirm the value of reciprocal relationships to nurture and provide children with a sense of safety, security, and trustworthiness and differ in the frequency and type of interactions with children as evidenced in a variety of formats including free choice play, large group instruction, and small group learning experiences revealing whether the educators hold developmentally appropriate expectations of children.

Secondly, early childhood educators serve to provide children considered at risk with nurturing, intensive learning experiences that encourage children's success in the preschool setting. It is essential that early childhood educators' demonstrate a willingness to hold high expectations of children, avoid punitive discipline, and minimize classroom transitions to promote a child's sense of secure attachment. Such perspectives reveal the need for early childhood educators to model a calm, patient demeanor to guide and support children's pro social behaviors characterized by warmth, respect, and sensitivity towards a child's lived experience to foster a deep and enduring affectionate bond that positively impacts a child's capacity for learning (Bergin and Bergin, 2009).

Thus, the implications of this study suggest that aspiring future educators and early childhood practitioners critically reflect on developmentally appropriate, positive guidance behaviors to acknowledge children's thoughts, feelings, and concerns. Secondly, there is a need for early childhood practitioners to consider how to engage

children during classroom learning experiences, routines, and transitions in order to holistically address child development in the preschool setting.

Additionally, as indicated in the findings, the educators' articulate the value of nurturing the preschoolers' development and learning in the presence of cultural, linguistic, socio economic and familial diversity. Such perspectives reveal that teacher communications, language and physical gesturing serve to nurture children's development particularly among English Language learners and ability diverse children (Howes and Smith, 1995). However, as the evidence suggests, the early childhood educators demonstrate differing expectations for English Language learners and ability diverse children.

Thus, the implications of this study suggest that aspiring future educators and practicing early childhood educators reflect on the need to assume an active role in supporting children's learning through prolonged conversations at free choice play and small group learning experiences rather than emphasize teacher directed, structured learning experiences that call for brief or simple correct responses from children, especially among ability diverse children and English language learners. Secondly, the implications of this study suggest that the early childhood educators seek to better understand familial perspectives relative to reciprocal relationships with children to garner an understanding of familial expectations.

Recommendations for Policy and Further Research

As a former classroom teacher and administrator of a publicly funded preschool program in an urban setting, the values, beliefs, knowledge, and philosophical assumptions I hold about developmental approaches to early childhood curricula and

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instruction inform this study. Although such beliefs may represent a degree of subjectivity, I have utilized such perspectives to foster a greater insight to the phenomena in the course of data collection, analysis, and interpretation. The case under study represents the experiences of the participating early childhood educators given charge to support preschool age children in an urban setting.

The evidence from this study enhances our understanding of an early childhood educators' essential role and responsibility for children in the preschool setting. The evidence confirms that an individual's beliefs, assumptions, knowledge, and professional experience in the early care and education of young children influences how educators foster child growth and development in the preschool setting and clearly illustrates that a personal sense of advocacy, knowledge, intention, and desire to thoughtfully interact with children represent key dispositions of early care and educational practitioners. Thus, the evidence makes a contribution to existing theories in early childhood education and contemporary research on conceptualizing an early childhood educators' disposition.

Based on the outcomes of this study, a review of scholarly literature, and personal researcher reflections, I offer recommendations for educational policy and further empirical research among professional learning communities of practice in early childhood education to deepen an understanding of how early childhood educators cultivate child growth and development with heartfelt appreciation for children. This study reports on a greater need for early childhood educators to possess and apply child development knowledge in the early learning setting and to demonstrate a deeper sense of advocacy and concern for young children.

Because early childhood represents a distinct period of rapid growth and development in young children from birth through eight years of age, children enrolled in publicly funded preschool programs who reside in urban geographical areas are often subject to numerous challenges including poverty, language barriers, and a lack of supplemental services (Barnett, 2008; Barnett & Yarosz, 2007; Chien et al,, 2010). Much of the educational policies on early care and educational programs inform quality early learning curricula and preschool teaching practices in publicly funded preschool programs. However, in spite of policy mandates to ensure all children are given equal opportunities to grow and develop cognitively, socially, and emotionally in the preschool setting, there remains a significant need for educational policy makers to ensure all young children are provided with high quality, equitable early care and educational programs across early childhood communities of practice. To ensure children are provided equitable opportunities in the early care and educational setting, policy mandates on effective instruction, sensitive and warm interactions, and teacher modeling behaviors are warranted to ensure classroom interactions foster positive outcomes (Pianta, 2011).

Educational policy seeks to ensure professional early childhood educators are highly qualified, credentialed educators. Such policies exist to ensure that educators entering the profession are capable knowledgeable practitioners. With emphasis on opportunities for early childhood educators to pursue professional growth and development, classroom mentoring, and in district teacher supports, educational policy seeks to ensure educators are properly supervised and routinely evaluated in the preschool setting to ensure that all children learn, especially those considered at risk for learning difficulties who are most vulnerable in the early care and educational setting

(Frede & Barnett, 2011; Pianta, 2011). There remains a growing need for policy to ensure that teacher educational attainment advancing in terms of degree combined with direct assessment of teacher competencies including reciprocal interactions be considered into policies on teacher credentialing.

Efforts to promote quality in the early care and educational setting requisite to children's growth and development emphasize teacher knowledge, care, and empathy for learners. Concerning the diversity present in the early childhood education workforce, policy standards mandate that early childhood practitioners possess proper education credentials including specialized degrees in early childhood teacher preparation (Ackerman, 2004). There remains a growing need for early childhood educators and paraprofessionals, who serve integral to meeting the needs of children and families in the early learning setting, to obtain further specialized training and education.

As reflected in the findings of this study, the early childhood educators represent a diverse group of practitioners. With varying years of classroom experience, professional preparation, and credentials, the early childhood educators reveal a contradictory nature of beliefs and practices in accordance to theories on professional teacher development (Katz, 1972). Surprisingly, Katie, who is a mother and holds an elementary education certificate, is among the most experienced of the early childhood educators. However, Katie lacks child development knowledge and rarely displays an appreciation of children in her role as early childhood educator. In sharp contrast, Barbara who is the least experienced of the early childhood educators and is enrolled in an alterative teacher education program demonstrates considerable affect and appreciation for children. Sarah, a rarely novice educator, demonstrates great proficiency across content areas and holds a

dual certification in early childhood education and special education. However, Sarah rarely demonstrates affective concern for children. Lena, a mother and an experienced, skilled early childhood educator, demonstrates considerable affect in classroom instruction, child assessments, and reciprocal interactions with children. Thus, there remains a significant need for policy makers to consider the impact of teacher knowledge and genuine, affective concern for children including the ethic of care in educational policy on the professional preparation of early childhood educators. It is recommended that further studies, which consider these variables be undertaken to ascertain how stages of teacher development impact beliefs and practices (Lobman and Ryan, 2007).

Early learning standards serve to mediate how children learn in the early care and educational setting. With an increasingly diverse population of children entering the early care and educational setting, early learning standards are often considered as a significant response to the changing sociopolitical landscape present in educational settings. Scholars advocate that developmental approaches in early care and educational settings do not preclude content area skill development (Goldstein, 2008; Justice et al., 2007 Han & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2010; Ostrosky, Gaffney, & Thomas, 2006; Ryan, 2004 ; Stipek, 2006; Wolfgang, Stannard, & Jones, 2009).

Although scholars suggest that policy driven, early learning standards support child centered, developmentally appropriate practice, the present case under study suggests a need for early childhood educators to implement a standards based model of curricula and instruction with a greater understanding of child development knowledge to foster positive outcomes for preschool age children in educational policy reform. Policy reform in the field of early childhood education is undergoing transformative change.

Current policy reforms suggest that early childhood education consider children's learning beginning at birth through age eight in formalized educational settings (NJDOE, 2014). With a growing emphasis on child development and learning beginning at birth through age eight, early learning standards may serve to positively impact the preparation of aspiring early childhood educators and provide an impetus for educators to carefully consider child development to implement early learning standards across content areas and learning domains. Such reform efforts may serve to influence teacher beliefs, knowledge, and practices in the preschool setting. It is recommended that further studies, which take these variables into account be undertaken to ascertain how early learning standards impact young children along the birth to age eight continuum.

Educational policy seeks to ensure that curriculum, materials, and classroom resources positively impact children's capacity for learning (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; NAEYC, 2009). Recognizing that child characteristics including culture, language, and abilities influence a child's disposition for learning, policy makers and educational researchers advocate for quality in the early learning environment to meet the varying needs, unique abilities, and interests of children. However, this study confirms that how early childhood educators create physical learning environments as measured through materials, equipment, and resources does not serve to influence how educators interact with children (Jeon et al., 2010; Slutsky and Pistorova , 2011) Rather, authentic physical and emotive early learning environments, support children's engagement in varied groupings under the direction of early childhood educators who value reciprocal interactions with children. The notion of authentic early learning environments characterized by children's engagement in authentic, intentional, and supportive adult and

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peer interactions is reliant upon an educators knowledge and desire to holistically address the needs of children. A desire to impact child growth and development represent an educator's commitment to children in the preschool setting.

As indicated in the findings of the present case under study, the early childhood educators demonstrate differing interactions with children. Such perspectives reveal that effective educators support and nuture children's strengths, interests and abilities as demonstated through interpersonal interactions which acknowledge children's thoughts, feelings, concerns, and encourage children's efforts to be successful (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). With a greater need for early childhood educators to acknowledge and to respond to developmental differences with care and sensitivity to children and families in the framework of child centered practice, further qualitative research on positive reciprocal relationships is warranted.

Methodologically, prior studies on the nature of reciprocal interactions interpret the caring behaviors of adults using standardized instruments in mostly large-scale studies (Howes & Smith, 1995; Kugelmass & Ross-Bernstein, 2000; Vitiello et al., 2012). This present case under study considers the interrelatedness of curricula, instruction, and reciprocal interactions through the lens of developmentally appropriate practice and interprets the experiences of the educators qualitatively. It is recommended that further qualitative research thoughtfully consider the voices of early childhood practitioners and young children to support the findings of the present case under study.

Much policy and empirical research emphasizes the need to prepare early childhood educators for diverse contextual settings in public education (Burant & Kirby, 2002; Cook & Van Cleaf, 2000; Frederick-Steele, 2011; Hughes et al., 2004; Johnson &

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Reiman, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Lee & Herner-Patnode, 2010; Milner, 2006; Nieto, 2006; Talbert-Johnson, 2006; Villegas, 2007). Although school context is a valid concern, educators should consider how personally a held beliefs, values, and assumptions impacts child's learning in schools serving diverse learners. As indicated in the findings, the educators possess varied skills, and knowledge to implement the preschool curricula. This study confirms a greater need for early childhood educators to pursue professional development knowledge, opportunities for direct engagement, and critical self reflection to increase sensitivity and responsiveness to culturally, linguistically, socio economically, and ability diverse children and families rather than perceiving diversity in the educational setting as an obligation of teaching diverse learners.

Therefore, early childhood educators should thoughtfully consider and critically reflect on the decision to teach in an urban context. Secondly, as indicated in the findings, teacher beliefs are strongly influenced by school climate and culture. Such perspectives reveal a greater need for publicly funded schools to support early childhood practitioners and further research is warranted to garner a deeper understanding of how a sense of advocacy among communities of practice are evident in serving diverse learners.

The current framework for developmentally appropriate practice considers a child's lived experience as essential to early learning and illustrates the growing need for educators to consider a child's racial identity, culture, socio-economic status, and language in the course of teaching, nurturing, and responding to children in the preschool setting (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Mallory & New, 1994; NAEYC, 2009). In accordance with the present results, previous studies have also demonstrated that an early

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childhood educator's disposition to affirm differences among young children and families demonstrates sensitivity to context (Goodfellow & Sumsion, 2000; Talbert-Johnson, 2006). However, further research on the influence of contextual factors across contexts is warranted in early learning communities of practice.

The present study considers how values, beliefs, and assumptions influence reciprocal interactions with children through the lens of developmentally appropriate practice. Since the focus of this study is on practicing early childhood educators in an urban preschool setting, this study does not consider the impact of teacher preparation programs on requisite teacher skills, knowledge, and characteristics. However, this study confirms a need for teacher preparation programs to wholly support the ideal of child centered curricula and caring centered teacher practices.

Scholars suggest that educational policy efforts support teacher preparation programs in higher education. Such perspectives reveal that teacher preparation programs convey outdated knowledge of child growth and development requisite to the skills of aspiring educators (National Association of Elementary School Principals [NAESP], 2005; NICHHD, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, & NCATE, 2008) Secondly, because the case under study considers key dispositions of early care and educational practitioners, a review of the research on conceptualizing an educator's disposition confirms the findings of the present case under study. In accordance with prior studies, this study suggests that for those who aspire to the profession of teaching, thoughtful consideration be given to the notion of education as a humanistic endeavor that affirms child differences in support of child development.

With an emphasis on the demands and difficulties of the profession, scholars advocate that educators' love children and possess a desire to meaningful interact with children. Such perspectives reveal that effective educators have an extensive understanding of children to best address the learning needs of children. However, much of the research interprets an aspiring educators' disposition. It is recommended that further studies, which take these variables into account should be undertaken to positively influence aspiring teacher and practicing early childhood beliefs, knowledge, and practices integral to exploratory play, classroom dialogue, curricula, and developmental assessments in order to ensure that aspiring future educators and current educational practitioners are highly qualified educators (Lobman & Ryan, 2008; Lobman, Ryan, & McLaughlin, 2005; NCATE, 2008). Additional research on teacher preparation programs should thoughtfully consider how higher education faculty support developmental theories in the course of presenting curriculum content and critical early childhood pedagogies along with community immersion experiences in diverse settings to adequately prepare aspiring early childhood educators to support children, families, and community in the role of teacher.

This study does not interpret the role of leadership in early childhood education. Scholars advocate that public schools possess a greater capacity to serve children (Aubrey, Godfrey, & Harris, 2013; Desimone, Payne, Fedoravicius, Henrich, & Finn-Stevenson, 2004; McCartney, Burchinal, & Grindal, 2011). This is an important issue for further research. In response to the outcomes of this study, there is a need for examining the role of administrators in leading professional early childhood learning communities of practice, especially in publicly funded preschool programs located in urban geographical

areas to ensure curricula alignment, kindergarten transitional practices, and to foster collaboration among teachers along the preschool through third grade continuum to promote a greater understanding of developmentally appropriate practices (NAESP, 2005).

Few studies have focused on whether practicing leaders possess requisite knowledge and skills necessary to lead early childhood communities of practice. Therefore, the role of early childhood administrators is especially relevant to further research because administrators influence school policies, school climate, and curricula decisions to foster the development of early childhood practitioners and effectively supervise programs for young children. An examination of the role of early childhood administrators and whether educational leaders embrace child centered philosophical assumptions in support of preschool age children in publicly funded programs could provide insight to the field of early childhood education (Cherry, 2011; Stamopoulous, 2012).

As the findings of this study suggest, the process of cultivating child growth and development with heartfelt appreciation for children and families demands knowledge, advocacy, and concern. The educators mostly demonstrate an ethic of care for children that are reliant upon personal values such as fairness, honesty, responsibility, and social justice concerns. Prior studies suggest that educators possess emotional and spiritual character traits in concert with a desire to impart knowledge and demonstrate pedagogical skills that are unique to the profession of early childhood and influence child growth and development in the early learning setting. Such prior findings reveal that personal characteristics including passion, joy, patience, drive, dedication, and perseverance are

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requisite to an early childhood educators' capacity to positively impact children because young children possess an intuit understanding of an adults disposition to demonstrate genuine concern and care for them in the early learning setting (Colker, 2008; Swick, 2007). Scholars advocate that educational policy makers consider the ethic of care as equally important to teacher knowledge and pedagogical skill (Webb & Blond, 1995). The findings of the present case under study provide further support for educational policy on the ethic of care in early childhood education.

Conclusion

Many educators with whom I have worked alongside during my career in public education have aptly expressed with heartfelt emotion, a love of children. And, loving children is vital to nurturing children's development across the continuum in education. It is however, not enough to support an ever growing population of young children residing in urban settings wrought with numerous challenges for children and their families that often inhibits the well being of preschool age children. The results of this study confirm this assertion.

The present study was designed to analyze varied, interrelated aspects of early childhood pedagogy to illustrate an early childhood educator's passion to cultivate child development with heartfelt appreciation for children based on key assertions about child development and the intuit responsibility of early childhood educators to demonstrate knowledge, advocacy and concern for children. At the onset of this study, I posited that effective early childhood educators' possess essential affective traits including knowledge and a desire to communicate subject matter knowledge with passion for the child development in the preschool setting. This case study research situated an analysis

of such perspectives within educational theory and existing empirical research on child development in the preschool years to interpret the espoused beliefs and observed practices of seven early childhood educators in four preschool classrooms within an urban geographical, preschool setting.

The educational theories of Dewey, Piaget, and Vygotsky inform the theoretical framework of this study as articulated in principles of developmentally appropriate practice. Through the lens of educational theory and contemporary empirical research on child centered pedagogy, I interpreted the values, beliefs, and prevailing characteristics of early childhood practitioners to illustrate how early childhood educators nurture children's individual strengths, interests, and diverse abilities to holistically serve children.

Informed by the educational philosophy of Dewey, I examined an early childhood educator's disposition to enact child-centered pedagogy with a love of knowledge, a desire to communicate knowledge, and a love of contact with the young. I considered Dewey's notion that education is a humanistic, social, and democratic endeavor that supports the notion of children's needs as the center of curricula and classroom decision making to promote the overall well being of children. In accordance with Dewey's philosophy on education, teaching and learning is a humanistic, social, and democratic process wherein children's learning occurs as a result of nurturing, personal and shared experiences with adults and children at play and during learning experiences (Dewey, 1940).

In consideration of Dewey's philosophy, effective educators possess essential dispositional characteristics to foster child growth and development in the early care and

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educational setting that extend beyond pedagogical knowledge (Dewey, 1938). Dewey imparts a notion of love as an essential teacher disposition which embodies an educator's intuit desire to empathize, care, and nurture children in the educational setting. Dewey articulates, in the absence of love, educators misinterpret the educational needs of children relating a message of indifference to children (Dewey, 1938).

Evident in the philosophical works of Dewey is the notion of responding to diversity present in contemporary early care and educational settings and the prevailing belief that education should reflect the broader community in which schools and educators serve children and their families as garnered through an educators awareness and knowledge of the physical, historical, and occupational aspects of child's community in the aim of fostering child learning experiences that mimic the linguistic, social, and cultural context of a child's lived experience (Dewey, 1938).

Piaget's and Vygotsky's theories on child development inform the results of this research study. Piaget's (1951) theory imparts that children's learning progress through distinct stages in accordance to biological maturation and through experience including environmental influences. Piaget's theory supports the notion that an early childhood educator's role is to model, guide, and facilitate meaningful learning experiences that foster children's curiosity and engagement in play like experiences, which stimulate cognitive growth, and development in children. While Piaget advocates for children's development as occurring in sequential stages, Vygotsky (1978) advocates for social interaction as requisite to children's increasingly complex understanding of key concepts, skills, and knowledge.

According to Vygotsky, children construct knowledge as they interact with adults and peers in the preschool classroom. Vygotsky's assertion is expressed as the zone of proximal development which represents the distance between a child's developmental level and the level of potential development that is attained when children engage in learning activities under the guidance of adults and among their peers, in contrast to working alone suggesting that learning is a social behavior (Blake & Pope, 2008; Follari, 2007; Hudson, 2002). The framework of developmentally appropriate practice is informed by the educational theories of Piaget and Vygotsky (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

Widely considered as a standard of practice in the field of early childhood education, developmentally appropriate practice is a framework of early learning principles which considers an educator's role in holistically addressing all aspects of a child's physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development in accordance to chronological age, individual characteristics, and culturally appropriate references in the early learning environment (Bredekamp, 1987; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Mallory & New, 1994). The framework for developmentally appropriate practice emphasizes positive relationships with children and families as requisite to children's readiness for learning. Considering demographical factors present in early learning programs, developmentally appropriate practice reflects contextual factors such as race, ethnicity, language, and socio-economic status present in settings populated by racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse children and families (Bredekamp, 1987; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Dickinson, 2002; NAEYC, 2009, Mallory & New, 1994).

There is general agreement in contemporary literature that education is a humanistic endeavor that serves to promote the well being of children in the educational setting. Such perspectives are reflected in the findings of this study. However, although the early childhood educators articulate the growing need to respond to children with empathy, care, and sensitivity the evidence from this study confirms that an educator's beliefs influence the nature of instruction and reciprocal interactions with children and families. Although the early childhood educators possess general knowledge about the children, families, and community served in the preschool setting, the evidence from this study confirms that educators interpret children's needs and abilities based on personal beliefs; such perspectives inform their interactions with children.

A greater sensitivity to context is integral to teaching young children. Such perspectives confirm that context influences an educator's practice. It suggests that scholars, policy makers, educational leaders and community stakeholders continue efforts to ensure early care and educational practitioners accept, embrace, and support children's cultural, linguistic, and ability diverse behaviors in early care and educational environments serving diverse learners.

There is general agreement in contemporary literature that many early childhood educators articulate the merits of child centered pedaogy and do not fully embrace principles of developmentally appropriate practice especially in programs serving children considered at risk for learning difficulties due to diversity and lived experience. The evidence from this study confirms that an educators pedagogical skills, personal traits, and child development knowledge adversely impacts how educators respond to children's unique needs, interests, and abilities with care, concern, and sensitivity to

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differences. It suggests a need for greater effort on the part of educational leaders, schools of education, and policy makers to ensure early care and educational practitioners possess a passion for curricula and desire to communicate knowledge with a greater understanding of early childhood pedagogy in diverse educational settings.

This research expands upon educational theory and empirical research to broaden our knowledge of early childhood pedagogy in a diverse, urban preschool setting that purports to embrace principles of developmentally appropriate practice. The results of this study illustrate that an individual's beliefs, assumptions, knowledge, and professional experiences in the early care and education of young children significantly influence how educators nurture child growth and development in the preschool setting. Such perspectives confirm that a personal sense of advocacy for children, professional knowledge, intentional teaching, and an intuit desire to thoughtfully interact with children represent key dispositions of early care and educational practitioners. The results provide insight for professional learning communities of practice in early childhood education that compliment an existing body of scholarly knowledge and empirical literature in the field of early childhood education.

Therefore, at the conclusion of this study, I return to the overarching research concern posed in this study, "What key dispositions of early childhood educators' support developmentally appropriate practice and affirm differences among children in the early childhood setting?" To that end, in order to positively impact children's growth and learning, thoughtful early care and educational practitioners consider the chronological, individual, and cultural appropriateness of teaching young children thus demonstrating knowledge, advocacy, and concern for young children. Therefore, to fully embrace

developmentally appropriate practice is to affirm child differences in the early care and

educational setting and to respond with care, sensitivity, and concern for the development

of young children.

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Appendices

Appendix A: IRB Letter of Intent

July 2011

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research
Rowan University
Office of Research, Bole Hall Annex
201 Mullica Hill Road
Glassboro NJ 08028

To Whom It May Concern:

Please find enclosed for your review and consideration, The Human Research Review Application necessary to conduct research as a part of the Doctoral program requirements of Rowan University.

The enclosed research materials adhere to the ethical guidelines, standards and regulations regarding the protection of human participants. I have enclosed for your review a copy of the *Completion Certificate for Human Participant Protections Education for Research.*

The purpose of conducting a research study in this topical area is twofold: (1) To explore key dispositions of early childhood educators that support developmentally appropriate practice and diversity in the early childhood setting and, (2) To reveal how early childhood educator perceive differences among children in the early childhood setting as evidenced through the formation of nurturing relationships with children in the early childhood setting. The aim of this research is to contribute to the expansive body of research within the field of early childhood education.

As a doctoral student in the Doctoral program in Educational Leadership at Rowan University, I plan to conduct this research study under the guidance and support of Dr. Corine C. Meredith, Professor of Teacher Education, Rowan University.

Dr. Meredith, who currently serves as a Rowan University Professional Development liaison to the research site selection will provide guidance to me throughout the course of this study in order to ensure this research study meets the highest standards of scholarly research.

I hope you will consider this request to conduct this research study and I look forward to a favorable response.

<div align="center">
Sincerely,
Lorraine C. Ricchezza, Doctoral Candidate
</div>

Appendix B: Letter to Principal

May 13, 2011

Mrs. Principal
ABC Elementary School
1020 S 3rd Street
Urban City, NJ 08103

Dear Mrs. Principal:

Please accept this letter as a formal request to conduct a qualitative research study entitled, "Fostering Nurturing Relationships with Diverse Learners in the Early childhood setting: A study of Key Teacher Dispositions that Support Developmentally Appropriate Practice" at the ABC Elementary School during the 2011-2012 academic year.

The purpose of this research study is to explore the interrelated concepts of developmentally appropriate practice and diversity in the early childhood setting in the construct of early childhood educators as a basis for understanding the context in which early childhood educators develop nurturing relationships children within the early childhood setting.

The following research questions will serve as the basis for this study. The overarching question for this study involves key early childhood educator dispositions towards diversity in the early childhood classroom as described below:

  c. What key dispositions of early childhood educators support developmentally appropriate practice and diversity in the early childhood setting?

Several topical sub-questions seek to address best practices in the early childhood classroom throughout the course of this study as outlined below:

  c. How do early childhood educator perceive and respond to developmental differences among children in the early childhood setting?
  d. How do early childhood educators form and nurture relationships with children whose background may be different from their own background?

The ABC Elementary School will serve as an ideal site to conduct this research study. The ABC Elementary School holds true the ideals of equity in education in contemporary urban settings expressed through open dialogue among administration, school staff, parents, and the community at large as described on the school's website.

Additionally, in my professional capacity as Director, Early Childhood Programs for Rowan University, I have observed firsthand the dedication among school staff and administration to foster change for children and the community.

As a doctoral student in the Doctoral program in Educational Leadership at Rowan University, I plan to conduct this research study under the guidance and support of Dr. Corine C. Meredith, Professor of Teacher Education, Rowan University.

Dr. Meredith, who currently serves as a Rowan University Professional Development Liaison to the ABC Elementary School will provide guidance to me throughout the course of this study in order to ensure this research study benefits all members of the learning community at the ABC Elementary School.

I hope you will consider this request to conduct this research study within the ABC Elementary School. I look forward to a favorable response and I thank you in advance for this opportunity.

Sincerely,

Lorraine C. Ricchezza
Doctoral Candidate
Department of Educational Leadership
Rowan University

Appendix C: Letter to Parents

Dear Parent/Guardian:

I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership Department at Rowan University. I will be conducting a research study under the supervision of Dr. Cori Meredith as part of my doctoral dissertation studies concerning how preschool teachers support educational practices in the preschool classroom and how preschool teachers develop caring relationships with young children. The goal of the study is to explore and identify key characteristics of teachers that support learning and care of children in the preschool classroom.

Throughout the course of this research study, I will participate in your child's classroom. Your child will not be interviewed for the purposes of this research. Rather the purpose of this letter of consent is to allow me to observe teacher child interaction in the preschool classroom.

All data collected as a part of this research study will be reported in terms of group results; individual results will not be reported and all of the data that I will collect during this study will remain confidential. The use of audio, video and photographs may be used to supplement the collection of data throughout this study.

Your decision whether or not to allow your child to participate in this study will have absolutely no effect on your child's standing in his/her class. At the conclusion of the study a summary of the results will be made available to all interested parents.

If you have any questions or concern, please contact me at (856) 756-5400 or you may contact my advisor, Dr. Cori Meredith at (856) 256-4500. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Lorraine C. Ricchezza

Please indicate whether or not you wish to have your child observed as a part of this study by checking the appropriate statement below and retuning this letter to your child's teacher by October 1st.

_____ I grant permission for my child _____ to participate in this study.

_____ I do not grant permission for my child _____ to participate in this study.

_____   _____
Parent/Guardian Signature   Date

Appendix D: Letter to Participants

Dear Early Childhood Educator:

I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership Department at Rowan University. I will be conducting a research study under the supervision of Dr. Cori Meredith as part of my doctoral dissertation studies concerning how early childhood teachers support educational practices in the preschool classroom and how preschool teachers develop caring relationships with young children. The goal of the study is to explore and identify key characteristics of early childhood educators that support learning and care of children in the preschool classroom.

By agreeing to participate in the study, I will be observing in your classroom over the course of the 2011-2012 academic year. Throughout the course of this research study, I will conduct a series of interviews with each teacher that will last approximately thirty minutes. It is anticipated that throughout the course of this study, that a series of three interviews will take place. The interviews will be audio taped and transcribed. It is my sincere hope that the information provided will help to support teachers who are responsible for young children in the early childhood classroom.

All data collected as a part of this research study will be reported in terms of group results; individual results will not be reported and all of the data that I will collect during this study will remain confidential. The use of audio, video and photographs may be used to supplement the collection of data throughout this study.

During the course of this study, I also plan to conduct two focus group sessions. Focus groups are commonly used in social and behavioral research to bring out insights and understandings that regular questionnaires or individual interviews may not offer. The purpose of these focus groups interviews will be to foster a better understanding of the topical area under research. The discussion in the focus group will be tape-recorded and transcribed following the session, but you will not be identified in individually on the transcripts.

There are no anticipated possible risks and/or discomforts of your involvement in this research study. Your participation is voluntary and your decision to participate can be stopped at any time.

If you have any questions or concern, please contact me at (856) 756-5400 or you may contact my advisor, Dr. Cori Meredith at (856) 256-4500. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Lorraine C. Ricchezza

I have been fully informed of the study and I give my permission to participate in this study.

I understand that the purpose of this study is to explore and identify key characteristics of early childhood educators that support learning and care of children in the preschool classroom. The data collected in this study with be combined with other data and will be submitted for a qualitative research study in fulfillment of a Dissertation requirement.

I understand that my responses will remain confidential and that all the data gathered will be confidential. I agree that any information obtained from this study may be used for publication or education provided that I am not identified and that my name will not be used in publication materials.

I understand that there are physical or psychological risks involved in this study.

The benefits to this study would be that the early childhood program teachers learn new ways to support developmentally appropriate practices and diversity in the preschool classroom.

I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and that I can decline to participate at any time.

I have been fully informed of the study and I give my permission to participate in this study.

_____   _____   ____
Signature of Participant   Name of Participant (print)   Date

_____   _____   ____
Signature of Project Director   Name of Project Director (print)   Date

Appendix E: Observation Protocol

I. Teacher: Site: Time: Date:

Time: # Adults Present: # Children Present:

Demographical Information:

Male students: #Female Students: Number of students with disabilities:

Number of ELL students:

II. Observation Checklist

A. During the visit students were:

- ☐ Working Independently
- ☐ Working in small groups
- ☐ Engaged at Center
- ☐ Participating in a scheduled routine/transition/activity

B. During the visit the teacher/paraprofessional was:

- ☐ Working with a large group of students
- ☐ Working with a small group of students
- ☐ Working with students one-one one
- ☐ Expanding on ideas presented by children
- ☐ Reading to children formally and/or informally
- ☐ Redirecting undesirable behavior/giving positive reinforcement

C. In the physical environment, there was evidence of:

- ☐ Student work is displayed
- ☐ Linking children's spoken communication with written language
- ☐ Books are organized in the literacy center and displayed in all centers
- ☐ Higher level question posted in all centers
- ☐ Activities to promote language development and independent writing
- ☐ Individualized conversations between staff and children
- ☐ A balance of non-stereotypical books, props and materials
- ☐ ELL support
- ☐ Clearly defined cozy areas (private areas with softness and comfort
- ☐ Choice system displayed
- ☐ Meaningful classroom print
- ☐ Materials organized and labeled for all students

D. During the visit the teacher/paraprofessional, there was evidence of:

- ☐ Vygotsky's ZPD theory
- ☐ Developmentally Appropriate Practice

Note: Observation Protocol adapted from. Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, (2004). *Early childhood environment rating scale (ECERS-R)* **Revised Edition. New York: Teachers College Press.**

Appendix F: Interview Protocol

Hello, my name is Lorraine Ricchezza and I am a doctoral student at Rowan University. I would like to thank for taking the time to join me for a few minutes to further discuss how you feel that diversity is being incorporated into developmentally appropriate practices in the early childhood setting. As we proceed through our discussion I will serve as the moderator and I will take notes on your comments. I invite you to speak openly and freely. Your comments are confidential. I will be audio taping our discussion and will transcribe the data.

This research study, "Fostering Nurturing Relationships with Diverse Learners in the Early childhood setting: A study of Key Teacher Dispositions that Support Diversity and Developmentally Appropriate Practice" is a qualitative case study designed to explore the interrelated concepts of developmentally appropriate practice and diversity in the early childhood setting through the lens of early childhood educators as a basis for understanding the context in which early childhood educators develop nurturing relationships children within the early childhood setting.

The purpose of this interview is to develop an understanding of the topical area and will be used to further discussion throughout this research study. Do you have any questions? Let's begin:

Interviewee (Title and Initials):

Site:

Time:

Date:

1.) Interviewee Background

    a) How long have you been in your present position?
    b) How long have you Teaching?
    c) What is your highest degree?
    d) What is your field of study?

2.) Main Interview Questions

    a) What do you enjoy about teaching?
    b) Briefly describe your role as teacher as it relates to student learning and assessment.
    c) Could you describe how you meet the needs of individual children in your classroom?
    d) What resources are available to you as teacher for engaging students and their families?

e) Do you use evidence of student learning as a springboard for classroom instructional strategies?
f) Are you and your students of the same or different cultural background?
g) Have you encountered any obstacles or challenges with teaching? What are they?
h) Are there any particular characteristics that you see among the children in your class?
i) Could you describe what happens each day at when children and parents arrive and leave?
j) How do you choose children's literature?
k) How do you support conversations among children and between children and yourself?
l) Are there opportunities for children to work together on projects?
m) Are any materials or activities used to help children understand that people come from many places?
n) Describe a typical day in your classroom.

Note: Interview Protocol adapted from. Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, (2004). *Early childhood environment rating scale (ECERS-R)* **Revised Edition. New York: Teachers College Press.**

Appendix G: Focus Group Protocol

Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of this research study is to explore the interrelated concepts of developmentally appropriate practice and diversity in the early childhood setting through the lens of early childhood educators as a basis for understanding the context in which early childhood educators develop nurturing relationships children within the early childhood setting.

Rationale:

The researcher will utilize a focus group in addition to individual interviews in order to bring out insights and understandings that individual interviews may not offer the researcher.

Participant Selection:

Participants selected for the focus group portion of this research study include all those early childhood educators involved in the practice of early childhood learning at the ABC Elementary School.

There is no exclusion criterion.

Location/Setting:

The sessions will be held in a location that will comfortable for the participants to interact and discuss the research topics.

The focus group sessions will occur at the ABC Elementary School in the teacher resource room in order to ensure confidentiality.

The location will be convenient for the participations.

Refreshments will be provided during the focus group session.

Procedures:

The focus group sessions will occur twice during the research study. The focus group sessions will occur at the onset of the study, post classroom observations, and at the conclusion of the research study.

There will be eight participants per focus group.

Participants will consent to the focus group as a part of the informed consent process obtained at the start of the research study.

The participants will not complete demographics information prior to the focus group discussion.

The focus group sessions will be recorded.

General Discussion Topics:

  (1) School's Mission
  (2) Community and Neighborhood Information
  (3) Knowledge of Children
  (4) Supports for Learning

Moderator:

The researcher will be heading the focus group discussions.

Confidentiality:

The discussions will remain confidential. The identities of participants will be coded as a part of the research study.

Taped recordings will be kept in a secure and locked area with access limited to the researcher.

Recordings will be destroyed at the completion of the research study.

Duration:

The focus group sessions will occur over a forty-five minute time period.

The focus group sessions will occur will occur at the onset of the study, post classroom observations, and at the conclusion of the research study.

Compensation:

Participants will not be compensated during any part of this research study.

Appendix H: Focus Group Informed Consent

Dear Educator:

You are being invited to participate in a series of focus group discussions in order to explore the interrelated concepts of developmentally appropriate practice and diversity in the early childhood setting.

The purpose of these focus group discussions is to provide a forum for open dialogue and discourse among early childhood educators as a basis for understanding the context in which early childhood educators develop nurturing relationships children along the developmental continuum within the early childhood setting.

Your participation in these focus group discussions will be voluntary. All measures will be taken to protect your confidentiality. I plan to audiotape group responses and will keep this information confidential. No information will be accessible to your administrator.

These discussions will serve as a participatory data collection and data analysis tool for the researcher. These sessions will allow the researcher to "check-in" with participants to provide the researcher with insight and valid interpretations of the data collected.

These sessions will last approximately forty-five minutes. Refreshments will be served.

I understand that my participation in these focus group discussions is voluntary and that I can decline to participate at any time.

I have been fully informed of the study and I give my permission to participate in this study.

_____   _____   _____
Signature of Participant   Name of Participant (print)   Date

_____   _____   _____
Signature of Project Director   Name of Project Director (print)   Date

Appendix I: Focus Group Discussion Guide

Instructions

A focus group is like a group interview. I am interested in everyone's responses to the questions, and there are no right or wrong answers. I appreciate your input in the discussion.

1.) Initial Focus Group Discussion Questions (ask and probe for responses):

a) How do you define diversity within the context of your responsibilities as preschool teacher?

b) How do you believe your formal educational program has prepared you to work with all learners?

c) What information about children are you provided at the start of the school year?

d) What information about the neighborhood and community do you have?

e) What is the mission of ABC School?

f) Do you feel supported?

g) Do you have any questions?

Appendix J: Checklist for Focus Group Interviews[1]

Advance Notice
_____Contact participants by phone two weeks (or more) before the session.
_____Send each participant a letter confirming time, date, and place.
_____Give the participants a reminder phone call prior to the session.

Questions
_____Questions should flow in a logical sequence.
_____Key questions should focus on the critical issues.
_____Limit the use of "why" questions.
_____Use "think-back" questions as needed.

Logistics
_____The room should be satisfactory (size, tables, comfort, sound, etc.)
_____Arrive early.
_____Check background noise so it doesn't interfere with tape recordings.
_____Have name tents for participants.
_____Place a remote microphone on the table.
_____Place the tape recorder off the table near the assistant moderator's chair.
_____Bring extra tapes, batteries, and extension cords.
_____Plan topics for small-talk conversation.
_____Seat experts and talkative participants next to the moderator.
_____Serve Food.
_____Bring enough copies of handouts and/or visual aids.

Moderator Skills
_____Practice introduction without referring to notes.
_____Practice questions. Know the key questions Be aware of timing.
_____Be well rested and alert.
_____Listen. Are participants answering the question?
_____Use probe, pause, or follow-up questions as needed.
_____Avoid verbal comments that signal approval.
_____Avoid giving personal opinions.

ccclxxxix————————————————

Immediately After the Session
_____Check to see if the tape recorder captured the comments.
_____Debrief with the research team.
_____Prepare a brief written summary.

[1] Krueger, Richard A. and Mary Anne Casey (2000). <u>Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research</u>. 3rd Edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Appendix K: IRB Approval Letter

Rowan
University

September 28, 2011

Lorraine C. Ricchezza
406 Otter Court
Mullica Hill, NJ 08062

Dear Lorraine C. Ricchezza:

In accordance with the University's IRB policies and 45 CFR 46, the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, I am pleased to inform you that the Rowan University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has approved your project:

IRB application number: 2012-013

Project Title: Fostering Nurturing Relationships with Diverse Learners in the Early Childhood Setting: A Study of Key Teacher Dispositions that Support Diversity and Developmentally Appropriate Practice

In accordance with federal law, this approval is effective for one calendar year from the date of this letter. If your research project extends beyond that date or if you need to make significant modifications to your study, you must notify the IRB immediately. Please reference the above-cited IRB application number in any future communications with our office regarding this research.

Please retain copies of consent forms for this research for three years after completion of the research.

If, during your research, you encounter any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects, you must report this immediately to Dr. Harriet Hartman (hartman@rowan.edu or call 856-256-1500, ext. 3787) or contact Dr. Shreekanth Mandayam, Associate Provost for Research (shreek@rowan.edu or call 856-256-5150).

If you have any administrative questions, please contact Karen Heiser (heiser@rowan.edu or 856-256-5150).

Sincerely,

Harriet Hartman

Harriet Hartman, Ph.D.
Chair, Rowan University IRB

c: Corine C. Meredith, Teacher Education, Education Hall

Office of Research
Bole Hall
201 Mullica Hill Road   856 256 5150
Glassboro, NJ 08028-1701   856-256-4425 fax

Appendix L: Teacher Instructional Schedule

SCHOOL SCHEDULE

SCHOOL/CENTER: Lanning Square Annex   SCHOOL YEAR: 2011/2012

TEACHER: _____
PARAPROFESSIONAL: _____

TIME	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
	Greeting/Arrival activities	Greeting/Arrival activities	Greeting/Arrival activities	Greeting/Arrival activities	Greeting/Arrival activities
	Whole Group/message time/Circle	Whole Group/message time/Circle	Whole Group/message time/Circle	Whole Group/message time/Circle	Whole Group/message time/Circle
	Free choice/small gr./Informal Read aloud/special area (9:30-10:15)	Free choice/small gr./Informal Read aloud/special area (9:30-10:15)	Free choice/small gr./Informal Read aloud/special area (9:30-10:15)	Free choice/small gr./Informal Read aloud/special area (9:30-10:15)	Free choice/small gr./Informal Read aloud/special area (9:30-10:15)
	Read aloud	Read aloud	Read aloud	Read aloud	Read aloud
	student lunch	student lunch	student lunch	student lunch	student lunch
	Gross motor	Gross motor	Gross motor	Gross motor	Gross motor
	Nap (teacher's lunch)	Nap (teacher's lunch)	Nap (teacher's lunch)	Nap (teacher's lunch)	Nap (teacher's lunch)
	free choice/snack	free choice/snack	free choice/snack	free choice/snack	free choice/snack
	Read aloud	Read aloud	Read aloud	Read aloud	Read aloud
	Gross motor	Gross motor	Gross motor	Gross motor	Gross motor
	departure activities	departure activities	departure activities	departure activities	departure activities

Para.Pro - lunch 1:15-2:15, Prep 2:15-3:00

Administrator's signature: _____
Date of approval: _____

Free Choice:	Minimum = 2 hrs. 10 min. (130 min.)
Whole Group:	May not exceed 20 min.
Small Group:	May not exceed 60 min. Takes place during free choice and occurs daily. Teacher meets with no more than 3 children in the AM and 3 children in the PM.
Gross motor:	Minimum of 45 min. and occurs daily. Must begin outdoors at least once daily (weather permitting). Free choice use of materials, not whole group time
Read aloud:	Must occur 3 times daily. One Read-aloud must occur informally during Free Choice.
Nap/rest:	1 hour daily
Special Area:	Occurs during Free Choice. The Special Area teacher becomes children as an instruct Area, not as a whole group, with the exception of Plays #6

Daily Non PE Schedule

Room#108

Teacher: Mrs. Armstrong   Paraprofessional A: Ms. Busbee

Time	Activity
8:30-8:45	Greeting/Drawing/Table Top Activities
8:45-9:05	Whole Group/ Read A Loud/Message Time
9:05-9:30	Gross Motor
9:30-11:10	Free Choice/Small Group/ Informal Reading
11:10-11:50	Lunch
11:50-12:15	Gross motor
12:15-12:20	Read A Loud
12:20-1:20	Quiet/Rest
1:20-2:30	Free Choice/Small Group/Healthy Snack
2:30-2:45	Recall/Read a Loud
2:45-2:55	Dismissal

Appendix N: Teacher Lesson Plan
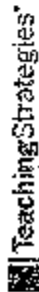
Weekly Planning Form

Week of: Feb 6. 2012   Study/Project: Clothes   Teacher(s): Brigid Donaghy

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Interest Areas	Blocks: Add plastic people and encourage students to build clothing stores	Blocks: Add plastic people and encourage students to build clothing stores	Blocks: Add plastic people and encourage students to build clothing stores	Blocks: Add plastic people and encourage students to build clothing stores	Blocks: Add plastic people and encourage students to build clothing stores
	Dramatic Play: Add in dress up clothes, both male & female, plus ironing board	Dramatic Play: Add in dress up clothes, both male & female, plus ironing board	Dramatic Play: Add in dress up clothes, both male & female, plus ironing board	Dramatic Play: Add in dress up clothes, both male & female, plus ironing board	Dramatic Play: Add in dress up clothes, both male & female, plus ironing board
	Toys & Games: Add buttons to sort by color and size	Toys & Games: Add buttons to sort by color and size	Toys & Games: Add buttons to sort by color and size	Toys & Games: Add buttons to sort by color and size	Toys & Games: Add buttons to sort by color and size
	Art: Create 3D washer & dryer for dramatic play	Art: Create 3D washer & dryer for dramatic play	Art: Add in cotton balls & glue and explain how clothes are made out of cotton	Art: Add in cotton balls & glue and explain how clothes are made out of cotton	Art: Add in cotton balls & glue and explain how clothes are made out of cotton
	Library: Add in books on clothes	Library: Add in books on clothes	Library: Add in books on clothes	Library: Add in books on clothes	Library: Add in books on clothes
	Music & Movement: Play "Mary Wore A Red Dress" and encourage students to listen for all types of clothing	Music & Movement: Play "Mary Wore A Red Dress" and encourage students to listen for all types of clothing	Music & Movement: Play "Mary Wore A Red Dress" and encourage students to listen for all types of clothing	Music & Movement: Play "Mary Wore A Red Dress" and encourage students to listen for all types of clothing	Music & Movement: Play "Mary Wore A Red Dress" and encourage students to listen for all types of clothing
Large Group	What does it mean to dress? Notes: Pose the question to the students and identify empty bottle of detergent and asking. Also ask students "Do they help with laundry at home?" Record answers in list format. Objectives / Dimensions: 8a, 8b, 9c, 9b, 10a, 11b, 12a, 12b Children: All	What kind of clothes are made from wool? Notes: Bring in clothes made from wool and let students explore, paying attention to texture and look. Record student responses in list format. Objectives / Dimensions: 11a, 11b, 11d, 12b Children: All	What is a laundromat? Notes: Pose the question to the students and record answers in list format. Explain that students will have a pretend laundromat in dramatic play using the class dress-up area. Objectives / Dimensions: 8a, 8b, 9a, 11a, 11b, 11d, 12b Children: All	What fabrics do we wear? Notes: Display several types of fabrics and pass around to students. Record answers in list format. Objectives / Dimensions: 8a, 8b, 11a, 11b, 11c, 12a, 12b Children: All	Do boys and girls wear the same type of clothing? Notes: Pose the question to students what students think and record answers in list format. Objectives / Dimensions: 8a, 8b, 9b, 9a, 11a, 11b, 11d, 11e, 12a, 12b, 22 Children: All

Small Group	Buttons Notes: In the group of 3, explore buttons and sort by color and size. Work on counting, quantifying, and making patterns. Objectives / Dimensions: 8a, 8b, 9b, 11a, 11b, 11c, 12a, 20a, 20b, 22, 23 Children: Cadir Lewis, Tahani Hall, Tyrell Carridad	Buttons Notes: In the group of 3, explore buttons and sort by color and size. Work on counting, quantifying, and making patterns. Objectives / Dimensions: 8a, 8b, 9b, 11a, 11b, 11c, 12b, 20a, 20b, 22, 23 Children: Jasmeen Lund, Joseph Hoover, Saleel Bos	Buttons Notes: In the group of 3, explore buttons and sort by color and size. Work on counting, quantifying, and making patterns. Objectives / Dimensions: 8a, 8b, 9b, 11a, 11b, 11c, 12b, 20a, 20b, 22, 23 Children: Nelson Land, Niyese Santiago, Senulise Vega	Buttons Notes: In the group of 3, explore buttons and sort by color and size. Work on counting, quantifying, and making patterns. Objectives / Dimensions: 8a, 8b, 9b, 11a, 11b, 11c, 12b, 20a, 20b, 22, 23 Children: Hiral Gutierrez, Jesili Davis, Joseph Frankie
Read Aloud	Stories: A Line Free Love Story: A Pocket for Corduroy; You'll Soon Grow Into Them, Titch Notes: Connect these books back to large group question. Ask questions during reading and discuss the pictures. Objectives / Dimensions: 8a, 11a, 11b, 12a, 12b, 17a, 17b, 18a Children: All	Stories: A Little Free Love Story; All Kinds Of Clothes; You'll Soon Grow Into Them, Titch Notes: Connect these books back to large group question. Ask questions during reading and discuss the pictures. Objectives / Dimensions: 8a, 11a, 11b, 12a, 12b, 17a, 17b, 18a Children: All	Des Gets Dressed; The Paper Bag Princess; Apple Notes: Connect these books back to large group question. Ask questions during reading and discuss the pictures. Objectives / Dimensions: 11a, 11b, 12a, 12b, 17a, 18a Children: All	Max's Dragon Shirt; The Way We Dress; The Paper Bag Princess Notes: Connect these books back to large group question. Ask questions during reading and discuss the pictures. Objectives / Dimensions: 9a, 11a, 11b, 12a, 12b, 17a, 17b, 18a Children: All
Outdoor Experiences			White Clothes — discuss the clothes we have on at dismissal. Notes: Objectives / Dimensions: None Children: None	
Special Activities	Sort the Laundry Notes: Using various types of clothing, sort the laundry in the "laundry room". Sort by color and by tops and bottoms. Objectives / Dimensions: 8a, 8b, 11a, 11b, 11c, 11d, 12b, 14a Children: All	Sort the Laundry Notes: Using various types of clothing, sort the laundry in the "laundry room". Sort by color and by tops and bottoms. Objectives / Dimensions: 8a, 8b, 11a, 11b, 11c, 11d, 12b, 14a Children: All	Sort the Laundry Notes: Using various types of clothing, sort the laundry in the "laundry room". Sort by color and by tops and bottoms. Objectives / Dimensions: 9a, 9b, 11a, 11b, 11c, 11d, 12b, 14a Children: All	Sort the Laundry Notes: Using various types of clothing, sort the laundry in the "laundry room". Sort by color and by tops and bottoms. Objectives / Dimensions: 8a, 8b, 11a, 11b, 11c, 11d, 12b, 14a Children: All
Materials				

Partnership

To-Do List
• Vocabulary: shirt, pants, socks, underwear, sweaters, jeans, jackets, coats, gloves, hats, pockets, buttons, snaps, fleece, thermals, long johns, wool, cotton, laundry, detergent, thread, needle, yarn, sew, sewing machine, washer, dryer

Reflecting on the Week