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UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Greeley, Colorado

The Graduate School

ENHANCING EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHERS'  
REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

Karen Magee Koski

College of Education and Behavioral Sciences  
School of Psychological Sciences  
Educational Psychology

May 2013

This Dissertation by: Karen Magee Koski

Entitled: *Enhancing Early Childhood Teachers' Reflective Practice*

has been approved as meeting the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in  
College of Education and Behavioral Sciences in School of Psychological Sciences,  
Program of Educational Psychology

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## ABSTRACT

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This collective case study was undertaken to discover if early childhood teachers could increase their reflective capacity after participating in professional development centered around reflection on their practice. Three professional development sessions were held with each participant: in the first session, a working definition of reflection was written; in the second session, participants were exposed to using reflection to examine multiple perspectives of a situation; and in the third session, participants used an issue in their practice and created an action plan after looking at multiple solutions and the consequences of each solution.

Four early childhood teachers from three types of early childhood settings--home-based, private school-based, and a for-profit center--participated in the study. The participants had differing levels of early childhood education: from a bachelor's degree to half way through an associate's degree. Their early childhood experiences also varied from 1 to 13 years.

Through educational autobiographies, interviews, and videotaped lessons, six broad themes and 21 sub-themes emerged from the data. The six broad themes were *personal academics, education, early childhood work experience, organization, philosophy of child development and learning, and reflection*. Through the themes, it was

shown that early childhood teachers with less postsecondary education had a harder time using reflection to improve their practice. Teachers with more postsecondary education were already using reflection and were able to increase their use of reflection to make positive changes in their practice for the children and themselves.

Much of the research on instructing teachers about reflection took place with pre-service teachers at schools of education. Many early childhood teachers have not attended college; therefore, they have not had the opportunity to learn about reflection. Being able to provide early childhood teachers with professional development focused on reflection could be a way to help them look at their practice through multiple lenses and ultimately improve their teaching and their students' learning.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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This dissertation is dedicated to my late mother, Courtnae Elizabeth Magee, who was so proud that her daughter was working on her doctorate and loved to tell all her friends the latest news about my progress. Unfortunately, she lost her battle with cancer before she could see me graduate. Mom, I love you and this is for you.

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Each day in the United States, an estimated 2.3 million individuals are employed to watch over and teach as many as 15 million children under the age of five while their parents are working (National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies [NACCRRA], 2012). About half of those adults work in a formal child care setting and the other half are employed in informal settings such as relatives, friends, or neighbors of the employed parents (NACCRRA, 2012). Early child care is an easy field to enter for untrained workers because of the unregulated nature of the profession (Whitebook, 1999). In many states, a high school diploma is not necessary to start your own home child care business (Kagan, Kauerz, & Tarrant, 2008). Once in the profession, there is often low pay and little or no benefits--conditions that lead to turnover rates as high as 30% a year (Whitebook, 1999).

Despite the low wages and inconsistent requirements, early childhood teachers are expected to provide high quality education and care to young children (Zaslow, Tout, Halle, Whittaker, & Lavelle, 2010). With the demand for early childhood teachers expected to increase by 11% over the next six years (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012), now is the time to look at the early childhood workforce and determine what changes need to be made so all children are taught by a qualified teacher in an enriching environment.

The early childhood workforce in the United States has become a conundrum with high monetary investments from local, state, and national agencies (Kagan et al., 2008) but extremely low wages for individual employed caregivers and high turnover rates (Whitebook, 1999). Contributing to the challenging circumstances is the fact that despite the broad investments in early childhood education from government agencies, many teachers in the field have little or no formal training (Herzenberg, Price, & Bradley, 2005). When teacher education programs are not required for early childhood teachers, how do they acquire the skills needed to look at their practice and make the changes needed to help all children progress?

Reflection has been seen as an integral goal of teacher education programs for the past 20 years (Korthagen, 1992). The practice of looking at one's own teaching for areas of possible improvement is one way teachers can grow as professionals (Harris, Bruster, Peterson, & Shutt, 2010). The ability to look at a problem and analyze it from a variety of perspectives allows a teacher to be more effective (Harris et al., 2010).

Early in the 20<sup>th</sup>-century, educational philosopher John Dewey (1910) viewed teachers as reflective practitioners. He saw teachers as professionals who could experience a troubling event, which created a feeling of unease or uncertainty, then step back to scrutinize their uneasiness. In his book, *How We Think*, Dewey defined reflection as the “active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends” (p. 6).

Dewey (1933) described two types of action teachers could engage in--routine and reflective. Tradition, authority, or impulse usually guides routine action. It is “the

way we do things at our school” thinking. If teaching proceeds without problems, alternative ways of thinking and doing are not explored. Unreflective teachers forget that problems can be framed in more than one way (Zeichner & Liston, 1996). To Dewey, reflective practice is a holistic way of looking at a problem; it is not a series of steps a teacher uses to solve a problem (Zeichner & Liston, 1996). The reflective teacher uses his/her heart and head when thinking about the students they work with and what each student needs to move forward.

Dewey (1933) emphasized three attitudes integral to reflective action: *responsibility, open-mindedness, and wholeheartedness*. The attitude of responsibility necessitates scrutinizing the consequences an action causes. Responsible teachers must ask themselves why they are making the choices they are, for whom is it working, and why it is working. The questions need to be deeper than “does it work?” Zeichner and Liston (1996) explained that responsible teachers need to look at the three kinds of consequences of their teaching:

- (a) personal consequences--the effects of one’s teaching on pupil self-concepts;
- (b) academic consequences--the effects of one’s teaching on pupils’ intellectual development; and
- (c) social and political consequences--the projected effects of one’s teaching on the life chances of various pupils. (p. 11)

With the attitude of open-mindedness, teachers are willing to listen to more than one perspective. They are also open to the possibility that a belief they hold dear might be erroneous. An open-minded teacher will listen to what others are saying and look at both the advantages and disadvantages of their and others’ views. Dewey’s (1933) last attitude of wholeheartedness is seen when teachers examine their own beliefs and assumptions and approach every situation with the intent that they can learn something new. If teachers embody all three attitudes, they are able to become reflective

practitioners. That does not mean they will always make the right decisions and do the right thing; it does make them more inclined to examine their teaching in a more critical light (Zeichner & Liston, 1996).

Dewey's (1933) scientific perspective did not advocate for teachers to reflect on everything they did during their day but he did advocate for a balance in what is routine in the day and what is reflective, i.e., between action and thought. Schon's (1983, 1987) study of professional knowledge examines reflection from an artistry of practice perspective. Schon uses the terms *reflection-in-action* and *reflection-on-action* to describe the way practitioners frame and solve problems. In reflection-on-action, the teacher would think about the lesson before the action took place or after the lesson when he/she thought about what occurred during the lesson. Reflection-in-action takes place during the action when teachers undertake to frame and solve the problem on the spot. This would occur when a teacher encounters an unexpected reaction or comment from a student that lets the teacher know the student is confused. Schon believed reflective teachers reflect both *on* and *in* action; they are also able to frame situations in their classroom in multiple ways (Zeichner & Liston, 1996).

Schon (1983) used the idea of *frames* to help understand how teachers make choices in their classroom:

As [teachers] frame the problem of the situation, they determine the features to which they will attend, the order they will attempt to impose on the situation, the directions in which they will try to change it. In this process they identify both the ends to be sought and the means to be employed. (p. 165)

For teachers to have multiple possibilities for teaching, they must be able to *frame* in more than one way (Barnes, 1992).

### **Need for Study**

This investigation extends the literature on teachers' reasoning about their own practice with the special case of early childhood teachers' reflections on improving their teaching practice. Reflection is a key component to professional growth and development; it allows teachers to learn from their experiences (Harris et al., 2010). This investigation supports teachers so they can take an experience in their practice, reflect on that experience, and then make a more informed decision to change the experience. By learning to become a more reflective teacher, participants are able to think through the possible consequences of their actions rather than falling back on old habits (Harris et al., 2010). Teachers often accomplish the first step in the reflective process--looking back at a situation and making an informed decision of how to change the situation. They usually do not continue the reflective process to assess the consequences of the decision; this investigation taught participants this vital step.

The majority of the literature on teaching teachers to be reflective comes out of education programs at universities. Students are taught to be reflective with the goal that they will develop into reflective practitioners. Many early childhood teachers have not been enrolled at a university; therefore, they have not learned about reflection and how it can enhance their practice.

Using Dewey's (1933) three attitudes necessary for critical reflection as a foundation, I worked with participants in the study to enhance their reflection skills by guiding them as they worked through a problem in their practice. A collective case study design was utilized to get insight from more than one early childhood teacher in more than one type of setting. Four participants in three types of settings--home-based, private

school-based, and a for-profit center--changed their practice with the use of reflection and looking at the consequences of their actions within their solutions.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Early childhood.** The time from birth to eight years old (National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 1987).

**Early childhood teacher.** Refers to any adult responsible for the direct care and education of a group of children in any early childhood setting (NAEYC, 2009).

**Frame.** Refers to the clustered set of standard expectations through which all adults organize not only their knowledge of the world but their behavior in it (Barnes, 1992).

**Professional development.** Continuing education that can take many forms including but not limited to classes, workshops, conferences, and mentoring with the ultimate outcome of improved learning for the participant and the children they teach (Kerka, 2003).

**Quality of care.** Extent to which care received from early childhood teacher is warm, responsive, and sensitive (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHD], 2000).

**Reflection.** The process of looking back on a situation, analyzing it through multiple perspectives to make informed decisions, and then looking forward to evaluate the consequences of the decisions (Harris et al., 2010).

**Reflective practitioner.** Acknowledging one's own assumptions and looking at a problem through multiple lenses. Thinking about how to frame and solve a problem of practice (Zeichner & Liston, 1996).

**Transformation.** Using new experiences to change one's personal view of self (Mezirow, 1991).

**Transformative learning.** Learning by critically reflecting on one's own assumptions, experiences, feelings, beliefs, and mental perspectives to construct revised or new interpretations. It was made popular by Mezirow (1991) with adult learners.

### **Research Questions**

This collective case study examined the relationships between what early childhood teachers believe and what their teaching practice actually looks like. By exploring the process early childhood teachers use to plan, organize, and implement tasks and activities within their classroom and then having them reflect on their practice, the goal of the study was to help early childhood teachers become more reflective practitioners. Through the central research question and the two supporting questions, this case study offered a rich description of early childhood teachers' practice and their journey to align their practice with their beliefs as they strove toward becoming a more reflective practitioner.

- Q1     What are the consequences of early childhood teachers' use of reflection when looking at their own teaching practice?
  - Q1a    What changes do early childhood teachers undergo in their reflective capacity after participating in professional development focused on reflection?
  - Q1b    What changes do early childhood teachers make in their practice when they implement additional reflection on their practice?



## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Over one million people go to jobs outside their home each day that involve the care and education of young children (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012). These early childhood teachers have varying levels of education and qualifications. Some teachers have as little as a high school diploma; whereas others have graduate degrees. With the demand for early childhood teachers expected to increase by 11% over the next six years (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012), now is the time to look at the early childhood workforce and determine what changes need to be made so all children have a qualified teacher and enriching environment.

This literature review examines current research on professional development of early childhood teachers and its influences on their practice in the classroom. The first section describes the early childhood teaching workforce with an emphasis on Colorado early childhood teachers. The second section discusses current research on effective professional development with an emphasis on early childhood teachers. The third section focuses on developmentally appropriate practice in the early childhood setting and its significance to child development. The literature review concludes with a description of reflection and its use in the classroom.

### **Pre-Kindergarten Teachers**

Early childhood teachers can begin their work in the profession with a high school diploma. Once in the profession, there is often low pay and little or no benefits, conditions that lead to turnover rates as high as 30% a year (Whitebook, 1999). In the United States, the average hourly wage for an early childhood teacher is \$9.88 and for a preschool teacher, it is \$16.61. In Colorado, the average hourly wage for an early childhood teacher is \$11.00 and for a preschool teacher, it is \$14.35 (American Federation of Teachers, 2008). In the 2007 Bureau of Labor Statistics report on average wages for 821 occupations in the United States, only 20 occupations had lower average wages than early childhood workers (NACCRRA, 2012).

Teachers working with children in early child care can be employed in three types of settings: center-based (for-profit and not for-profit); school district-based; or in a home-based setting with their own children and the children of relatives and non-relatives. In the United States, about two-thirds of children in early childhood care are in home-based settings (Eheart & Leavitt, 1986). The type of setting has a direct impact on the wages and benefits an early childhood teacher receives.

The National Child Care Staffing Study (Whitebook, Howes, & Phillips, 1989) offered an in-depth look at child care centers and the quality of care children received. Two hundred twenty-seven centers in five metropolitan areas (Atlanta, Boston, Detroit, Phoenix, and Seattle) were used for data collection. The 1,305 teachers, teacher/directors, and aide/assistant teachers interviewed and observed provided a snapshot of the people who made up the early childhood industry. The majority (95 to 99%) were

women, a gender preference that still holds true across all types of early childhood settings (Saluja, Early, & Clifford, 2002).

The education level of early childhood teachers varies widely. Over time, the percentage of early childhood teachers holding a degree has declined. From the 1980s to 2004, the number of center-based early childhood educators with a college degree decreased from 43% to 30%. Those with a high school diploma or less increased from 25% in the early 1980s to around 30% in the 2000s (Herzenberg et al., 2005). For home-based teachers, educational accomplishments were lower. About 56% had a high school diploma or less while about 11% had a college degree (Herzenberg et al., 2005).

In the National Day Care Study (Ruopp, Travers, & Goodrich, 1980), three- and four-year-olds were assigned to 29 preschool classrooms with teachers of varied educational levels (Bachelor of Arts, Associate of Arts, or less than an Associate of Arts) --some with early childhood related education and some with only the degree. An assessment of children's behaviors was completed when the intervention began and again nine months later. Teachers with early childhood related degrees had more intellectual and social stimulation for children than did teachers without early childhood training. Furthermore, the children of teachers educated in early childhood scored higher on standardized measures in cooperative behavior, school readiness, and task persistence.

The National Child Care Staffing Study (Whitebook et al., 1989) found the amount of formal education in any subject a teacher had was the greatest predictor of appropriate caregiving. Formal education also predicted teachers' sensitivity, harshness, and detachment. The study also found teachers' years of experience was not a predictor of his/her behavior toward children.

## **Professional Development**

Professional development for adult learners has taken many forms: workshops, conferences, college-level classes, practitioner inquiry, credentialing, and mentors (Kagan et al., 2008; Kerka, 2003). No matter the type of professional development, most would agree the ultimate outcome is improved learning for the participant who is then able to take that learning back to the classroom with, in turn, improved learning by children (Kerka, 2003).

Guskey (1986, 2002) put forth a model of teacher change through professional development with three main outcomes for teachers: to change their attitudes and beliefs, to change their classroom practices, and to change the outcomes of their students' learning. He determined that the order of change was important for sustained results. The first step is for teachers to change their classroom practice; if they see a change in their students' learning, they will then change their attitudes and beliefs.

Guskey (1986, 2002) developed three principles he deemed essential in the planning of professional development to create significant improvements for teacher and student learning that would be sustained over time. The first principle was to understand that change is gradual and can be difficult; teachers need to understand it will take time to learn to follow particular practices and they need to be given the time needed to learn and feel competent with the new practices. The second principle was to ensure regular feedback is given to teachers on the progress of student learning. When teachers see their students are making progress, they are more inclined to continue use of the new practice. Student learning can be academic as would be seen in class assignments or tests or it can be affective with students' improved confidence or commitment to the class. The third

principle was to provide support through continued follow-ups to encourage those who had actively changed a practice and to add pressure on teachers who were reluctant to change their behaviors.

Like Guskey (1986, 2002), this study sought to obtain the same three outcomes for professional development: to change their beliefs and attitudes, to change their classroom practice, and to change student learning. Through the reflective process, teachers examined an issue in their practice, looked at the consequences of changing that practice, and then implemented that change. If the implementation is successful, teachers' beliefs and attitudes about the issue should change.

### **Early Childhood Teachers' Professional Development**

In April of 2002, Good Start, Grow Smart, an early education reform partner to No Child Left Behind, was launched by the federal government to improve the school readiness of young children in all types of education and early care settings (Zaslow & Martinez-Beck, 2006). The task was to strengthen Head Start, get research-based information to all types of early educators and care givers, and collaborate with states to improve early childhood education. Federally funded programs were required to create early learning guidelines for what children should be able to do before starting school. Good Start, Grow Smart also called for the creation of qualifications for early childhood teachers so they would be sufficiently skilled to help children meet their competencies (Zaslow & Martinez-Beck, 2006).

At the national level, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC; 2009) has been at the forefront of early childhood education for the last 75 years. It has created guidelines for standards of professional preparation,

developmentally appropriate practice and expectations for curriculum and assessment in early childhood programs (Hyson, 2003). Five areas are at the core of NAEYC's standards for professional preparation: (a) promoting child development and learning; (b) building family and community relationships; (c) observing, documenting, and assessing; (d) teaching and learning; and (e) becoming a professional (Hyson, 2003).

The National Association for the Education of Young Children's standards were designed as competencies all early childhood professionals should be able to perform. *Promoting child development and learning* encompasses the understanding of child development, its influences, and the ability to create an environment where all children are able to thrive. *Building family and community relationships* helps professionals understand and create respectful shared relationships within communities and families by valuing families and involving them in their child's learning and development. *Observing, documenting, and assessing* include understanding and using effective assessment strategies such that the teacher has a positive influence on children's development and learning. *Teaching and learning* give children experiences that are developmentally effective with sound knowledge of learning strategies that promote the learning and development of all children. *Becoming a professional* encompasses the ethical standards of the profession along with the ideals of being a life-long learner who can think critically and reflectively (Hyson, 2003).

In Colorado, the Department of Education (CDE) and the Colorado Office of Professional Development (COPD) have each developed standards for early childhood teachers' performance (see Table 1). The CDE standards are entitled *Colorado Performance Based Standards for Teacher Licensure and Endorsement*; the COPD

standards are entitled *Colorado Core Knowledge Standards* (Marsico Institute, 2009). The CDE standards are intended for early childhood teachers who will be working in a public school, district-based setting and need either a K-6 or P-3 teaching license, which requires a bachelor's degree. These teacher performance standards are identical for all Colorado teachers, P-12. The COPD performance standards are intended for early childhood professionals working as teachers (formerly Group Leaders) or Group Directors, who are working with children in non-public school settings. The CDE standards are for professionals who are working toward a degree at a four-year college or university while the COPD standards were created to set up checks and balances at two-year institutions that do not have the same oversight or review processes for quality of program (Marsico Institute, 2009).

In 2000, the Colorado legislature created a tiered system of early childhood credentials. The voluntary professional credentials moved from a pilot project to availability for interested early childhood teachers throughout the state in 2005. The Colorado Office of Professional Development (2012) is responsible for administering the six levels of credentials available to early childhood teachers in Colorado. At the lowest level (level I), teachers need no experience, take two early childhood classes at the college level, and receive a credential that is valid for three years. At level III, a baccalaureate degree in early childhood education or early childhood special education is required along with 1,820 hours of experience--the credential is valid for five years. At the highest level (level VI), a doctoral degree with an emphasis in early childhood education and 1,820 hours of experience is required for the five-year credential. All

credentials are renewable with six semester hours of credit from a college or university (Colorado Office of Professional Development, 2012).

Table 1

*Comparison of Standards for Teacher Preparation*

NAEYC's Standards for Professional Preparation	CDE Colorado Performance Based Standards for Teacher Licensure and Endorsement	COPD Colorado Core Knowledge Standards
Promoting Child Development and Learning	Knowledge of Literacy	Child Growth and Development
Teaching and Learning	Knowledge of Mathematics	Developmentally Effective Approaches
Building Family and Community Relationships	Knowledge of Assessment	Family and Community Relationships
Becoming a Professional	Knowledge of Content	Professionalism
Observing, Documenting, and Assessing	Knowledge of Classroom and Instructional Management	Health, Nutrition, and Safety
	Knowledge of Individualization of Instruction	Guidance
	Knowledge of Technology	Cultural and Individual Diversity
	Democracy, Educational Governance and Careers in Teaching	Administration and Supervision

While Colorado does not require formal education for early childhood teachers in a non-public school setting, two different agencies grant credentials or qualifications that serve to recognize the educational attainment of early childhood professionals. The



Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS; 2012) created the qualifications for early childhood teacher and director of a large center. With varying amounts of education and experience, early childhood teachers have 10 different ways to attain their teacher qualification. The qualification is recorded in the teacher's personnel file at his/her place of employment; no concrete letter is given to the teacher. Professionals have two paths to achieve director qualifications, which results in a letter issued by CDHS (2012).

Professional development needs to be of high quality and support the complicated process of change in teachers' practice and thinking. It needs to look different for teachers at different points in their career. Part of the professional development would need to include a quality reflective component, which has been shown to be necessary for change to be sustained (Wood & Bennett, 2000).

Reflection has been deemed as one component of quality teaching. Reflection is usually taught at the university level in teacher education programs. When early childhood teachers have not attended a university, they need a mode for learning about reflection and how it can enhance their teaching practice. This study used professional development as that mode by working with four early childhood teachers to train them on how to improve their reflective capacity.

### **Quality of Care and Development**

With the increase of parents with children in the workforce, putting their child or children in child care has become a necessity (NICHD, 2001). Much research has taken place to discover if child care is helpful or detrimental to a child's development. Research has examined language development (Burchinal et al., 2000), social

development (Phillips, McCartney, & Scarr, 1987), and overall development (Vandell & Wolfe, 2000) in children who spent time in a child care setting. There is evidence that the quality of care children receive outside their home has effects on their development but the research is less clear on how long those effects last (Belsky et al., 2007).

For example, Burchinal et al. (2000) followed 89 African American children over three years beginning before their first birthday. Data on cognition and language were collected at 12, 24, and 36 months. Researchers examined classroom quality using the Infant/Toddler Environmental Rating Scale (ITERS) or Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS) and found that children in higher quality classrooms had more advanced cognitive development, better communication skills, and more skilled receptive language at all three ages. Children in poorer quality classes were especially slower in acquiring expressive language.

The research conducted by Phillips et al. (1987) studied the influence of center-based child care quality on children's social development and found overall quality played a significant role. The research examined nine child care centers in Bermuda and included 166 families. Center quality was based on three measurements: ECERS, extensive interviews with center directors, and the type and amount of verbal interactions between caregivers and children as measured through observations. Social development was measured by parents and caregivers' ratings on the Classroom Behavior Inventory and the Preschool Behavior Questionnaire--both were standardized measures. Eight dimensions of social development were examined: considerateness, dependence, sociability, intelligence, task orientation, aggression, hyperactivity, and anxiety. Parents' ratings were predictive of greater sociability and greater considerateness, findings that

were confirmed by caregivers' ratings. Children in centers with overall higher quality were rated higher in intelligence, task orientation, and less anxiety by their caregivers.

In a follow-up study of the nine child care centers in Bermuda, 127 of the original 166 children were rated by their teachers at five, six, seven, and eight years of age for academic achievement and social competence (Scarr, 1997). The effects seen while the children were in child care were no longer an influence on the children's' development. The researchers discovered parental characteristics were more important in determining academic achievement and social competence during the primary grades than were child care experiences.

When aspects of quality were examined to determine which affected social development, one factor stood out. When adults engage children in conversations that are verbally stimulating, children thrive intellectually. When children spend more time conversing with peers rather than adults, there is a detrimental effect on their social development. Talking to peers, which could replace conversing with adults, could also hamper language development (Phillips et al., 1987).

The NICHD Study of Early Child Care (2001) followed 1,100 children from 24 hospitals in 10 cities around the country from birth through seven years. One of the goals was to examine children's' early child care experiences and their later development. At 24 months, children who were enrolled in higher quality child care had fewer behavior problems as rated by their mothers and caregivers. Mothers also rated them higher in social competence. At 36 months, they continued to have fewer behavior problems and had greater compliance with both their mother and caregiver. At 54 months, quality child care yielded positive relations on tests of language and pre-academic skills. The NICHD

study also found that parents' beliefs and behaviors were a better predictor of cognitive and social-emotional outcomes through age three.

Effects of high quality child care can be strongest for children from families who are under the most stress, have lower levels of education, and the fewest resources. Early intervention for children of poverty can encourage their early development when they are not receiving the stimulation they need in their homes (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Early experiences with language matter to children's vocabulary. Adult talk was shown to be one of the best predictors of children's vocabulary. For children who do not experience rich vocabulary at home, a quality child care setting can provide the verbal stimulation they need to increase their vocabulary (Belsky et al., 2007).

### **Reflection**

Every day, early childhood teachers are making hundreds of decisions on the spot; some come spontaneously, whereas others take thought before proceeding. Each spontaneous decision comes from somewhere within the teacher. It could be something they learned during their professional development, something they experienced growing up, or it could be how they dealt with their own children. Other times, teachers are able to think about what they are doing before they take action and reflect on what they are doing. This could be a skill they are performing or a problem they are trying to solve. As they are trying to make sense of what they are doing or how they are going to solve the problem, they reflect on what they know about the action.

The teacher as a dynamic, continually growing professional is the image of teacher as reflective practitioner that can be traced back to Dewey (1933). Valli (1997) describes reflective practitioners as having "the ability to think about their teaching

behaviors and the context in which they occur. They can look back on events; make judgments about them; and alter their teaching behaviors in light of craft, research, and ethical knowledge” (p. 70). Zeichner and Liston (1996) included “a recognition, examination, and rumination over the implications of one’s beliefs, experiences, attitudes, knowledge, and values” (p. 20). Within each of these definitions of reflective practice are the ideas of looking at one’s own practice with multiple lenses. We need to analyze what and how we are teaching while remembering the political, social, and moral qualities of teaching (Jay & Johnson, 2002). Many researchers have examined the concept of reflection and reflective practice. I focused on two theories of how teachers become reflective--Jay and Johnson’s (2002) work in the Teacher Education Program at the University of Washington and Jack Mezirow’s (1991) theory of transformative learning.

### **Dimensions of Reflective Thought**

Jay and Johnson (2002), through their work at the University of Washington in the Teacher Education Program, developed profiles for three dimensions of reflective thought: descriptive, comparative, and critical. The first dimension--descriptive reflection--is intellectually based and is the process where we “set the problem.” The problem is any “puzzling, or troubling, or interesting phenomenon with which the individual is trying to deal” (Schon, 1983, p. 50). It is deciding and describing the matter that will be reflected on (Jay & Johnson, 2002). Munby and Russell (1990) used the term *puzzles of practice* to describe something within a teacher’s practice that they do not fully understand but would like to have a better understanding. A typical question in descriptive reflection could be “What am I happy/concerned about in my practice?”

The second dimension--comparative thought--involves looking at the matter we are reflecting on from a variety of different frames or perspectives (Jay & Johnson, 2002). To look at a *puzzle of practice* from multiple perspectives, the teacher must have the qualities of open-mindedness and wholeheartedness Dewey (1933) discussed. The teacher must look at the matter through the eyes of everyone involved in the matter: a student, another teacher, the principal, or a parent. A typical question might be “What can be done to improve what I am concerned about?”

The last dimension--critical reflection--is the result of looking at a problem from multiple perspectives and then looking at the consequences of each possible solution. After looking at the possible consequences, the teacher carefully deliberates to decide if one of the solutions will be acted upon or if the cycle of reflection will continue (Jay & Johnson, 2002). A question for critical reflection could be “Given these various alternatives, their implications, and my own morals, and ethics, which is best for this particular matter?” (Jay & Johnson, 2002, p. 79)

By using the three dimensions of reflection, instructors can scaffold early childhood teachers through the reflection process to achieve clarity on decisions in their practice. When the dimensions are used, a teacher might not come to a decision about their practice but might instead continue to reflect on the matter. Using the dimensions is not a guarantee a solution will be found for the “puzzles of practice.”

### **Transformative Learning**

To learn, we must be able to make meaning of what we see and hear (Mezirow, 1991). Using past experiences, we create a frame of reference or expectations that become our meaning perspective (Cranton, 1994). Mezirow (1991) talks about three

types of meaning perspectives: epistemic, sociolinguistic, and psychological. The first meaning perspective is epistemic, which is related to a learner's use of knowledge. If they are concrete, abstract, global, or detail-oriented thinkers, they will be part of their epistemic meaning perspective. The second meaning perspective is sociolinguistic, which is based on a learner's social norms, cultural background, family background, language spoken, cultural expectations, religious beliefs, and interactions with other people. The last meaning perspective is psychological, which is the way learners see themselves as individuals. Included are their self-concept, anxieties, needs, inhibitions, and other personality-based preferences. Psychological meaning perspectives often come about from childhood experiences, especially traumatic experiences. We use our meaning perspectives to judge right from wrong, true from false, beautiful from ugly, and good from bad. Other authors use the terms *paradigm* or *personal frame* instead of meaning perspective (Mezirow, 1991).

Within each meaning perspective is a quantity of meaning schemes, which contain particular knowledge, value judgments, feelings, and beliefs that become expressed in an interpretation. Meaning schemes are concrete manifestations of our expectation that direct our actions (Mezirow, 1991). However, distortions of assumptions can take place. A distortion of an assumption occurs when there is an error in learning. It is an assumption that has been unexamined or unquestioned and limits a learner's ability to be open to change, personal development, and growth (Cranton, 1994).

When learners do not question or reflect on knowledge, they obtain from someone they believe to be an expert an epistemic assumption, which in turn can cause a distorted

assumption. An epistemic assumption is something taken for granted. “I believe I know” is equivalent to an epistemic assumption (Cranton, 1994).

Mezirow (1991) related that the factors that created sociolinguistic distortion include all the mechanisms by which society and language arbitrarily shape and limit our perception and understanding, such as implicit ideologies; language games; cultural codes; social norms, roles, and practices; and underdeveloped levels of consciousness, as well as theories and philosophies. (pp. 130-131)

Most people are unaware of the social codes they live with; they take on the meaning perspectives of the people who socialized them to different situations.

Different types of learning happen within different meaning perspectives.

Communicative learning mainly happens within sociolinguistic meaning perspectives but communicative learning can also direct changes in the epistemic and psychological meaning perspectives. Instrumental learning is mainly in the epistemic meaning perspective. Emancipatory learning is reflective and affects the other two types of learning. All learning is multidimensional and can affect several distinct meaning perspectives (Mezirow, 1991).

“Reflection is the process of critically assessing the content, process, or premise(s) of our efforts to interpret and give meaning to an experience” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 104). Mezirow’s (1991) theory of transformative learning contains three types of reflection: content, process, and premise. First, content reflection is looking at the description or content of a problem, e.g., questions like “What is this?” or “What is the problem?” Second, process reflection is looking at the problem solving strategies you can use. The learner stops and asks himself “Do I understand the problem?” or “Did I forget about anything?” The third type of reflection is premise where you question whether you have a problem. Questions the learner might ask are “Why do I need to



learn this?” or “Why should I believe this is true?” Content and process reflection can transform meaning schemes while premise reflection can transform meaning perspective.

Mezirow's (1991) research of 83 women reentering college formed the basis of the 10 phases of perspective transformation people go through to have a personal transformation:

1. A disorienting dilemma
2. Self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame
3. A critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions
4. Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change
5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions
6. Planning a course of action
7. Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans
8. Provisional trying of new roles
9. Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
10. A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective. (pp. 168-169)

It was found that there were two main places in the phases where people had the most trouble with backsliding, stalling, and failure. The first point was the beginning of the process when then learner looked at his/her recognized values, ideas, and sense of order, and how he/she felt about these. The second point was when the learner felt so threatened by the commitment to reflection that he/she was immobilized. Even if one can understand the need to change one's actions, it takes emotional strength to act on it (Mezirow, 1991).

As more and more children with special circumstances such as living in poverty, being English language learners, and having special needs begin their early childhood education, teachers will need to examine their assumptions about the different children they will teach and how those children learn. Reflection must start the process to change beliefs, opinions, and attitudes. The learner's assumptions must be examined and the consequences of the alternative assumptions must be explored. All learning can involve reflection but not all reflection leads to transformative learning.

### **Reflection Within Professional Development**

Over the course of a day, early childhood teachers are making hundreds of decisions about their practice in order to understand what they are doing. To make good decisions, they must do three things: "we need to observe what we do, critically question ourselves, and reflect on our actions within their context" (Cranton, 1996, p. 19).

Teachers need to be able to describe their philosophy of practice before they can question it, which can then lead them to meaningful growth. Using Mezirow's (1991) three types of critical reflection can help teachers start the process that can lead to transformation. Teachers who become reflective practitioners are able to look at their practice, define the problems of practice, and then create and apply solutions to their problems (Copeland, Birmingham, De La Cruz, & Lewin, 1993). Cranton (1996) suggested ways to bring an educator's assumptions to the forefront:

- Keep a shared journal with a trusted friend or colleague in which both people write about their practice and exchange the journal, looking for assumptions in each other's writing.
- Write a biography of oneself as an educator and discuss it with another person in order to find hidden assumptions.
- Analyze videotapes of one's practice and justify behavior to oneself or another. (p. 84)

In order for an early childhood teacher to confront his/her assumptions, he/she must understand where his/her assumptions came from; it could be past experiences, childhood, culture, or popular culture. Once he/she is able to confront his/her assumptions, he/she can decide if he/she wants to keep them or revise them (Cranton, 1996). A first step in deciding whether to keep or revise assumptions is to critically question those assumptions. It could be as simple as asking “Why do you think that?” If an educator is able to change a distorted assumption, a transformation can take place (Mezirow, 1991). On their own or as part of organized professional development, early childhood teachers would be able to use the components of transformative learning to look at the practice, question their assumptions, and decide if they need to revise them.

Early childhood teachers can start the process of change in their practice by writing their educational autobiography. This process can help them see where their beliefs about education might come from. They can choose a problem of practice and videotape themselves to watch and start a conversation about why they do it that way. With the use of critical reflection, they can determine if their practice is the way they want it or if they need to change their practice. With the use of journals and videotapes of their practice, early childhood teachers can start the process of looking at their practice, confront their assumptions, and start the process of accepting or revising their assumptions to become reflective practitioner.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this study was to examine early childhood teachers' use of reflection to become more mindful when she looked at her daily practice by examining the consequences of her actions. I developed and facilitated three professional development discussions (see Appendix A for syllabus) for early childhood teachers to help them enhance reflective practices in their daily teaching. The context of this professional development allowed the time and practice necessary to increase teachers' understanding, use, and skills needed for the implementation of reflection in their daily teaching practice.

#### **Research Design**

I chose a qualitative, collective case study design (Stake, 1995) because it allowed me to understand the complexity of early childhood teachers' use of reflection in their teaching practice by looking at teachers in different types of settings. By using a variety of settings, I was able to maximize my learning about early childhood teachers' reflective practice. Stake (1995) stated, "Balance and variety are important; opportunity to learn is of primary importance" (p. 6). This study had the qualities that were well served by a case study approach including (a) boundedness of a single issue in a single occupation with a single participant, (b) high importance for those involved (Stake, 1995), (c) the participants needed to be interviewed to obtain their unique stories, and (d) the case

needed to be understood within its contextual setting. “Case studies are undertaken to make the case understandable” (Stake, 1995, p. 85). Purposeful sampling with accessible cases was used to obtain a representation from three different types of early childhood settings: home-based, center-based, and private school-based (Creswell, 1998).

### **Research Questions**

To examine the use of reflection in early childhood teachers and their daily teaching practice, I developed an overarching research question and two sub-research questions to focus on the topic.

- Q1     What are the consequences of early childhood teachers’ use of reflection when looking at their own teaching practice?
  - Q1a    What changes do early childhood teachers undergo in their reflective capacity after participating in professional development focused on reflection?
  - Q1b    What changes do early childhood teachers make in their practice when they implement additional reflection on their practice?

### **Participants and Settings**

The setting for my study was a mid-sized city in the Rocky Mountain region of the United States. The city has approximately 144,000 residents with around 8,000 residents being children under the age of five. The majority of the population is White (83%) with Hispanic as the second highest ethnic group (10%). The city is home to a state university and is unique in that almost half the population (48%) over age 25 has a bachelor’s degree (City-Data, 2011).

The participants for this collective case study came from three types of early childhood settings: home-based, private school-based, and a for-profit center--The Child Center (a pseudonym). The participants had differing levels of early childhood

education--from a bachelor's degree to half way through an associates' degree. Their early childhood teaching experience also varied from one year to 13 years. All four participants were teaching three-year-olds when the data were collected (see Table 2).

Table 2

*Characteristics of Participants*

	Holly	Samantha	Claudia	Mary
Age	23 years	34 years	40 years	32 years
Ethnicity	Caucasian	Caucasian	Caucasian/ Native American	Caucasian
Early Childhood Teaching Experience	1 year	6 years	2 years	13 years
Highest Degree	Bachelor's	High School	High School	2 Bachelor's
Early Childhood Education	Bachelor's	Working on Bachelor's	Working on Associate's	Working on Associate's
Teaching Setting	Private school	Home-based	For-profit Center	For-profit Center

At the time of my study, I was employed as an elementary school teacher at a public school. I asked my colleagues if they knew of any early childhood teachers who would be teaching during the summer. I was given the names of two parents and one former student teacher. One of the parents, Samantha (a pseudonym), was a home-based early childhood teacher and the other parent was the director of a local early childhood

center. I contacted both parents by email in March to inform them about my study and to see if they would be interested in hearing more about what I would be doing. Both parents agreed to talk to me and I met with each individually during the end of March and explained what the commitment would be. Samantha agreed to participate and the center-based parent invited me to a staff meeting to explain to her staff what the commitment would be if they chose to participate in the study. I was not able to attend the staff meeting so the director set up a time for me to visit the center and talk individually to the two teachers, Claudia and Mary (pseudonyms), in the three-year-olds room. I spent half an hour with each teacher explaining what the study would entail and had an informal question-and-answer session. Both teachers agreed to participate and we set a time when I would come back and observe for a week before Institutional Review Board approval was granted. The fourth participant, Holly (a pseudonym), was emailed and I explained to her what the study would be and she also agreed to participate if it was okay with her principal. I emailed her principal in June, explained what I would be doing, and she gave her approval. By the end of June 2012, I had four tentative participants for the collective case study and IRB approval was granted in July 2012 (see Appendix B). After my initial meeting with each participant, further contact was through email or in person.

I knew Holly personally since she had been a work-study student in my elementary classroom during fall semester in 2008 while she was at the university. I had met Samantha once at a meeting but had never had a conversation with her. She was a parent of a first grader at the school where I taught. Claudia and Mary were recruited by their director, which I believe helped encourage them to participate.

**Participant One: Holly**

Holly had just completed her first year teaching in a private school-based, early childhood program teaching three- and four-year-olds. She was the youngest participant at 23-years-old; she is Caucasian, single, and had the most early childhood education with a bachelor's degree in Human Development and Family Studies. Holly had a director-qualified certificate from the state, which meant she had a bachelor's degree with an emphasis in early childhood. The majority of time during her final two years of university work was spent in classrooms where she gained experience as she worked with children. During the summer, when data were collected for this study, the number of children in her class of three- and four-year-olds ranged from 4 to 10. Holly had a full-time aide who worked with her and the children each day. After the summer, Holly would be teaching preschool in a public school in a local district.

For the summer, Holly used the private school's preschool room. The room was the size of a house with over 1,400 square feet of usable space with another 600 square feet of storage space. The room included a small kitchen with stove, refrigerator, and sink, which included a drinking fountain. Within the main carpeted area of the room, there was a dress up area, reading area, play kitchen area, and a large aquarium. On the linoleum area, there were three computers and three tables with six chairs around each table. This area was used for art activities as well as lunch. Two unisex bathrooms were in the room so the children were never out of eyesight.

Holly was in charge of up to 10 children who all came at 8:00 a.m. and left at 3:00 p.m. The schedule was the same every day with indoor playtime from 8:00–9:30. The children were allowed to play with anything in the room. They moved outside to outdoor



playtime with the other children at the school from 9:30–10:45. Outside, they had tricycles, a sandbox, a play structure with swings, slide and jungle gym, a grassy area, and plastic furniture. When they came inside, they had circle time from 10:45–11:30, which included a book about their current theme and then an art project that was also related to the theme. Lunch and rest time came next from 11:30–1:30. The end of the day was back outside where they completed a structured activity. The children played in the kiddie pools or used giant paintbrushes and water to make pictures on the blacktop.

### **Participant Two: Samantha**

Samantha is a 34-year-old Caucasian, home-based early childhood teacher. After graduation from high school, she moved out of state and spent three years in college studying elementary education with an emphasis in special education but did not complete her degree. After one of her professors suggested Samantha change her career path, she moved back to her hometown and found a job at an early childhood center. She spent three years there where she worked with two-year-olds, first as an assistant teacher and then as a teacher. She left the early childhood field for six years during which time she got married and had a son. When her son was four and she was pregnant with her daughter, she started to think about doing early childhood care in her home. She took the classes needed to be licensed by the state for in home-based early childhood care; for the last three years, she has run a licensed early childhood center in her home. While data were being collected, Samantha was in charge of four to seven children each day. The youngest child was a five-month-old and the oldest was seven-years-old. She taught three 3-year-olds on a daily basis.

The children in Samantha's care transitioned between her compact living room and the adjoining eating area in her kitchen for most of their activities. On nice days, the children spent time in the backyard where they played on the swing set or ran around on the grass. The approximately 300-square-foot living room was where most of the day was spent. In the morning, there was playtime where children were allowed to use the toys and books that were available in the bookshelf separating the living room from the kitchen. Samantha had a 30 minute to one hour circle time that constituted the teaching time during the day. After lunch, the carpeted floor was covered with mats and the children had their required rest time of two hours. On days the children were restless, Samantha played a video such as *Aladdin* to help them relax. During the summer, there was the constant hum of the air conditioning unit in the front window.

One wall of the living room was covered with activities used during circle time including a calendar, small colored shapes for each of the dates to come, a working clock, a clock to teach telling time, the letters of the alphabet, strips labeled with weather terms to record the weather, and the days of the week.

#### **Participants Three and Four: Claudia and Mary**

Claudia and Mary are two teachers from the Child Center. The parent company operates nine centers around the state. The two teachers shared a room and the teaching responsibilities for 10 to 20 three-year-olds. Both teachers had been asked by the center director to move to the three-year-olds room to stem the turnover of teachers at that age group. In the past year, there had been four different teachers in the three-year-olds room; the Director felt the three-year-olds would benefit from consistent care. When I started the study, it was the first week teaching three-year-olds for both teachers.

Claudia is a 40-year-old Caucasian/Native American woman who previously worked with one-year-olds for two years at the Child Center. She is a single mother with three children aged 9-17. She shares her house with her father who helped with her own children. Claudia is taking classes at the local community college, working toward an associate's degree in early childhood. She is half-way through her degree. When Claudia decided to return to college, she took course placement testing and scored very low. She decided to find out why school was so hard for her so she had testing performed at the college. The testing results diagnosed Claudia with dyslexia--the inability to integrate auditory and visual information, and dysgraphia--the inability to write correctly because normal connections among brain regions were not made. Claudia described her disabilities as "not being able to get the words in her head onto the paper." Claudia would register for a class, go to class a couple of times, decide it was too much work, and she would drop the class. She was early childhood teacher qualified (formerly called group leader) according to the State Division of Child Care.

Mary is 32, single, Caucasian, and has worked at the Child Center for eight years and with the company for 13 years at two of their other centers. Before she taught the three-year-olds, she taught two-year-olds. In that capacity, she taught 13 of the current three-year-olds as two-year-olds. She worked her way through college as an assistant teacher. After Mary received her bachelor's degrees in French and journalism, she worked in France for a year as a journalist. The work was not fulfilling so Mary came back to the United States and returned to work in the early childhood field. She is working on her associate's degree in early childhood and is almost finished. Mary is

early childhood teacher qualified and often filled in for the center director, which could pull Mary out of the classroom for long periods.

Claudia and Mary share a room with up to 20 three-year-olds. The 600-square-foot room is divided with carpet in the circle and play areas and linoleum in the table area. The three tables have children's names labeled on them and are used for eating and art projects. The configuration of the room changes weekly as the teachers try to figure out what works best for the children. Three 3-foot tall bookcases have shelves labeled with the names of the toys they hold. Plastic insects, building blocks, baby dolls, and plastic food are available for the children to use. A four-tiered bookcase holds the 20 or so books that are in the room. A multicolored eight-foot oval rug anchors the circle area. The teachers have a piece of tape with each child's name spaced around the outside of the rug so each child has a designated place to sit. On the wall next to the rug are cards with pictures of different shapes and colors. The other walls are filled with the children's artwork.

The Child Center is open from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. All children who arrive before 8:00 a.m. play together in a downstairs room. At 8:00 a.m., children are taken to their regular classroom where their teachers wait. Parents drop their children off in Claudia and Mary's room at different times during the day. When a child comes into the room, Claudia or Mary welcomes them: "Hello my friend!" If the child easily separates from their parent, they say "Hi" and find a friend and play. If it is hard to separate from the parent, Claudia or Mary gets down to the child's level, gives them a hug, kiss, and says, "I love you" as the parent leaves. When children are distraught when their parent

leaves, they stand in front of the large windows that face the front parking lot and cry for their parents.

### **Methods of Data Collection**

#### **Data Sources**

Data for this study were collected from five sources: educational autobiographies, two interviews with each participating teacher, classroom observations, field-notes, and two 20 to 30 minute video recordings of each participant teaching a lesson.

The educational autobiography consisted of three parts. In the first part of the autobiography, participants wrote about their experiences as a learner. In the second part, they wrote about their experiences during their preparation to become an early childhood teacher and their teaching experiences so far in their career. The third part of the autobiography had teachers relate their teaching to their beliefs about young children and how they learned during early childhood (see Appendix C).

The second step of data collection occurred after participants finished writing their educational autobiographies. I interviewed each participant individually to clarify any questions I had about their story and to probe more deeply so I would have a better understanding of their experiences and beliefs related to their learning and the teaching of young children. I also used this interview as a time to plan with participants the videotaping of their first lesson that would be used for the study. I used a semi-structured interview protocol that allowed me to tailor the questions for each participant based on their autobiography (see Appendix D). Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim using pseudonyms to protect each participant's confidentiality.

The third step in data collection was videotaping two lessons of each participant: the first lesson was at the beginning of the study and the second lesson was at the end of the study. After each videotaping, I met with the participant to watch her videotape and debrief about her lesson based on what we saw when we watched the videotape. Each participant was given the option of watching her videotaped lesson alone before we watched it together; all participants declined that option. I used a semi-structured interview protocols that allowed me to adapt the questions for each participant (see Appendices E and F).

The first videotaped lesson took place early in the study and focused on circle time. Each participant's circle time varied but they had some components in common (see Table 3). It was a time that included the entire group of children with the teacher leading and the children sitting on the floor surrounding the teacher; each participant read a book or two during circle time. Each participant's circle time was scheduled for 30–45 minutes.

Table 3

*Daily Circle Time Activities*

	Holly	Samantha	Claudia	Mary
Scheduled circle time	10:45–11:15	10:00–10:45	8:30–9:00	8:30–9:00
Activities during circle time in order performed	Read a book related to current theme	Pledge Weather forecast Day of the week Find today's date Book related to current theme	Song "Good Morning" Colors Shapes Song "Day of the week" Count up to 20 then down to 0 Story related to current theme	Song "Good Morning" Colors Shapes Song "Days of the week" Count up to 20 then down to 0 Story related to current theme

The second videotaping of each participant took place after two professional development discussions on reflection and reflective practice and focused on circle time same as their first lesson. The third individual interview with each participant took place after the second videotaped lesson. Similar to the second interview, we debriefed about their videotaped lesson and then talked about the changes they had seen in their use of reflection and whether it made a change in their teaching practice.

Throughout the data collection phase, observations took place in the natural settings of the three early childhood sites and represented a firsthand encounter with the participants' teaching rather than a secondhand account of what happened in the

classroom (Merriam, 1998). This allowed me to have a better understanding of the context in which teaching and interactions took place in each setting (Patton, 2002). All observations took place in the mornings and included participants' circle time.

At the time of the observations and videotaping of lessons, I recorded field notes from the viewpoint of an observer (Creswell, 1998). As an outside observer, I was able to see things that might not be apparent to those who were closely involved. In the field notes, I recorded "events within their real-life context" (Yin, 2009, p. 83) and included physical descriptions of the natural setting where observations took place, descriptions of classroom instruction, and formal and informal encounters with participants that had significance to my research questions (Creswell, 1998; Stake, 1995). Field notes concentrated on what I heard and saw rather than make judgments about what happened.

### **Data Collection Timeline**

The original plan was for data collection to last nine weeks. In week one, I intended to meet with participants at their place of business, explain the research study, obtain their consent to participate, have our first professional development session, and distribute the protocol for writing their educational autobiography. They would have two weeks to write their educational autobiography; in week three, we would meet and I would interview them about their educational autobiography. The interview would be used to clarify any questions I had and to set a time to videotape a lesson. In week four, the first lesson was to be videotaped and in week five, we would meet to watch the videotape and reflect on the lesson. During weeks six and seven, we were to meet to conduct the professional development on reflecting and reflective practice. Week eight was to be videotaping the second lesson, week nine was to be watching the lesson, and a



final interview was planned with reflection on their practice and the study. Data collection was much messier than the original plan as is the case with human research. Unfortunately, data collection did not stay on schedule so each participant's data collection is explained separately (see Table 4).

Table 4

*Timeline for Data Collection*

	Holly	Samantha	Claudia	Mary
Observations	July 19, 20, 23 (3.5 hours)	July 11, 17, 24 (4.5 hours)	July 10, 11, 12, 18, 25. Aug 1, 15, 17 (15 hours)	July 10, 25. Aug. 1, 15, 17 (10 hours)
Autobiography completed	July 23	July 27	September 10	September 11
Interview about autobiography (Interview 1)	July 24	July 30	October 16	October 16
Videotape of first lesson (Video 1)	July 27	August 2	August 3	August 8
Interview about first videotaped lesson (Interview 2)	August 2	August 7	August 30	August 30
Professional development	July 27 August 7	August 14 August 21	August 29 September 5	August 29 September 5
Videotape of second lesson (Video 2)	August 20	October 5	October 11	October 11
Final interview (Interview 3)	August 21	October 9	October 16	October 16

*Note.* All dates were in 2012.

Holly was in her last month of teaching at the private school before transitioning to a public school in another school district. She wanted to participate in the study so we compressed the original data collection timeline. Holly was emailed the outline for her educational autobiography on July 21. She emailed the completed autobiography back to me the next week. She finished teaching at 3:00 p.m. each day so we met that week to talk about her autobiography and set a date for the videotaping of her first lesson. On July 27, I videotaped Holly's first lesson and we met for a professional development session. The next week, I interviewed Holly about her first videotaped lesson. On August 7, we had the final professional development session and two weeks later, I videotaped Holly's second lesson. The final interview with Holly took place the week of August 21.

Samantha emailed her completed educational autobiography on July 27. The next week, I interviewed Samantha about her autobiography and set a time to videotape her first lesson that same week. The next week we met and watched her videotape on August 7 and I interviewed her about her lesson. The weeks of August 12 and 19, we met for a half hour each week for professional development. By law, the children in her care must rest for two hours each day, which was when we met. Samantha and her son both started school the end of August and she felt overwhelmed by all the changes in her life so we postponed the second videotaped lesson until October 5. I met Samantha for the final interview on October 9.

Claudia could not write her autobiography because of her dysgraphia; so she was given an audio recorder to record her story, and it was subsequently transcribed. The audio recorder was returned to me on September 10. Since it took so long for Claudia to

complete her autobiography, I decided to move ahead and videotape her first lesson before the autobiography was completed. Claudia's first lesson was videotaped on August 3. Claudia worked 10 hour days and did not want to meet after work for an interview; twice we set meetings to view her videotape during the children's rest time after lunch. Both scheduled dates had to be changed because the children were restless, would not go to sleep, and she needed to sooth individual children. I emailed the director and she scheduled a time. Claudia and I met August 30 for her interview regarding her first videotaped lesson. The weeks of August 26 and September 2, we met for 20 minutes each week for professional development during the children's outside time. Claudia's second lesson was videotaped on October 11 and the final interview was the next week when I also interviewed her about her autobiography.

Mary emailed her autobiography on September 11. While I waited for Mary to complete her autobiography, I decided to move ahead and videotape her first lesson before the autobiography was completed. Mary's first lesson was videotaped on August 8. Like Claudia, after two scheduled interview times were cancelled, I had the director schedule a time and we met on August 30. The weeks of August 26 and September 2, I met with Mary each week for 20 minutes for professional development during her break time. Her second lesson was videotaped on October 11. The final interview, in which I interviewed her about her lesson and her autobiography, was October 16.

The autobiographies, interviews, observations, field-notes, and videotapes of lessons constituted a multi-method data collection approach (Creswell, 1998) that allowed for triangulation as I moved from data collection to data analysis. Interviews with participants were audiotaped and then transcribed verbatim using pseudonyms to

protect each participant's confidentiality. Participants were given a copy of their transcript to read and make corrections if information was incorrect, incomplete, or to allow them to delete any sensitive information. None of the participants made changes to their transcripts. Videotaped lessons were watched with the participant to collect data on their reflections about their lessons and what changes they saw in their teaching at the end of the study.

### **Professional Development**

The goal for the professional development sessions was to have participants become more mindful when they looked at their daily practice by examining the consequences of their actions. The original intention was to have the first session before the study started and the second and third sessions at week six and seven of the study. In actual practice, Holly had professional development at weeks one and three. Samantha had professional development at weeks four and five. Claudia and Mary had professional development at weeks six and seven.

Professional development consisted of three meetings. I met with each participant individually at a time convenient for her. The first meeting was an informal discussion about reflection and how the teacher used it in her daily practice. At this meeting, a working definition of reflection was created by the participant.

The second time I met with each participant, we discussed looking at a situation from multiple perspectives. I had each participant pick something that had happened with their class in the last week and tell the story from her perspective, from the perspective of a child in the class, and from the perspective of another adult. I used this activity as a lead in for the next professional development session.

For the last professional development, I worked with participants to look at a sequential format to work through an issue in their practice. The first step was to identify a problematic issue in their practice that was derived from a concrete experience and important to her. To accomplish this step, the participants looked at their practice and chose something they would like to change or something they were not sure whether they were implementing it the way they wanted. During step two, I had participants generate a list of all the possible solutions they could employ to make the change. In the third step, they made a list of people who could possibly be impacted by this change. The last thing they did was look at possible consequences for each of those people in each of the solutions. After the participant considered all the consequences, they decided what change if any they would make and created a timeline for implementation.

### **Data Analysis**

I utilized an inductive analysis for this case study to discover the patterns, categories, and themes in the data (Patton, 2002). Rather than start the analysis with predetermined themes, I allowed the themes to be defined by the data. The transcribed data were read, reread, and compared to arrive at the themes.

The large amount of data that were collected in this case study research required constant data analysis that took place simultaneously with data collection in the form of autobiographies, interviews, observations, and field notes (Creswell, 1998; Stake, 1995). As soon as I collected any data, I input it into NVivo version 9 and started the coding process. As I collected data, I focused on the research questions and made notes of my reflections about what I observed and what I heard each time I visited the field. By

staying focused on the research questions, I was able to probe for deeper meaning as I engaged in fieldwork (Stake, 1995).

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **ANALYSIS**

In the first section of this chapter, I present a beginning vignette about each participant. The second section is an analysis of each participant using the six broad themes and 21 sub-themes. In the last section, the three research questions are addressed.

#### **Individual Cases**

As researcher, I was collector and analyst of my qualitative study (Merriam, 1998); therefore, I chose first to look at each participant as an individual case in this collective case study. As the data collector, I was the only person who knew what was contained in the data. Therefore, when I started the analysis of the data, I was the only person who could create the appropriate categories. Dey (1993) stated the analysis of data must be based on the researcher's own ideas. I took Dey's advice to heart and decided to present each individual case as a "real life" story that contained a beginning, a middle, and an end. The beginning of each participant's story--her vignette—focused on my observations, field notes, the participant's educational autobiography, and the contents of her first videotaped lesson. The middle of each story focused on reflection as a catalyst for change and was comprised of insights participants had on their teaching and the professional development work completed on their use of reflection. The end of the story was based on the participant's second videotaped lesson, final interview, along with

selected observations (Author's note: All names in the following individual case studies are pseudonyms).

## **Holly**

After Holly graduated from college in May of 2011, she was hired as a co-teacher for pre-kindergarten. At the end of the first semester, she was moved to lead teacher for three- and four-year-olds, her position at the time of this study.

**Holly's vignette.** Even though it was only 10:30, the morning was stifling hot as the class lined up to go inside after an hour of outside play. The hot weather did not deter Holly from taking the children outside; she believed preschoolers needed many opportunities to play throughout the day.

Girls in flowing dresses and boys in shorts struggled to line up when there was so much to still be explored outside. After many reminders from Holly, they were ready to walk up the ramp and into their school. Holly looked younger than her 23 years; with softly curled brunette hair and big brown eyes, she looked like the girl next door. A calm descended on the children as they navigated the maze of hallways back to their room, went inside, grabbed a mat from the basket, unrolled their mat, and sat on it in a semi-circle around the white rocking chair Holly would occupy. The ten 3- and 4-year-olds were swallowed up by the 1,400 square foot size of the classroom. Holly sat down and asked the students what they were studying that week. A loud voice answered "animal sounds"; Holly gently corrected by saying they were studying animal sounds and also animals.

Holly wanted to get the children thinking about animals so she began circle time with two plastic cubes with animal pictures on all six sides. One cube had a picture of



the front of an animal and the second cube had a picture of the back of an animal. When the two cubes were placed next to each other with the correct front and back of an animal, the animal made its sound. The children advised Holly about what two animal pictures to put together; they correctly matched all the animals on the cubes. When the children asked to go through the animals again, Holly replied the cubes would be available to try after they finished their art project. Jacob asked Holly, "Are we having lunchtime yet?" Holly responded, "Not quite yet; we have a story to do next."

Holly picked up the book on the small table next to her and placed it in her lap. "*Brown Bear, Brown Bear,*" Kevin shouted. Holly showed the book to the children and asked them to touch their nose if they had read it before. Many voices answered and Holly again asked the children to touch their nose if they had read the book. Then she would be able to look and see who had read the book. Jacob told Holly that Jenny had not read the book. Again, Holly instructed the children that they should touch their nose if they had read the book because they did not need to speak for anyone else.

Holly invited the class to join her if they knew the story or could catch on to the pattern in the story as she read the book aloud. As she read, she gave the children peeks of the animal that came next by showing a small part of the animal's picture. By the yellow duck on the third page, most children read along in loud singsong voices.

As Holly read the book, she engaged the children by asking them questions. Holly read, "White dog, white dog, what do you see?" and asked her class to put their finger on their nose if they had a dog. Excited voices canceled each other out as they told Holly that they had a dog. Holly put her finger to her mouth and said "Shhhh" but no one heard her because of the noise. She repeated the directions to put a finger on their nose if

they had a dog. One boy asked if he could put two fingers on his nose because he had two dogs at home. Holly patiently replied that that was a good idea. She began to read “Red b” but before she could get the word bird out, Lane yelled cardinal. Holly corrected him by showing him that if it was a red cardinal, there would be a “c” for cardinal but instead there was a “b” for bird. When they got to goldfish, Holly asked if anyone had ever had a goldfish or a fish at home to touch their head. Luke responded, “A crunchy goldfish right?” Holly replied, “No, a real goldfish.” The little boy replied, “I don’t have one of those.”

Voices continued to shout out as Holly tried to read. She stopped again and explained to the children that when she asked a question, they did not need to shout out an answer because other children would not be able to hear the story. While Holly read the book to the children, she was interrupted repeatedly. She stopped reading 12 times to remind the children about appropriate behavior during circle time. Another seven times, she stopped as she read to put a finger to her lips to quiet the children. When Holly finished to the book, Jacob again asked, “Now are we going to have lunch?” Holly put her finger to her lips and then answered, “It’s not your turn, and we are not talking about lunch now.”

The children enjoyed the story and were ready to get started on their art activity. Holly repeated all the colors in the book and then asked each child to think of their favorite animal and what color that animal might be so they were prepared for the art activity. One by one, Holly called on a child who was quiet and asked, “What is your favorite animal?” The child replied and then Holly asked, “What color might that animal be?” When the children finished answering Holly, there was a purple and pink cat, a blue

horse, and a red butterfly. Mats were rolled up and placed in the basket and children walked to the worktables and started to draw their animal. The incessant chatter continued as the children talked and drew for the next 10 minutes.

**Reflection as a catalyst for change.** Holly watched her video and was surprised at the amount of talking from the children. “I think when you’re actually teaching, you’re just not paying attention as much or you just keep trying to bring them back. I just hear their voices constantly” (Interview 2), Holly observed.

Holly thought for a while and then framed her problem of practice: “Children lose a lot during read aloud if the kids think it’s okay to just keep talking and talking and talking” (Interview 2).

Holly generated four possible solutions for her problem: (a) do not allow the children to talk during read aloud time, (b) have a flip sign with discussion time on one side and discussion time with a diagonal line through it on the other side to denote no talking, (c) have children raise their hand when they have something to say, or (d) do nothing and allow the children to talk as much as they want during read aloud.

Holly felt the people who would be affected by the solutions were the children and herself. Next, she looked at the consequences for each solution if it was implemented. Solution one to not allow the children to talk during read aloud would have a negative impact on Holly and the children. Holly felt the discussions were important for the children and the children would not be able to share their thoughts about the story. The second solution used a flip chart to let the children know if it was okay to talk or if they needed to be quiet. Solution two could be positive for everyone. Holly could use the flip chart to allow the children to talk when she wanted a discussion

and to keep them quiet when a discussion was not necessary. Solution three had the children raise their hand when they wanted to add to the discussion and was positive for everyone. Children would be allowed to talk during any read aloud as long as they raised their hand and were called on before they talked. Holly would be able to have the discussions she wanted without all the extra talking. The fourth solution to do nothing was not positive for anyone. Holly was frustrated from all the talking and the children were not able to hear their peers' comments since everyone talked at once.

Holly thought about all the consequences and determined the best solution would be to have the children raise their hand when they wanted to add to the discussion:

I do want to pose questions to them and get their feedback, but at the same time I do think that right now they just go off onto whatever they want to talk about or they say the same thing six times until they finally get a response from me even if it's off subject, and that's why they're not getting a response from me. (Interview 2)

Holly decided to have children put a finger to their lips and their hand in the air when they wanted to talk or had a question during read aloud. Holly started the implementation of the solution the next day during read aloud.

**Change emanates from reflection.** The children were seated on the floor around Holly who was sitting in the white rocking chair. She stated, "Criss-cross applesauce your legs and spoons in the bowl." The children complied by sitting cross-legged and placing hands in their laps. She grabbed a small stuffed animal from the basket sitting next to her and held it up. "What animal is this?" Holly asked. Two children answered "Tiger." Holly introduced the book for the day: *Leo the Late Bloomer*--a story about a baby tiger. She shared her experience of going to an animal preserve and holding a baby tiger. She told them it was scary, but also exciting. Holly asked the class, "What kind of

animal friends would Leo have? Raise your hand and tell me.” Lane answered, “A snake.” Holly reminded him and said, “Remember to raise your hand and if you can’t remember to turn your voice off, you put your finger over your mouth.” Holly demonstrated by putting her pointer finger up to her lips. Holly called on Gina to answer and Gina replied, “A snake.” Holly continued to call on children who were quiet and had their hands raised. When a child started to blurt out an answer, Holly calmly reiterated, “Raise your quiet hand.”

Thanks for those quiet hands. Remember we are really working on instead of just saying the answer or saying what we want to say if you think of something in your brain put your finger over your lips to remind you to turn your voice off and raise your quiet hand in the air. Then I know you have something to tell us.  
(Video 2)

Holly again got the children ready for the book as she reminded them, “Criss-cross applesauce spoons in your bowl.” Ethan began to ask Holly, “What book are we reading today?” Holly put her finger to her lips and replied, “Voice off. Ethan, raise your quiet hand with no voice, now wait patiently until I say your name. Try it.” Holly modeled what one finger over the lip and one hand in the air looked like as Ethan began to copy her. When his hand and finger were in the correct spot, Holly asked, “Ethan, what do you want to tell us?” He took his turn and asked, “What story is this?” Holly thanked him for the question and repeated the name of the book.

Holly read the book and asked questions that related to the action on the page. The children sat quietly and raised their hands when they had something to say. As Holly called on a child to answer her question, she thanked the child for raising his/her hand and having a quiet voice. Holly finished the book, with three interruptions,

answered questions the children had about the story, and explained the art project before sending the class to the tables to work.

What a difference two weeks made in the interruptive behavior in Holly's class. Holly described the process she went through to implement the change for her read aloud time. Initially she realized, "I think I have been inconsistent in what I expect from them. I haven't explained to them what my expectations are for circle time" (Interview 2).

Holly spent an evening deciding what her limits would be for circle time talking so she could set expectations for a child's behavior. At the next circle time, she explained to the class what her expectations were for circle time behavior. She also modeled for them how to put one finger to their mouths and raise one hand. Holly expected it would take a couple of weeks before all the children were following the new procedure: "Any time that I've changed a procedure or made a new rule it takes a lot of reminding and then making sure kids remember" (Interview 3). Holly consistently corrected a child if he/she shouted out instead of following the new procedure for talking.

Holly watched the video from her second lesson and discovered she was interrupted three times while reading the story, 16 fewer times than before implementing her quiet circle time routine. She commented,

Well they did a lot better. It seemed a lot less chaotic and less voices all shouting out at once so that was impressive to me. It didn't seem to take them very long to start catching on and a few of them didn't understand the concept but you could tell that over time they would start to get it. that was really cool. (Interview 3)

Holly's major in college had a strong reflective component so she was comfortable with daily reflection about her practice. "I am always reflecting, always rethinking. My goal

is to always be improving and to never get too set in my ways that I cannot adapt my practices or try new things” (Autobiography).

### **Samantha**

For three years, Samantha has cared for and nurtured children in her home. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (2009) considers all adults who are responsible for the direct care of children a teacher. Samantha does not consider herself a teacher.

**Samantha’s vignette.** The front door opened and Samantha invited me inside; the baby on her hip held out his arms as if extending the welcome. Before I stepped inside, I heard the excited voices of other children yelling, “Hi Karen, can we dance?” Samantha put on some music and five children and I held hands and danced in circles. After a few minutes, I was tired and a little dizzy, but the children were just getting started. It quickly got out of hand when the older children whipped the younger ones around. So Samantha turned off the music and calmly asked the children to sit down on the floor and get ready for circle time. The five children quickly complied with her request.

Samantha had children dropped off at her house as early as 7:00 a.m. and the last child was picked up by 5:00 p.m. She had a mixed age range of children during the summer. Samantha was in charge of three boys under the age of two; there were never more than two boys on any given day. At the upper age range, she had two boys who were both seven and would be in second grade in the fall. One of the boys was her son, Peter, and the other, Kenny, was a good friend. Three children--Janie, Allison, and Aaron--were each three-years-old.

Samantha attempted to keep the same schedule each day; she knew that was not always possible and she needed to be flexible. The daily schedule was comprised of 14 different activity segments. The longest segment was two hours and 45 minutes for rest time; the shortest were 15 minutes each for three bathroom/diaper changes, art, and two free-playtimes.

Forty-five minutes of the morning schedule were devoted to circle time. Each day at 10:00 a.m. after a snack in the kitchen, the children gathered on the living room floor facing the calendar wall. They started with the Pledge of Allegiance. A different child led each day; today, it was three-year-old Janie, Samantha's daughter. With the pledge over, Samantha asked the children what the weather was today. False weather forecasts were revised until the children correctly answered, "Cloudy." Samantha took the strip labeled "cloudy" and put it on the poster titled "Today's weather is." She moved to the next topic--the days of the week. She asked individual children to answer what day yesterday, today, and tomorrow were. She worked with each child until he/she answered correctly. Samantha next moved to the calendar where she held up her daughter and had her pick the shape with today's date on it. The children looked to see if they could figure out the pattern made on the calendar by the calendar pieces but it was too early in the month for the pattern to appear. Together, they read the numbers on the calendar, "One, two."

For the second part of circle time, Samantha took a seat on the floor with the children and led them in four songs. As they sang "The Alphabet Song," each child used his/her hands and tried to sign each letter as it was sung. Peter, Kenny, and Janie had no



trouble forming the correct hand signs but the other children struggled. All the children used both of their hands while they sang, “Where is Thumbkin.”

Samantha changed themes each week. This week, it was “families” so Samantha had two stories and an activity based on the theme. Samantha had found “theme” kits the public library put together for home-based child care providers; they contained picture books and directions for multiple activities based on the theme. Samantha found most of the contents of the boxes helpful and they saved her time when she planned the daily activities. Samantha shared, “I loved the kits that I used this summer; they were awesome. I think they worked well for the older kids but they didn’t quite fit the younger kids as well” (Interview 2).

Samantha reminded the children about the family theme and said they were going to look at different people who could be in a family and what their job could be. From a zip-lock bag, she pulled out a six-inch plastic female doll and asked Peter who the person could be. He answered, “Mommy.” Samantha asked him what a mommy could do and he replied, “Go to work.” She asked if there was anything else a mommy could do and Janie responded, “Stay home.” Samantha showed the rest of the dolls, which included dad, grandma, sister, brother, and grandpa. As she questioned the children, Peter kept interrupting the other children by giving an answer. Samantha gave her fingers a quick snap and Peter stopped. She asked Aaron what a grandpa could do and he suggested, “Stay home and rock.” The dolls were returned to their bag and Samantha had the children crawl like a baby around the room and then run around in circles like a kid would. After a minute, she told them to sit back down for the story. They had had enough of a break that they were able to sit for the rest of circle time.

For their first story, Samantha pulled out a felt board and pictures of a mother doing different jobs such as a cook, a singer, an artist, and a gardener. She read a poem about the different jobs a mother does and put the corresponding picture on the felt board. For the second story, Samantha read *Oh My Baby Little One* about a baby who grew up and went to school. As she read the book, she continually asked the children questions about what they saw and what they thought would happen.

Different colored, two-inch interlocking plastic people were used for the circle time activity. The children separated the plastic mom, dad, brother, and sister by color and then tried to make a pattern. All of the children struggled to make a pattern that was made up of color and person. Samantha asked Janie to explain her pattern and Janie replied, “Mom, sister, brother, brother; all the people were blue.” Samantha asked each child to explain the pattern they made; all had similar answers to Janie, i.e., specific people all of the same color. The children stopped the pattern activity and retreated to the kitchen table to draw a picture of their families.

**Reflection as a catalyst for change.** At the beginning of the study, in her autobiography and in Interview 1, Samantha defined reflection: “I guess just going back over things that you’ve done and finding the flaws or the things you need to fix in that time period or that day or that hour or whatever it may be.” I asked her if she currently used reflection in her practice. She responded, “If I have (used reflection) it would be just on my own and thinking about what I could do better the next day. But I don’t do that every day.” As we continued to talk, she continued to think about reflection and added to her response:

When I’m planning for the next day, I think okay what worked well this morning?  
Or I think what worked well in that time, well that worked and so we can do that

and just yea so I guess in a way I do. I just don't think that I do, I just don't put those words to it. I don't say, "Okay I'm reflecting now," so I guess that's kind of where I'm at. I guess I do a little of that every once in a while. (Interview 1)

After the third time we met for professional development session, Samantha thought about something in her practice that she would like to change: she decided on being more prepared for circle time so the morning would be more fluid. On many days, she did not have all her materials ready and she would have to stop what she was doing and find the material she needed, which interrupted the flow of circle time. She thought about possible solutions for the problem and came up with two: she could gather all materials for circle time the night before and put them in a designated spot or get up 30 minutes earlier in the morning to gather all materials for circle time and put them in a designated spot.

Next, she looked at who would be impacted by this change in her practice and she came up with four: the children she taught, her own children, her husband, and herself. The children she taught would be positively affected since they would be less likely to misbehave if all supplies were within arm's reach while she was teaching and there would be no down time while Samantha looked for something she needed. Samantha's husband would be negatively impacted because Samantha would either go to bed later or get up earlier to gather materials, and that could affect his sleep. Samantha's children, Peter and Janie, could be positively or negatively impacted. It would be positive for them since Samantha teaches them; or it could be negative if she makes too much noise while gathering her materials, keeps them up at night, or wakes them up earlier in the morning. The fourth person affected by the change would be Samantha. On the negative side, she would lose 30 minutes sleep each day; on the positive side, she would feel more

confident because she would be prepared for circle time. In the end, Samantha decided the change was worth implementing. To be fair to her family, she would try staying up later for a week and then get up earlier for a week to decide which had the least negative impact on her family. “If I can get up in the morning or if I can get it done before I go to bed, it’s kind of something I’m going to have to feel out right now just to see what works the best.”

**Change emanates from reflection.** Samantha’s dark brown hair was pulled back in a ponytail and she appeared more relaxed than the last time I was in her house six weeks ago. Samantha’s group of children had changed: the 2 seven-year-olds were back in school so there are three 3-year-olds, two 2-year-olds, and an infant. Samantha explained the difference between the summer and the present.

Too many age differences, just too many kids. And I wasn’t prepared mentally and educationally. I wasn’t prepared for all of that. So I think a lot has to do with the fact that I’m focusing on a smaller group of children and at a different level. Yes, there are two-year-olds and three-year-olds, but there’s just enough of a similarity between the two ages and the way that they learn that I feel more confident in giving them what they need. In the summer, I was trying to add a seven-year-old’s learning ability to a two-year-old’s learning ability and that doesn’t work. (Interview 3)

Samantha began the circle time routine and her group of four children took turns as they reported on the weather and affixed today’s date to the calendar. Samantha had changed some of her circle time routine to reflect the needs of the younger children. The biggest change was circle time had been shortened from 45 minutes in the summer to 20 minutes now. Samantha moved from standing by the circle time wall to sitting with the two 3-year-old girls and two 2-year-old boys in her care today.

Samantha pulled the laptop from the couch onto the floor next to her as she glanced at it. Then she asked the children, “Where do animals come from?” Janie

answered, “Jungle.” Allison said something I could not understand but Samantha could and replied, “In a zoo.” While correct, these two answers were not what Samantha was looking for. She prompted them by asking, “Where would we find the cows, the pigs?” Janie answered excitedly, “The farm.” Samantha reminded the children of the art activities they had completed this week that had to do with the farm. Samantha introduced the first farm song by starting to sing, “The cow in the barn goes moo, moo, moo.” The four children joined in and they also sang about a horse (Janie’s choice), a pig (Allison’s choice), and a cat (Evan’s choice). They sang another song, *Over in the Barnyard*, which included many animal sounds.

After they sang, Samantha took out flash cards with pictures of different objects and the children told Samantha the color of the object. She asked one child to tell her the color and then asked the other children to repeat the color. When they had finished saying the names of the six colors Samantha flipped the cards over and asked the children to tell her the shape of the objects on the cards. Samantha made sure each child had the opportunity to say each shape.

Samantha commented that the children were getting restless, so she read a short book: *Spot Goes to the Farm*. On each page, she asked the children to tell her the new animal that Spot met. When they finished, Samantha sent the children to the kitchen table to create another art project based on the theme of farm.

The next week, Samantha and I met one last time for the final interview. I asked Samantha about the goal she had set for herself to be more prepared each day and whether she had found a consistent time to prepare for the day. Samantha filled me in:

Mostly every morning, it’s just gathering materials. I have the ideas and I have been using the computer and a website about preschool education that has lesson

plans in a sense. I have been using a lot of their songs to bring in new songs and their craft ideas to bring in different craft ideas. Now I sit down, make a calendar of the weeks in a month, and write down what I want to do for each week and then I put together ideas for each day and use that throughout the week. (Interview 3)

Before I left, I asked her if she had noticed any changes to her practice since we started the study. She replied, “Confidence level, my confidence level is just there (Interview 3).” Samantha added, “I’ve always had it in the back of my mind to do the planning but I never had the drive to get it going to get it done. Now I do” (Interview 3). Samantha continued, “Knowing I can be prepared, that it doesn’t take too much time, it takes just enough. The complete difference between not being prepared and being prepared is the kids don’t get completely out of control because I am prepared” (Interview 3).

I asked her about her reflection practices and whether she was using reflection more than when we started. She replied, “Every day I’m reflecting about how things went when I have a quiet time. When they are working on their craft, I look back at how circle time went and what I need to change.”

I probed a little more and asked if she had ever used reflection during a lesson to make immediate changes. She replied, “I try to change it, I definitely do. I noticed when I picked a book that was way too long and their attention span was going so I shortened the book or I hurry the book along to make it shorter” (Interview 3).

Samantha also shared that Janie would often ask during an activity to do something else: “So I’ll find a way to add a game or something that goes along with the theme but that helps to get that energy out before we do the next step” (Interview 3).

**Claudia**

**Claudia's vignette.** Mornings in Claudia's Rainbow Room were loud and chaotic. The time from when children arrived until 8:30 a.m. was designated as free playtime; the children were allowed to use anything in the carpeted area of the classroom. The air was filled with all the sounds that accompany children playing: laughing, yelling, talking, and crying along with the constant sound of a doorbell announcing all arrivals to The Child Center. Claudia was alone this morning with six 3-year-olds.

Circle time was scheduled for 8:30–9:00 every morning but that seldom happened. Claudia asked the children to clean up their mess but most children continued to play and did not listen to her. She began to individually ask children to put their toys away; as one child put a toy away, another child took a toy out from its resting place and started to play. Ten minutes later, the room was finally cleaned up and the children were headed to the circle time rug. They found their spot and sat down.

Claudia maintained the same circle time components each day but the order they were completed often changed depending on the group's preferences. This day, circle time began when Claudia sat on the rug with the children. She put Henry in her lap and started to clap her hands as she sang the welcome song: "Good morning Henry, good morning Henry. Thank you for coming to school today. Good morning Alice, good morning Alice. Thank you for coming to school today." Claudia stopped the song and asked Carrie to come sit on the rug. She repeated herself three times before Carrie jumped off the short bookshelf and joined the rest of the class on the rug. Claudia continued to sing by herself until everyone in the room had been acknowledged with their name in the song.

Claudia asked the children if they wanted to do their colors or sing the ABC song. Alexis replied that she wanted to show Claudia that she could sing the song by herself. Alexis sang, Claudia clapped, Jenny rolled her dress up in her hands, Carrie laid on the floor--one hand held her bunny and the other hand was in her mouth, and Audrey picked her fingernails while they watched.

Claudia held Henry in her lap against his protests to get out of her lap as she asked bare-footed Martin to climb down from the short bookshelf. The class started the counting activity as they used their fingers and their voices to count up to 10, then back to zero, with a loud "Blast off" at the end that everyone yelled. Claudia clapped while she sang the "Days of the Week" and then the months of the year as she scooted across the floor to grab Martin and sat him on the rug next to her. As children walked around on the rug, Claudia helped them with their American Sign Language for the colors that were posted on the wall. Martin walked behind Claudia to where Henry was and pushed him. Claudia grabbed Martin, sat him on the floor next to her, and said to Henry, "Tell Martin no thank you. I don't like that." Claudia held on to Martin and helped the other children as they signed their colors. After they named and signed all the colors on the wall, Claudia asked the children, "Who has red on?" The children answered, "Henry." Claudia continued until every child's name had been called. They moved on to shapes where Claudia asked the children what the name of the shape was with a specific number of sides: "What's the name of the shape with three sides?" She constantly battled with Henry and Martin as she tried to get them to pay attention and not climb on the bookshelf.



Claudia had the children sit as she read them a story about heavy equipment. Carrie sat in Claudia's lap as she sucked her fingers, Martin kicked Henry with his foot, and Jenny rolled her dress up to her chest. Claudia asked Jenny to put her dress down and Martin to leave Henry alone. Two children stood directly in front of Claudia as she read and they blocked the pictures from the other children. Claudia asked the children to move so others could see and they did. Claudia tried to engage the children as she read when she asked if they had ever seen a cement truck or a truck that dumped its load from the side. Claudia told the children they could try to find some heavy equipment on their walk after snack. Claudia finished reading the book and helped the children put on sunscreen to get ready for outside playtime.

**Reflection as a catalyst for change.** Claudia and I met for professional development during her break time while the children were playing outside. She thought long and hard about what she wanted to change in her practice. Claudia decided the biggest problem they are having was that the children were not cleaning up after free playtime, which caused circle time to start late and the morning schedule to be disrupted.

Claudia thought about solutions for the problem and came up with three that made sense. The first solution was she could give the children a warning before it was time to start cleaning up by doing a countdown. Claudia would start at 5 and when she said "1," that would be the cue to the children that it was time to stop playing and start picking up the toys. The second solution she devised was a reward system for children who picked up the toys. She thought it would start with any child who was picking up toys would get a sticker for their work. Over time, giving a sticker to each child who picked up toys would be phased out and just the best cleaner would get a sticker. Ideally, it would get to

the point that no stickers would need to be given out because everyone would know it was their responsibility to pick up the toys. Claudia's last idea was to have logical consequences for those children who did not help pick up the toys.

Claudia listed the people who would be impacted by the solutions and determined there were three: the children, Mary, and herself. Next, she looked at the consequences of each solution. If Claudia did a countdown to let the children know it was time to start picking up, all three groups would be positively impacted and there would be no negatively impacted group. If a reward system was implemented, Claudia and Mary would be responsible for purchasing the reward so they would be negatively impacted. The children who picked up toys would be positively affected because they would get a reward every day they picked up the toys. The children who did not pick up toys would be negatively impacted since they would not receive a reward. The last solution--logical consequences--could negatively impact Claudia and Mary in two ways: (a) they would be responsible for figuring out a consequence and then they would have to execute the consequence and (b) the children would be upset if they lost a privilege and positively affected if they picked up the toys.

Claudia was worried about taking on too much so she opted to start with the countdown. She was ready to institute a reward system along with the countdown if the countdown alone was not successful.

**Change emanates from reflection.** By the end of the study, Mary was not pulled away from the classroom as she had been during the summer months. Claudia and Mary were working as a team instead of two individual teachers sharing a classroom. Because

of this change, I chose to write one ending to their narrative and placed it at the end of Mary's section.

## **Mary**

When Mary and Claudia were both with the class during circle time, they worked together and became a tag team. One of them would lead the activity while the other one approached and talked to children who were not behaving. This strategy kept the activity going with the least amount of disruption to the other children. Mary had the role of reading to the children because Claudia did not feel comfortable reading out loud due to her dyslexia.

**Mary's vignette.** Mary started to read a book, "Our Skeleton," while she sat on the rug with the 15 children in class this morning. The children were silent and sat on the rug for the first couple of minutes of Mary's reading. She read with expression and embellished on the book as she showed the children each page. On the page about X-rays, Mary shared about the time she broke her arm when she was nine and had to have an X-ray and a cast. She pointed to the illustrations in the book and asked the children about them. The children paying attention to Mary's reading were engaged by her presentation of the book.

I didn't just read the words that were on the page, I elaborated and I pointed out to the kids like here's where our heart is, here's our skull. We have bones around our eyes and in our ears and our nose can wiggle because of this stuff, we have cartilage in our bodies. And so instead of just reading it and kids being like, "Oh yea cartilage, what's that?" actually kind of going the extra step to illustrate it. It's something that I always, it's not a conscious thing that I think about doing. But if a thought pops into my head as I'm reading a story I will tend to try and get it out there but I think with that story especially, that I did a really good job of um taking it a little further so the kids that were paying attention and were listening could kind of make some actually connections to the story instead of just a book about a skeleton. (Interview 2)

Within two minutes, story time quickly deteriorated as children left the rug and began to play with toys, walk around the room, and bother each other. Six children stayed with Mary and listened to the entire book. The other nine children listened for a while and then left the rug to pursue other interests. Claudia spent story time retrieving children from other parts of the room, brought them back to the rug, and then sat them down.

Mary finished the story and sent the children to wash their hands before snack. The two bathrooms filled quickly with children anxious to wash their hands and eat so they could go outside to play. Allison stood by the picture windows as she cried and asked for her mommy. Mary walked up to Allison said, “Mommy will be back soon. Let’s go have some oranges.” Mary picked her up, carried her to a chair at the snack table, and sat her down. Children washed their hands and sat down at the tables for a snack of orange wedges. Mary put a napkin and an orange wedge in front of each child. Oranges slid along the table--they were cars or they were weapons--but today, they were not eaten. As children finished with their oranges, Mary sent them to the bathroom to wash their hands again before she put sunscreen on each child in preparation for going outside.

**Reflection as a catalyst for change.** At our last professional development session, Mary thought about a change she wanted to make in her daily practice and replied that she had been contemplating where she should physically position herself at circle time: “Where I position myself physically can have an effect on kids’ willingness to sit and willingness to pay attention” (Interview 2).

There were daily problems when children stood directly in front of Mary as she read and blocked other children from being able to see the book. She had been sitting in a corner of the circle time area where two walls come together to make a right angle. No one could get behind Mary but she was not sure if that was the best place for her to sit.

Mary made a list of the places she could sit during circle time and came up with four: (a) be part of the circle sitting on the rug, (b) sit outside the circle on the floor, (c) sit in a chair outside the circle, or (d) continue to sit in the corner. Mary listed the people who would be impacted by the solution and determined that the children, Claudia, and herself could be affected.

If she chose the first solution and sat in the circle on the rug, she would be impacted because children would sit on her lap, which would make it difficult for her to hold the book high enough for all the children to see. The children would be negatively impacted if they could not see the book but they would be positively impacted if they sat on Mary's lap or leaned against her side. If Mary sat on the floor outside the circle in solution two, the children would be negatively impacted since they would not be able to sit in Mary's lap or next to her. They would be positively impacted since Mary would hold the book higher and everyone would be able to see and there would be no fighting about who sat in Mary's lap. Claudia would be negatively impacted since she sat across the circle from Mary and would be against a wall, which made it harder for her to get up and retrieve children who left the circle. If Mary chose the third solution to sit in a chair outside the circle, the children would be negatively impacted since they would not have Mary's lap to sit in but they would be positively affected being able to see the book. Claudia would be negatively impacted since she would have to sit against a wall. Mary

would not be at the same level as the children, which would be a negative impact. The fourth solution to stay in the corner positively affected Claudia since she would no longer be against a wall and therefore it would be easier to leave the circle and help children.

The children would be able to sit in Mary's lap but might have trouble seeing the book.

After much consideration, Mary decided to sit on a chair outside the circle:

For one thing I think I will see a lot less of the kind of pushing and vying for certain spots in the circle time area because when I'm sitting up and I've got the book up here there's really no bad spot to sit for a child. It really eliminates that "I can't see" and "get out of the way!" and it doesn't matter if there are a couple of kids sitting on their knees. (Interview 2)

**Change emanates from reflection.** Claudia and Mary are no longer two teachers sharing the same room and the same children; they have become a team with a rhythm. They finish each other's sentences as they work their way through the circle time routine. Mary starts circle time with the singing of the "Good morning" song. Most of the 18 children are singing and all are clapping, "Thank you for coming to school today." After the fifth child, Dean, is sung to, Mary stops and reminds Dean to keep his feet safe. Dean immediately stops kicking his feet toward Ted. After the brief stop, the class continues the song until they have acknowledged all the children and the three adults in the room-- Claudia, Mary, and me.

Claudia asks the class if they want to count to 20 or sing the "ABCs" first.

Children call out their preference but since no one is sure which activity is chosen, Mary asks the children to raise their hand if they want to count first. Children raise their hands and then Mary asks who wants to sing the "ABC" song first. A couple of children raise their hands and Mary lets the group know that the alphabet will be first today. Before they get started on the alphabet song, another child arrives in the room so Claudia starts

singing “Good morning” to Jody and everyone joins in. Jody joins the group, settling into Claudia’s arms. Claudia asks Henry to go to the garbage and spit out whatever is in his mouth. Henry walks across the rug between two children in the circle; in the process, he steps on David’s fingers. David lets out a crying scream so Mary asks what is wrong. David tells Mary that Henry stepped on his fingers. Mary explains to David that it was an accident. Mary tells Henry that he should apologize and reminds Henry that we say excuse me when we walk by someone.

Mary starts them on the alphabet song. As they sing the letter name, they also use their hands and hit their thigh for each letter. Mary primes the children for counting when she says, “Wiggle your fingers and make sure they’re all ready to count” as she holds up her hands and wiggles all her fingers. Claudia starts by saying 1 and leads the count up to 20; some of the children are struggling to move their fingers fast enough to designate the number being counted. At the number 18, Claudia crawls across the rug, sits down, picks up Devon, and puts him in her lap to keep him still. A 10 second break from counting ensued while children moved around the rug to get closer to Claudia. The count began from 20 down to 0 and then “Blast off” as everyone yells and raises their hands.

Claudia and Mary talk as they teach the children how to sign the days of the week. The children pay close attention and enjoy moving their arms. Together Mary and Claudia remind the children how to have safe feet, criss-cross applesauce, and safe hands in our lap. Mary prepares to read a book from her spot in the corner by announcing, “If you cannot see me where you are sitting, you need to move.” Mary reads a book about

stranger danger, which fits in with the theme of staying healthy and safe, while Claudia puts crackers on the tables in preparation for snack.

The room is still noisy and not all children are engaged during circle time, but there is a positive difference from the time Mary and Claudia were first videotaped. The countdown by itself was not entirely successful so Claudia and Mary instituted a reward system that has produced a decrease in the amount of time children are taking to pick up the room. After a week, Mary found sitting in a chair outside the circle was not working for the children because some of the children needed the comfort of her lap to settle down and listen to the story so she moved back to the spot in the corner where children could sit in her lap.

In summary, Table 5 presents the broad themes, sub-themes, and number of references to each sub-theme.



Table 5

*Broad Themes, Sub-themes and Number of References in Data*

Initial Broad Theme	Sub-theme	Number of References
Personal Academics	Successes	5
	Challenges	20
	Hands-on learning	13
	Frustrations	5
	Social - emotional	6
Education	College	10
	For early childhood	9
Early childhood work experience	Successes	30
	Influences	11
	Challenges	37
	Environment	24
	Teaching social - emotional	6
	Frustrations	11
Organization	For teaching	4
	For students	4
Philosophy of child development and learning	Providing opportunities	25
	Assessment	1
	Learning styles	2
	Teaching	6
Reflection	Definition	4
	Doing	22
	Professional goals	4

## Thematic Analysis

In this section, I analyze the study data based on the six broad themes and 21 sub-themes for each participant.

### Personal Academics

Personal academics was the first theme created after reading each participant's autobiography. I wanted a theme that expressed the educational experience of each participant as a learner rather than as a teacher. Within this theme, five sub-themes emerged: *successes*, *social-emotional*, *hands-on activities*, *frustrations*, and *challenges*.

**Successes.** Since kindergarten, Holly has felt successful in school:

From the beginning, learning and excelling in school came easily for me in most areas. My kindergarten and first grade teacher constantly praised me for my reading and writing abilities. In first grade, Miss Wiz had me tutor students who struggled with reading. (Autobiography)

Samantha traced her interest in learning back to elementary school and her love of mathematics: "Math was the easiest for me to learn, numbers always just made sense and I could do such a great job on memorizing the facts." She remembered the first computer lab her school had and being able to play Oregon Trail, which transported her to another era.

Mary had honors history her sophomore year of high school and related that she wrote a journal from the point of view of an historical figure:

I chose Maximilien de Robespierre, the man who perpetrated the Reign of Terror towards the end of the French Revolution. You had to really research who the person was and what they did in history to do it right. The project was so much fun for me because writing is something I've always loved doing. (Autobiography)

**Challenges.** Mary was the only participant who did not write about any challenges in school. Holly spent her entire educational career struggling in

mathematics: “I never liked math, probably because it wasn’t easy for me, and throughout the years it did not get better” (Autobiography). Even though Holly put a lot of effort into math to improve, it was hard work:

I failed a math test in fifth grade and never forgot my dad’s disgust at my failure and saying that he never wanted to see something like that cross his desk again. After that, I worked harder to do better, but doing well at math took a lot of extra work for me. Even in college, I struggled through my math courses with average grades. In fact, the only C I received in college was in a statistics course. I had to work hard to pass, while in my others classes I easily made As. (Autobiography)

Samantha encountered challenges during elementary school with reading, writing, and spelling: “In first and second grade, I was put into a special reading group because I was just a little behind on my reading skills. Unfortunately, at that time, it was very uncool to be in a special reading group; it meant that you were slow” (Autobiography). Samantha’s reading improved in third grade when she experienced a teacher who inspired her to read. It no longer was hard work to read it; was now fun and an escape from the day:

The unfortunate thing about third grade was I was awful at spelling. I had the most horrible experience with a spelling test that I could have. I got caught cheating on a test. It is the only thing I ever cheated on, I was so embarrassed it did not make the situation any better. (Autobiography)

In fifth grade, school became more about the memorization of facts rather than hands-on activities and this challenged Samantha:

I could not get all the facts straight such as names with places and dates with social studies. Nothing seemed to stick in my brain. I tried all kinds of tricks to remember and studied extra hard to get all the facts down, but nothing seemed to work. I still have that problem to this day that is unless it is something that interests me very much. (Autobiography)

Claudia struggled throughout school and currently in college with dyslexia and dysgraphia. She wrote, “The energy to do homework was very overwhelming it was hard

to do it. I felt kind of like I was stupid or dumb at times, not as adequate to retain the information as some kids” (Autobiography). In high school, Claudia stuck with the basic classes since she did not feel she was smart enough to take anything more advanced: “When I got up to high school, I would take the basic classes, and took the whole four years of high school the basic classes because I wasn’t smart enough to remember anything past the basic math” (Autobiography). She also indicated,

As I got older and I thought about going to school and stuff, I never thought about going to college because I thought “that’ll be too hard, too difficult, they’ll have more homework and stuff” and I won’t be able to do it. I was always like I’ll accept the kind of job I have in my life and that would be it. (Autobiography)

**Hands-on activities.** Hands-on activities was the preferred way to learn for three participants: Holly, Samantha, and Mary.

Holly recalled the authentic learning experiences she participated in while in elementary school, which made her love to learn:

In fifth grade, my teacher inspired a love for history in all of us when she had us play parts in our own “Continental Congress.” Being active made history come alive and become more exciting than any textbook. The next best thing for me as a learner was learning history through historical fiction. I still remember details from the books I read about ancient Rome that came from quality historical fiction books integrated into my history curriculum much more than I remember anything from my textbooks or PowerPoint slides. (Autobiography)

Samantha commented, “Hands-on learning was always the best way for me to learn. I always got excited when we could go places to see what we were talking about, do experiments in the classroom or when we turned the classroom into the subject we were studying” (Autobiography). Samantha remembered studying state history in fourth grade and being driven around in a school bus to see the local historical landmarks she had learned. She also participated in a Rendezvous where she learned how people lived and worked in the 1800s. In fifth grade, she conducted experiments with magnets and

learned about electricity when she made circuits: “I very much saw that hands-on was very important to me in elementary school; especially as we get older, it’s all about memorizing and taking notes.”

Mary shared her experience in fourth grade with “exploration bags” that she was able to take home every other weekend. Each bag contained different materials, e.g., magnets or shells, and activities to complement the materials:

I relished my weekends with a bag. I was always so excited to see which one I got and I would dump the contents out all over the living room floor as soon as I got home. I absolutely loved the hands-on activities and thought it was the coolest homework. (Autobiography)

Mary explained further,

I think I really connect with projects and learning experiences that are just a little left of center, that think outside the box. I really like doing hands-on activities, and the stuff I learn from them seems to stick with me a lot more. I also like really creative activities that give some free reign to take it where I will. (Autobiography)

**Frustrations.** Samantha became frustrated with her learning when she attended college and all her classes required so much note taking and memorization:

I had a little bit of frustration and some sadness just at the loss of the ability to learn hands-on. As we get older, it is all about memorizing and taking notes and knowing how to do those kinds of things. Why can’t we incorporate some of that at the college level, you know the hands-on? I am frustrated that I cannot find a better way to learn for myself. (Autobiography)

Claudia’s struggles in reading and writing turned to frustration with every assignment she attempted: “I didn’t read much because I struggled with reading and writing and not being fluent. The grammar was really hard, the punctuation and stuff” (Autobiography).

**Social-emotional.** Holly was homeschooled from 7th grade through 10th grade: “It was a little traumatic but more in a social way but not an academic way. I didn’t feel

like it affected my schooling that much except maybe to teach me more self-reliance and independence” (Interview 1).

Academics were not the only area where Samantha struggled in school and in college. She was shy and struggled in her interactions with people, especially with other children: “I only had a couple of friends in elementary school; I didn’t have a large group of friends that I interacted with” (Interview 1). Her interaction skills suffered further when she was homeschooled for seventh, eighth, and ninth grades and attended a private Christian school for 10th grade before returning to a public high school.

## **Education**

The education theme came from participant autobiographies and interviews after I read the autobiographies. The theme encompassed the postsecondary schooling participants had completed. Two sub-themes materialized: *college* and *for early childhood*.

**College.** Holly attended a four-year university and obtained a bachelor’s degree in human development and family studies.: “In teaching this year, and during student teaching, I have many times found myself going back to the books I read for class and reinforcing that learning again now that I can use it in practice” (Autobiography).

Samantha attended three years of college but dropped out before she graduated:

At first, I was not interested in early childhood, my interest lie with elementary education and a specialty in special education. I went to college in Iowa for three years with the intention of becoming a teacher in special needs class. I worked hard, but found I was very discouraged by my teachers. One even told me that I should change my career choice. (Autobiography)

**For early childhood.** Holly was the only participant who attended college to become an early childhood teacher. Her last two years of college comprised her early

childhood classes; she student taught at a preschool for nine weeks and in a first/second grade classroom at a public elementary school for nine weeks:

While my weekly practicums were good practice, by far the most educational experience that prepared me to become a teacher in early childhood was my student teaching experience. I spent nine weeks teaching preschool under a mentor teacher and learned everything I could. It all came together in that time- the classes, the practicums, my lesson plans- it all finally made sense. (Autobiography)

Samantha's original plan was not to be an early childhood teacher but an elementary special education teacher. She did not take any classes in early childhood until she decided to start her home day care business three years ago:

It wasn't until this environment [Home daycare] that I found that I was, that I needed more classes to brush up on some early childhood development and that's when I started actually doing classes. I was required to take 15 credit hours of something related to child development. (Interview 1)

### **Early Childhood Work Experiences**

All participants shared incidents and people who helped mold them into the early childhood teachers they had become. These incidents and people became the theme of early childhood work experiences, which contained six sub-themes: *successes, influences, environment, teaching social-emotional, challenges, and frustrations*.

**Successes.** Holly was challenged during her student teaching experiences when the children would not produce what she was looking for: "I've gotten a lot better about explaining things before I send kids to do them that was something I wanted to work on when I was student teaching so I've grown in that area" (Interview 2)

"My favorite part about teaching was watching the kids develop and find their success in learning. Just watching their faces light up when they got it," Samantha

related when she talked about her experience teaching in a classroom of two-year-olds (Autobiography).

Claudia and Mary have experienced daily behavioral issues in their classroom during circle time. They have invested considerable time working with the children to get them to understand the routine. Mary related,

Pretty much everyone is sitting for circle time now, even Clem and Gene have figured out “Ok if I sit and kind of cuddle with Miss Mary or Miss Claudia that that’s an acceptable thing.” Usually they pick one of us to sit against and they cuddle up against our side and you know we do everything and that keeps them very calm and very engaged with the activity so it really helps. (Interview 3)

Claudia expressed her excitement about the changes that have happened during circle time:

I feel like we are gaining something it has taken a long time but we have actually been able to get through circle time with doing the reading in the book, doing our colors, shapes, and numbers. We have been able to get the kids sitting on the outside of the circle. (Interview 3)

Another issue Mary and Claudia have been working on with the children is picking up toys in the room at the end of free playtime and before circle time. On a typical day, two or three children will do all the cleaning while the other children walk around the room doing nothing or they continue to get toys out and start to play. Claudia described a current success: “Today one of the twins was actually helping clean; he cleaned up today so he got a sticker” (Interview3). The twins, Clem and Gene, are notorious for not stopping their playing when the transition to circle time begins.

Since starting in the three-year-old room, Claudia has been reluctant to read to the children because of her dyslexia. She defers reading the story to Mary who loves to read aloud to the children. Claudia stated,



I need to work on reading them (the class) the books because I have trouble reading so I have to really just get in a read the book because if I get off the track I'll never be able to read the book because, for me it's just too hard. But I'm learning, for me it's been a long process since I first started to be a teacher. I think I'm a lot better with the reading and a little more confident because when I first started and just volunteering and reading I had a hard time. Now I feel a lot more confident about reading to my three-year-olds. (Interview 2)

**Influences.** Holly takes advantage of multiple sources to keep up to date on the preschool classroom. She constantly seeks out new and familiar resources to improve her teaching. Holly explained:

I am lucky to have experience in many different types of preschool classrooms. I love to pick the best ideas out of each place I go and always keep learning. I learn from my old textbooks, other teachers, and online teaching blogs all the time to get new ideas. (Autobiography)

Things that did not quite make sense in the classroom at the university later made complete sense once I was actually teaching. In teaching this year, and during student teaching, I have many times found myself going back to the books I read for class and reinforcing that learning again now that I can use it in practice. This is due to the fact that many of the ideas and methods were not as clear to me until I had my own classroom. (Autobiography)

Claudia tended to use the teachers and other adults who spend time in her classroom: "I look for guidance from Mary or whoever is in the room with me to kind of see how they do things so I can kind of do the same thing and make what I do better" (Interview 1). As a mother, Claudia approached her teaching with her own children in mind: "I think I teach with having a parent in mind as well as having a teacher in mind and how I would want someone to teach my children" (Autobiography).

Mary's main influence on her teaching has been her mother and other teachers she has worked with. Mary revealed,

My mom has worked in early childhood since before I was born, and I was always her "guinea pig" for art projects, activities, etc... My mom was a single parent and a HUGE influence on me. I always thought that growing up to be like her would be a great accomplishment. (Autobiography)

My mom had a song for everything. She sang constantly and I try to sing a lot in class, though sometimes I feel like I don't enough. Ms. Karen was a teacher who always stayed so calm and patient no matter what was happening, and she told me "if you freak out, they freak out more." So I try to keep calm like that. Ms. Amy always had the coolest art projects that were always just a little outside the box. I try to come up with art activities that aren't the average everyday cut/paste and finger paint like she did. (Autobiography)

**Environment.** With a year of teaching her own classroom completed, Holly realized how important the environment is for the smooth operation of the classroom:

I, as the teacher, have to take responsibility for creating the environment that makes up my classroom. The way that the year will go is entirely based on how you train your kids to behave, treat each other, and function as a group. I have to teach, model, and practice every little routine, procedure, and social emotional skill that I want to see the kids using. These things do not happen naturally. Having a good classroom environment takes a lot of work at the beginning, teaching and re-teaching. (Autobiography)

Samantha discovered her attitude had an effect on the children in her care: "I really believe in the positive aspect of being able to have a positive environment, a consistently positive environment" (Interview 2).

Claudia learned the day does not flow smoothly unless the children know classroom expectations and routines: "If we do not get through anything else we're going to teach you that this time is circle time, this is what you do. This is art time and this is what you do. To get ready to go outside, this is how we sit to get ready to go outside" (Interview 2).

**Teaching social-emotional.** Holly believes the most important part of a preschool program is nurturing a child's social-emotional growth:

I believe in taking time for teaching social emotional skills, and that at this age the social and emotional aspect of development is more important than the content. I will gladly take less time teaching letters, and spend more time on developing positive social skills, emotional skills, and problem solving with peers. (Autobiography)

During the summer, Holly discovered her class needed to learn how to be friends with each other:

I always thought the social/emotional was more important than the content and I'll gladly stop a circle time and teach them about how to be a friend. In preschool if they're not getting the emotional down, they're not going to make it through the rest of school. (Interview 1)

When children entered the Rainbow Room at The Child Center, they immediately head to Claudia to get their morning hug:

I want to love them and hug and snuggle them but when there are 20 kids, I don't feel like I get to be that to them and I miss that because I really enjoy that. I love my kids to death and I want to be able to show them that empathy. I want to be able to show them to hug, love, and care for people and that I am there for them regardless of what they are going through or doing. (Interview 2)

Claudia also believes that each child in the room should be treated with kindness and respect from other children and adults: "I think everyone should be friendly and get along; whether you like them or not, nobody should be judged" (Interview 2). "We teach them to say, 'I don't like that' (Interview 2) when a child is disrespectful to another child." Claudia continued, "Teaching my kids, giving them love, care, patience, and respect is very important. Showing them that you are always there for them and showing them different ways to express their anger or happiness is very important" (Autobiography).

**Challenges.** Holly, however, was confident in her ability to teach and to know what is developmentally appropriate for preschool children:

While many people want more and more time spent on kindergarten skills in preschool, I cannot jump on board. Preschoolers need time to develop as preschoolers, and pushing them too hard, too soon, runs the risk of burning them out on education at age three. (Autobiography)

Mary and Claudia have up to 20 children in their care each day. With so many children in the room, unproductive behavior can quickly escalate. They have been working to find ways to keep the behavior problems to a minimum. There was constant improvement for a two week period after the first professional development and then it fell apart. Mary expressed her thoughts after having a couple days to process what happened:

It was a step back looking at it now; we probably shouldn't have let it bother us so much because they are kids. They're always going to have those and so I think it's just going to be a matter of reminding ourselves that there are going to be those days and to just take the breath and say okay we'll deal with it and then tomorrow or the next activity will be different, will be better. (Interview 2)

Mary shared at circle time, children would leave the circle and confrontations would happen between children while no adult was close by. The commotion the children created would attract the attention of the children in the circle and then no one would pay attention to the teachers. "It definitely throws me for a loop when there is somebody in the background having an issue," Mary related in Interview 1.

One boy in particular, Nick, was hitting and kicking other children and the teachers. Mary and Claudia were not discovering anything that was helping to change Nick's violent behavior toward other people: "He has figured out the cycle of 'if I say this and I do this' then you know nothing happens to him. But it is not changing the behavior" (Interview 3).

Claudia does not feel secure in her teaching as she does not have an early childhood degree: "I'm still learning all this stuff so I don't know what is right and what is wrong. I am still learning as I go along" (Interview 1).

**Frustrations.** Holly shared her frustration of being a co-teacher with a teacher who did not use developmentally appropriate practices with the class: “If you are a co-teacher, you really can’t do anything; so that was my struggle last year is that she would want me to have the kids doing handwriting pages and things and I just kind of had to go with it because it wasn’t my classroom” (Interview 3).

Samantha had a frustrating summer with a wide range of ages of children in her care. She had the allotted number of children allowed by law but the age differences were difficult to overcome. Samantha shared, “I feel overwhelmed this summer by the number of children as well as the varying age groups that I cannot provide a very positive environment” (Autobiography). Samantha explained how she dealt with the children on a bad day: “I get to that point and go ‘ugh this isn’t working, go away and do something else’ so I get frustrated and I just kind of let it go and let the kids run crazy because at that point I am so frustrated that I can’t get them to focus” (Interview 2).

As Mary and Claudia continually work to make circle time more productive for the children, they have both become frustrated. Mary revealed,

I guess it’s not letting myself get discouraged when we break a string of good days, I mean Claudia and I had a run for probably about a week and a half where every day was better than the last and then we had one day that just kind of, I mean the wheels didn’t totally fall off the bus it was just one of those days where we had some hiccups and we just, I think we just both let it get us a little frustrated. (Interview 3)

Claudia also disclosed her frustrations with the children during circle time:

I want to find a different approach to get some of the children to circle and not get so frustrated with that. Like for instance, when you want them to sit down on the carpet and they keep getting up and running away. You have to keep getting up and picking them up and putting them down and tell them it’s time to sit down. And they keep getting up and taking off again and I get all “urrg really?” and they make you chase them and you’re like “I am not doing this today, I am not chasing you” and it’s easy to get frustrated like that because they’ll just... and finally

you're like "sit!" and you have that strong stern tone to it and I feel like I'm being mean. (Interview 2)

## **Organization**

During interviews, participants talked about struggles they had because of their own lack of organization and the effect it had on their teaching and the children.

Organization became the theme and *for teaching* and *for students* were the two sub-themes.

**For teaching.** During the summer, Samantha started to get more organized by working on lesson plans and having her materials ready:

Having more children has given me the need to be better organized and better prepared each day. I will say that during this last spring, I was not very organized and I did not do as much with my children. Having little ones was hard to incorporate some of these things because they were not interested. Now that those kids are older and seem more interested in these things, I will be sure to follow through with my lesson plans more now than I ever did. (Autobiography)

When Samantha would look for materials she needed or the book she was going to read, the children would get out of hand and it would take minutes to get their attention back.

For a long time I would have lesson plans but I wouldn't necessarily have all my materials set out or I wouldn't have the book I was reading. I would have it written down on my lesson plan but I wouldn't necessarily have pulled that book and set it aside. (Interview 1)

And so it was more learning that I need to do this instead of searching for the book five minutes before I have to have it and then being able to have the materials for the craft set in this particular spot so I can just set those on the table the next time and have the paper and the crayons and the scissors and the whatever in a spot instead of having to go here for the pencils and here for the paper you know. (Interview 1)

**For students.** Holly discovered that the students in her class were able to get more understanding out of the read aloud when the children had circle time expectations:

“I think I might put more of an effort into teaching them how to be quiet and how to have more strict circle time rules and routines” (Interview 2).

Samantha had a group of children who thrived with a schedule: “So long as I have a schedule and I keep that schedule with them they do just fine. But once we lose that schedule or get off it for any reason, it really throws them into a crazy cycle where they’re just out of control” (Interview 2).

### **Philosophy of Child Development and Learning**

Participants wrote about their beliefs on how children learn in their autobiographies; this became the basis of the philosophy of child development and learning theme. Within their beliefs, participants talked about *providing opportunities*, *assessment*, *learning styles*, and *teaching*, which became the four sub-themes.

**Providing opportunities.** Holly thought children need opportunities to express their thoughts: “I like to have the discussion and I have always been an advocate of having kids be able to talk and discuss things” (Interview 1).

The children in Mary and Claudia’s classroom were all three years old, but some children were getting ready to turn four and some had just turned three. There was a span of ability levels in the room and each level needed to be met. Mary explained:

It’s also really important for me to provide activities at different skill levels, because not every child is at the same developmental place. If it’s too easy, it’s not engaging. If it’s too hard, then it’s just frustrating. Activities have to be challenging enough to hold a child’s focus and make them work at it and learn, but not so difficult that they become discouraged and just give up.  
(Autobiography)

Claudia understands that not all the children wanted to sit on the rug during circle time: “They can be onlookers or parallel players but let them come when they feel comfortable. I feel like they should all be at circle” (Interview 3).

Mary has been trying to find a way to have children understand what their responsibilities during the school day entail: “It’s just figuring out a way to get them to understand that ‘yeah this is something I should be doing. This is something I need to be doing’ but at the same time having incentive enough for children that need the incentive” (Interview 3). She further explained:

The first thing I have been trying to do is the positive reinforcement of the children who are doing the right thing. Like this morning when we were trying to get ready to go outside, “Oh Erica, I love how you are sitting on the carpet with your hands in your lap and your bubble in your mouth. You can be my line leader.” (Interview 2)

Mary believes all children need to be given multiple chances to learn: “The most important thing for me to provide is opportunities, even small ones, for each child to learn in their own independent style” (Autobiography).

**Assessment.** Holly is an advocate for children having many opportunities throughout the day to play but play is not the only reason the children are in school: “We do assess them on their knowledge” (Interview 3).

**Learning styles.** Holly brings her preferred method of learning into her classroom:

I think that mostly due to my own appreciation for learning through hands on and authentic experiences, I am a huge advocate for hands-on learning for preschoolers. I try to make learning as authentic as possible, using real materials and allowing kids to get involved and get messy while they learn. (Autobiography)



Claudia knows all children learn differently so she takes their preferred way to learn into consideration when developing activities: “I think all children learn different. I think some kids are hands-on, some kids are more visual, some kids are more verbal; you just have to work on what’s best for each individual kid” (Autobiography).

**Teaching.** Holly knows it is important to teach preschoolers content but she also realizes content, at times, may take a backseat to what the children need at that moment: “I always thought that the social/emotional was more important than the content and I will gladly stop a circle time and teach them about how to be a friend” (Interview1). “I learned to be willing to let go of my plans based on the kids. There are times when you just need to stop and regroup with a little movement or a song and that is okay” (Autobiography).

Claudia wants all the children she teaches to become kind adults: “I believe just showing kids love, care, trust, honesty, respect, all values and morals, things like that are very important when you teach children” (Autobiography).

## **Reflection**

At the beginning of the study, it was important for me to understand what participants thought reflection was and if they used reflection in their practice. Two sub-themes emerged immediately: *definition* and *doing*. The third sub-theme, *professional goals*, emerged when I determined participants had to reflect on their practice in order to create a professional goal.

**Definition.** Holly imagines a teacher who includes reflection in his/her practice is “someone who is very flexible in their ways and willing to rethink it for the better.

Whether it's going badly or going well but could be better, always rethinking it"

(Interview 3).

When the study commenced, Samantha had a limited definition of reflection. She thought reflection was only looking at the negative in one's practice: "I guess going back over things that you've done and finding the flaws or the things you need to fix in that time period or that day or that hour or whatever it may be" (Interview1). When Samantha learned more about reflection, she broadened her definition: "Looking back at things you have either done well or not and then evaluating the things you have done. Understanding what you've done and if there is anything you need to work on" (Interview 2).

**Doing.** Holly had a college major with a strong reflective component, which developed her habit of ongoing reflection about her teaching. She explained,

It seems that every day and week I am constantly reflecting on how I can be a better teacher, especially on the bad days. I am one that goes home still thinking about how I can change this procedure, or deal with this behavior better next time, etc. I am always willing to take my teaching practices back to the drawing board and brainstorm how it can be done better. (Autobiography)

Holly also shared how having another professional to reflect with improved her teaching:

In times that things fell apart, I had an experienced teacher to help me reflect on how I could do better. I remember a small group lesson I planned that completely flopped with the morning group. Within five minutes after reflecting with her about how it went, I had changed my plan completely. I tried again with my afternoon kids and the lesson went great. I learned that the key is to be flexible. You have to see what is not working and rethink it until it does work. On top of that I learned to be willing to let go of my plans based on the kids. There are times when you just need to stop and regroup with a little bit of movement or a song, and that's okay. (Autobiography)

Samantha started to reflect about the behavior of the children she was caring for over the summer and tried to determine the cause of the misbehaving: "I think in my

practice, there are days where like you said the kids don't behave I need to look at that and say, 'why was that, did we miss snack? Did we not get enough outside time? What's my attitude where am I at, my stress level'" (Interview 2).

Mary explained how she used reflection at the beginning of the study:

I'm always asking myself "What worked?" or "What didn't work?" and I try to build on it or change what needs changed. I always try to think about the kids I have, their needs, and how to support them, too. If I'm able to adjust an activity to better support a child/children I really try to do that. But at the same time, I'm a realist and I know I can't individualize every activity for 20 different kids. (Autobiography)

**Professional goals.** Holly revealed when she first started her college program, "I thought I wanted to teach first grade" (Interview 1). As she worked in different preschools, she fell in love with the younger children and eventually felt she was more gifted teaching at the preschool level.

Samantha made the decision to return to college to earn her bachelor's degree in elementary education. In August, she was taking classes: "I'm really trying to focus on some online classes that I can take that's going to fulfill my requirements" (Interview 2).

### **Cross-Case Analysis**

In this section, I first answer the two sub-questions and then the overarching research question that were the foundation for this collective case study and kept me on track as I conducted my fieldwork and undertook the inductive analysis.

Q1a What changes do early childhood teachers show in their understanding of reflective capacity after participating in professional development focused on reflection?

When this case study commenced, the four participants were at very different places with regard to their knowledge of reflection: what it is, how it can be used, and how it could benefit them in their teaching practice. Utilizing conversations and field

notes, I thought Claudia had the least reflective capacity when we started. I thought she was so overwhelmed with the change in the age of the group of children she was teaching. Previously, when she taught the one-year-olds classroom, it was more about giving the children a safe and secure environment than it was about teaching the children their colors and numbers. Claudia was unsure how or even if she used reflection in her practice. Claudia described her use of reflection: “I try to, after I do things, look back and see if that was a good choice or a bad choice and see how I could make it better the next time” (Autobiography).

Claudia improved her use of reflection to improve her practice after the professional development. Claudia was often frustrated at work when the children would not listen to her directions. “It can be very easy to get frustrated with the kids and be like whatever and just give up” (Interview 1). She used her reflection skills to think about the problem from different perspectives, something she had not done earlier. Earlier she would have raised her voice to the point of yelling at the children. Now she looked inward to see if there is something she was doing or not doing that was exacerbating the problem.

Samantha strengthened her reflective capacity after the professional development more than did the other participants. In the beginning of the study, Samantha said she did not use reflection in her practice as an early childhood educator: “If I have [used it], it would be just on my own time and thinking about what I could do better the next day” (Autobiography).

At the end of the study, Samantha was reflecting not only within her practice but also within her personal life. She returned to school in the fall to complete a degree in

elementary education. She had to decide whether to take online or face-to-face classes. She looked at what the consequences would be to herself and each member of her family with each type of class and came to a decision that would have the least impact on her family. Within her practice, she began to question the use of “theme boxes” from the public library. She used the boxes daily during the summer but was not sure if they were the best materials to use with the younger children she would be teaching in the fall. Samantha changed her definition of reflection to mean not just looking at her practice but understanding the how and why of her practice and the decisions she made.

Holly exhibited the most reflective capacity when the study started. Her major in college required her to reflect on her experiences while she was working in numerous classrooms during her field experiences. Even though Holly knew how important it was to be a reflective teacher, she was not applying reflection to her practice. Holly began to realize how valuable reflection was and she determined to bring it back to the forefront of her practice: “I reflect on what’s working and why it’s working so I can apply it to other situations always reflecting.” As reported in her vignette, Holly was able to watch the videotape of her lesson and acknowledge that some children were not having their voices heard because other children were constantly talking. She used this knowledge to make changes in her practice.

Before the study began, Mary reflected about situations within her practice, usually when activities did not go as planned. With her transition from teaching two-year-olds to three-year-olds, Mary was unsure how to make the classroom run smoothly with a new teaching partner, new children, and new curriculum. By the end of the study, Mary used reflection as a way to make daily changes in her practice. She was more

deliberate as she looked at all the consequences of an action and decided what would be best for her and the children. Reflection no longer was just about big decisions but also small decisions. It became a way for Mary to be more thoughtful in looking at the impact of her decisions within the classroom.

Q1b What changes do early childhood teachers make in their practice when they implement reflection on their practice?

All four participants made changes in their teaching practice, which ultimately benefited the children they were teaching. Holly began to look at the needs of individual children within the larger group. Holly observed that a couple children in her class were not able to share during read aloud discussions because some of the other children were talking so much. After she instituted expectations for circle time, she noticed a big change in individual children's behavior.

Samantha knew what she was going to teach each day but she was never completely prepared for the day. As she stated in her vignette, she did not always have the books she was going to read in a spot convenient to where she sat on the floor with the children. She also did not always review the activity she did, which caused down time as she fumbled with the activity. After professional development on reflection, she began to look at the children's need for her to be organized and started to plan for the long term and the short term. Samantha now assigns a theme for each week in a month; on the weekends, she plans in detail for the upcoming week. She gathers the materials she will need for the week and piles them in the kitchen. Each morning, she puts all the materials she will need for that day in a wicker basket so she always has her supplies close by.

Claudia and Mary began to set expectations for classroom behaviors and then explicitly taught those behaviors. Transitions were difficult for the class to make. Transitions from playtime to circle time, circle time to snack time, and snack time to outside time were all chaotic. Claudia and Mary decided how a transition would work best for them and for the children. They started with one transition--playtime to circle time--and explained to the children what the transition should look like and they practiced what it should look like. When that transition was better, they taught the children expectations for the transition from circle time to snack time. They slowly worked through each of the transitions praising children who were doing them correctly and showing children who still did not understand the appropriate behavior.

Q1     What are the consequences of early childhood teachers' use of reflection when looking at their own teaching practice?

Teachers became more cognizant of their practice. They began, or for some continued, to examine their practice but now, they looked more carefully at the effects their decisions had on other people. Originally, if a teacher had a problem in her practice she wanted to change, she would make a change. If that change did not work, she would make another change. This would continue until the teacher gave up or the change was successful. There was no thinking the change through before implementing the change. Teachers now thought of all the consequences of a change before deciding what to implement. When a change was instituted, a teacher might discover it was not the best solution and needed to go back and look at the problem again. The teachers could use the three attitudes of Dewey (1933) or the three dimensions of Jay and Johnson (2002) to develop implementation plans that worked for themselves and the children. Holly changed the way she organized her circle time and Samantha changed the way she

organized her day, which resulted in her feeling more confident and having less behavioral issues with the children because they were constantly engaged in circle time activities. Claudia and Mary worked on ways to induce the children to pick up the room after playtime and Mary thought through the consequences if she were to change where she sat while reading aloud to the children.

Teachers spent more time looking at the big picture rather than just the issue they were having. Often times, the problem with practice teachers wanted to change had deeper roots. For example, Claudia and Mary wanted children to sit during circle time. A few of the children were climbing on a short bookshelf and jumping off. Once they moved the bookshelf, the children were more willing to sit.

### **A New Question Emerges**

While I conducted the data analysis, a fourth research question emerged: What is the connection between an early childhood teacher's training and background and their ability to increase their reflective capacity?

The two teachers with the least amount of education and training in early childhood, Claudia and Samantha initially both focused on what they were doing in their first videotaped lesson and did not look at what the children were doing. Claudia focused on her gum chewing and Samantha on the faces she made while teaching. After some probing questions, both teachers were able to look at the interactions they had with the children and pick a puzzle of practice. Claudia chose to work on ways to get the children to clean up after playtime, not something she observed on her videotape. Samantha noticed on her videotape that she stumbled in parts of circle time because she was not prepared with her materials. She chose to work on having her materials collected and



ready to use. Both Claudia and Samantha were able to increase their reflective capacity after undergoing professional development. Both teachers knew they needed help but Samantha was the one who was ready to make the changes in her practice while Claudia needed more time to feel comfortable with her own teaching.

Holly was the only teacher with a degree in early childhood and graduated from a university program that integrated reflection into all her practicum courses. She understood reflection and our professional development was a reminder for her to make her reflection more critical by looking at the consequences of her solutions to puzzles of practice. Holly's comfort with her ability to teach three- and four-year-olds allowed her to look at all aspects of her teaching practice to make changes that were beneficial for her and the children.

Mary had two bachelor's degrees, neither in early childhood, and 13 years' experience as an early childhood teacher. In the beginning of the study, it was more natural for her to reflect on her practice. Even though she struggled with how to organize and manage her new classroom, she was able to look at her practice and acknowledge what needed to be changed.

By the end of the study, all four teachers were able to reflect in ways that improved their practice. Where I saw differences was where the four teachers started in their ability to reflect. Holly and Mary, the two teachers with college degrees, were able to quickly see what changes needed to be made in their practice. Samantha and Claudia, the two teachers without college degrees, had trouble in the beginning to look at the children's needs and not just their own needs.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **DISCUSSION**

#### **Overview of the Study**

In this collective case study, I described and analyzed the perspectives of four early childhood teachers from three different employment settings. For the study, each of the four teachers composed an educational autobiography describing their experiences as a learner along with their philosophy of what young children need as support while learning. The teachers also described how they used reflection in their daily practice. The four teachers were videotaped while teaching a lesson during their circle time; then I interviewed each teacher after we watched her video tape together. After viewing her video tape, each teacher chose something in her practice she wanted to improve. In addition, teachers participated in three professional development sessions to learn more about reflection and how it might enhance their daily practice. From the information learned during the professional development sessions, teachers formulated a plan to bring about changes in their teaching. At least two weeks elapsed while changes were implemented. Then teachers were once again videotaped teaching a lesson during circle time. I met individually with each teacher; we viewed the video tape and I interviewed them with regard to their use of reflection and the changes made in their practice.

### **Summary of the Findings**

The study revealed that the teachers with postsecondary education in early childhood or in another major were already using limited reflection in their practice. These teachers were able to increase their use of reflection to look at their practice and implement positive changes for the children and themselves. Teachers with little postsecondary education thought reflection was only looking at the parts of their practice that were not working. Claudia, who had the least education, needed the most scaffolding to be able to reflect on her teaching. Claudia had trouble focusing on an issue in her practice that she wanted to change and then taking the steps necessary to make a change. She also had the most unrealistic view of how the children were behaving when she was teaching.

At the end of the study, all teachers were able to use reflection to look at a concern in their practice, develop a plan of action that included multiple potential solutions, examine the consequences of each solution, and then implement their plan of action in the classroom.

### **Reflection on Summary of Results**

When I started this study, I thought teachers with more higher education would embrace reflecting on their practice more than would teachers with little additional education. I found this to be true for Holly, who had a bachelor's degree with an emphasis in early childhood and had already used reflection in her practice but she had not done a lot of reflecting during the summer session. Making her more aware of reflection caused her to go back to reflecting more on her practice. Samantha was committed to become the best teacher she could for the children. She taught in

preparation for becoming an elementary school teacher. She was open to trying anything that would make her job more effortless. Samantha wanted her time with the children to be organized enough that one activity flowed to the next so the activities seamlessly melded together. She knew she needed help and embraced the idea of reflection.

Claudia had the least amount of education and the most difficulty with reflection. When Claudia watched the first video of her teaching, she was not able to accurately assess her performance. Mary used reflection in her practice in a limited way by looking at her own needs and not always taking the children's needs into consideration. After the professional development, she focused more on the consequences to children when she reflected on her practice.

The biggest unintended consequence of the study was Samantha underwent a transformation of her meaning perspective. Through the critical reflection of her practice, Samantha was able to change the way she saw herself as a teacher, which increased the confidence she had about her practice. Samantha went through the 10 phases of Mezirow's (1991) process of personal transformation. She felt guilt that she was not meeting the needs of the children in her care during circle time. She created a plan of action that she then implemented and observed positive results in the children's behavior and learning. This in turn gave Samantha self-assurance about herself as a teacher, which gave her the confidence to enroll in an elementary education program. When Samantha started having all the materials for the day organized, the day went much smoother; that helped her realize she could do a good job, which boosted her confidence. I think she was able to make such a shift in her confidence because she knew she needed

help. She took in everything I told her about reflection and she embraced reflection as a way to improve her practice and herself.

### **Reflection on Early Childhood Teachers' Work Settings**

The results and findings of the collective case study presented early childhood teachers in three different settings. I knew the setting each teacher worked in would make a difference in their teaching. However, what surprised me was the lack of oversight of the teachers. There might have been an expectation that activities would be developmentally appropriate for the children but no one was making sure they were.

Holly worked in a private summer school early childhood program where she was free to create her own schedule for the day with no apparent oversight from a principal or other teacher leader. Her philosophy on early childhood learning was that play was the most important thing children should do. The majority of the seven hours children were with Holly was spent in play activities. The first two hours and 45 minutes of the day consisted of indoor and then outdoor play. The two hours in the afternoon were spent in structured and unstructured playtime outside. Even though the temperatures were often in the 90s, Holly still had the children outside involved in play. Holly's academic teaching consisted of her circle story time, which was tied into the current theme, and art time where the children were encouraged to write about their art project. Holly created the early childhood classroom that fit her philosophy to teach young children.

Samantha also had the ability to create the program of her dreams as long as she followed the regulations established by the state-licensing agency. The regulations included one musical activity each week and one provider-initiated language activity each day (Colorado Department of Human Services, 2012). Samantha included singing

and dancing in her circle time activities each day that were related to the week's theme. The songs usually had hand motions that went along with the singing. Each day she had the children looking at flash cards and telling Samantha what the shape, or color, or object was on the flash card.

Claudia and Mary were required to follow The Child Center's official curriculum. Children were assigned to age-level rooms that were each named to reflect the theme of the center. Rooms were dynamic as children moved to the next age-level room after their birthday. Children tended to attend the center for their entire preschool years; thus, when they moved up to the next room, they already knew many of the children in their new classroom. The Child Center curriculum was listed by month and weekly themes. Teachers could teach the theme however they chose. Claudia and Mary were required to teach colors, shapes, letters, numbers, months of the year, days of the week, and seasons of the year during their circle time each day. They had time scheduled each day where they had the children doing worksheets to work on writing the letters of the alphabet. When an art project involved fine motor skills that were not yet developed in the children, e.g., cutting with scissors, the teachers would do the cutting for the children in order to make the project turn out perfectly.

Before starting the investigation, I thought child care centers were run like a school where teachers had a common time together to talk and plan and the children were out of the room. What I discovered was teachers never had a common time to plan or talk about the day. Each teacher had two 15 minute breaks and a 30 minute lunch when another adult would take his/her place in the room. Other than the hour they were away from the classroom, teachers were with their class.

### **Reflection Training of Early Childhood Teachers**

The four teachers in the study came from diverse educational backgrounds. Holly had a bachelor's degree in human development and family studies with an emphasis in early childhood education and was a licensed preK-3 teacher. Samantha had three years of college but limited early childhood education. Each year since starting her daycare business, Samantha had taken 15 credit hours of classes that had to do with child development or child safety as required by the state to maintain her licensed daycare status.

Claudia had started working on her associate's degree in early childhood education at the local community college. However, because of her struggles with reading and writing, she had trouble completing one class each semester. She was half way through the program but had not taken a class during the last two semesters. In the classroom, she seemed overwhelmed by her lack of experience teaching three-year-old children. Claudia's previous experience had been teaching one-year-olds who did not require the early academics the three-year-olds needed. She was not able to determine if an activity was developmentally appropriate for the children and she struggled to maintain control of the children inside and outside the classroom. Claudia did not know how to discipline the children and was inconsistent in her expectations of how the children should behave. There were usually 20 children in the room with two adults, which made it difficult to see what all the children were doing. Three boys and one girl were constantly hitting and pushing other children with no real consequence. When Claudia or Mary heard a child yell out because he/she had been hit, one of the teachers would comfort the hurt child and instruct the hurt child to say, "No thank you. I don't

like that” to the child who did the hitting. While this response helped the hurt child feel better, it did nothing to stop the hitting behavior. No one was helping Mary and Claudia with their transition to teaching the three-year-old children.

### **Personal Reflection**

My 21 years of elementary teaching experience did not prepare me for the exuberance of three- and four-year-olds. There was so much energy in each of the classrooms, I could not help but get overwhelmed. I wondered how many of the children were also overwhelmed by the other children in the room.

I looked forward to my visits to Holly’s classroom; there was a serene peacefulness even though there was lots of chatter in the classroom. Each of my visits to Holly’s classroom started outside where the children used their imagination as they played. The weather was hot but as I sat under the shade of the trees, talked to Holly, and watched her interact with her students, I thought how lucky those children were to have this preschool experience. The sandbox became a lake and the stick in Luke’s hand was a paddle. The children created their own fairyland on the playground and were joyous in their play.

I also enjoyed my visits to Samantha’s daycare. I knew the 2 seven-year-old boys from being book buddies with their first grade classroom. The children were always excited when I visited and wanted to dance and play with me. Infusing the arts into her curriculum was important to Samantha. She had music every day for the children to dance to and songs to be sung during circle time. There was exuberance when the children got worked up and took the dancing or another activity too far. Samantha always stayed calm when she interacted with the children in her care and the children



responded to her by immediately following her directions. While Samantha did not always have control of the children, she was able to quickly regain control. The age range of children Samantha had--from under one year to seven years--was difficult to keep all children engaged all the time. Samantha worked hard to create a nurturing environment for all the children.

The visits to Claudia and Mary's classroom made me anxious. The noise and chaos inside the classroom made it impossible for me to enjoy the visit. I did enjoy the time I spent with the children playing outside. Outside they were not as aggressive with each other and appeared to be calmer than when they were inside. With 20 children in one room, two adults were not enough to ensure the safety of all the children. Claudia shared with me that one girl was afraid to come to school because she was concerned for her safety.

Conducting this study definitely took me out of my comfort zone working with children. It opened my eyes to the challenges faced by early childhood teachers and the children they teach.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The findings from this collective case study provided insights into early childhood teachers' daily practice and their use of reflection in their teaching. Many education programs in early childhood teach prospective teachers to use reflection in their practice (Copeland et al., 1993; Jay & Johnson, 2002; Korthagen, 1992). Early childhood teachers who have not been formally trained in early childhood education at the college level have not had the exposure to reflection and how it can help their practice. Future researchers should investigate whether professional development centered around reflection

conducted in a collaborative environment with early childhood teachers is more successful than professional development conducted with individuals. Also a six-month follow-up with teachers who have been taught how to incorporate reflection into their practice would be a way to gauge whether teachers maintain their reflective practice.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **SYLLABUS OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CLASS**

## Syllabus of Professional Development Sessions

### Session I – Informal discussion about reflection

- Set norms to establish a respectful environment
- Explain requirements for the professional development go over timeline
- Create common definitions for reflection and reflective practice
- Discuss importance of reflection within participant's teaching practice
- Have participant read and sign consent form to participate in research study
- Hand out educational autobiography protocol, go over with participant

### Session II – Looking at *puzzles of practice* from multiple perspectives

- Choose a recent event from the classroom
- Tell the story of the event from participant's perspective
- Tell the story of the event from a child's perspective
- Tell the story of the event from another adult's perspective

### Session III – Sequential format to work through a *puzzle of practice*

- Identify a *puzzle of practice* using a concrete event
- Make a list of possible solutions
- Make a list of people who could be impacted by solution
- Make a list of possible consequences for each person who could be impacted by each solution
- Choose solution to implement in classroom
- Create timeline for implementation

## **APPENDIX B**

### **INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL**

UNIVERSITY of  
NORTHERN COLORADO



*Institutional Review Board*

July 17, 2012

TO: Spencer Weiler  
ELPS

FROM: Maria Lahman, Co-Chair  
UNC Institutional Review Board

RE: Expedited Review of *A Case Study of Early Childhood Teachers' Use of Reflection in Their Teaching Practice*, submitted by Karen Magee Koski (Research Advisor: Kathryn Cochran)

First Consultant: The above proposal is being submitted to you for an expedited review. Please review the proposal in light of the Committee's charge and direct requests for changes directly to the researcher or researcher's advisor. If you have any unresolved concerns, please contact Maria Lahman, Applied Statistics and Research Methods, Campus Box 124, (x1603). When you are ready to recommend approval, sign this form and return to me.

I recommend approval as is.

Spencer Weiler 7-18-12  
Signature of First Consultant Date

w/accompanying communications/attachments -

The above referenced prospectus has been reviewed for compliance with HHS guidelines for ethical principles in human subjects research. The decision of the Institutional Review Board is that the project is approved as proposed for a period of one year: 7-20-12 to 7-20-13

M-Lahman 7-20-12  
Maria Lahman, Co-Chair Date

Comments:

## **APPENDIX C**

### **OUTLINE FOR WRITING EDUCATIONAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY**

### **Outline for Writing Educational Autobiography**

Think back on your educational experiences as a learner and as a teacher write about the experiences that stand out to you no matter the reason they stand out. The educational autobiography that you are going to write should be composed of three parts.

#### **PART I - You as a learner** (experiences that you remember)

- ❑ Include as many details about the experience as you can remember,
- ❑ How you felt about the experience,
- ❑ Any other thoughts you have about the experience.

#### **PART II - Your preparation to become an early childhood teacher and your teaching experiences so far in your career.**

- ❑ Include any experiences that stand out to you
- ❑ Why they stand out
- ❑ How they have impacted your teaching

#### **PART III – You as an early childhood educator**

- ❑ How you currently use reflection in your practice
- ❑ Beliefs on how children learn
- ❑ What is important for you to provide to support their development.
- ❑ Include beliefs that you have but may not be putting into practice at this time.

## **APPENDIX D**

### **INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AFTER AUTOBIOGRAPHY**

### Interview Questions after Autobiography

1. What did you learn about yourself while writing your educational autobiography?
  - ☐ Was there anything that stood out for you?
  - ☐ As you were writing your autobiography what kind of feelings did you have?
2. As a learner what was your biggest challenge?
  - ☐ How did you overcome that challenge?
3. When you were learning to become an early childhood teacher what was your biggest challenge?
  - ☐ How did you overcome that challenge?
4. What has been your greatest success since becoming an early childhood teacher?
5. Did you discover any gaps in what you believe about how young children learn and how you are currently teaching them?
  - ☐ Why do you think there are gaps?
  - ☐ What can you do to change those gaps?
6. How do you currently use reflection in your practice?



## **APPENDIX E**

### **PROTOCOL FOR DURING AND AFTER VIEWING PARTICIPANTS' FIRST TEACHING VIDEOTAPE**

Protocol for During and After Viewing Participants'  
First Teaching Videotape

1. What stood out for you after watching your videotape?
  - ☐ Why did that stand out?
2. What are you most proud of after watching the videotape?
  - ☐ What makes you most proud of that?
3. What changes do you want to make in your teaching practice?
  - ☐ What needs to happen in order for you to make those changes?
  - ☐ What will your first step be in making a change?
  - ☐ When will you start working on that first step?
  - ☐ How long did you think it will take to make the change?

## **APPENDIX F**

### **PROTOCOL FOR DURING AND AFTER VIEWING PARTICIPANTS' SECOND TEACHING VIDEOTAPE AND END OF STUDY INTERVIEW**

Protocol for During and After Viewing Participants'  
Second Teaching Videotape and  
End of Study Interview

1. What surprised you the most after watching your videotape?
  - ☐ Why did that surprise you?
2. What are you most proud of after watching the videotape?
  - ☐ What makes you most proud of that?
3. What changes have you seen in your teaching since the beginning of the study?
  - ☐ What made you make those changes?
4. How are you using reflection to improve your teaching?
  - ☐ On a daily basis how often do you reflect on your teaching?
  - ☐ Are there other ways you can incorporate reflection in your daily teaching practice?