Stories from Kindergarten: A Study of Teachers of Young Children in Public School Kindergarten Classrooms under the Standards Based Accountability Design

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by

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Abstract

Using case study design with a narrative stance, this dissertation attempts to share insight into the work and lives of kindergarten teachers and to share the stories that they tell about their work and daily lives. Data were collected from November 2009 to March 2010. Multiple data sources were employed, including formal and informal interviews, field observations, and document analysis in order to gain an in-depth portrayal of the lives of kindergarten teachers as they worked in the same contexts and negotiated the pressures to lean toward a more academic achievement model of education.

With the focus on the education in kindergarten classrooms and the teachers who work with young children, several research questions guided the study: (1) What are the stories that are told by kindergarten teachers, working in an era when accountability and academic achievement are the focus?; (2) How do teachers deliver developmentally appropriate instruction and make learning meaningful and engaging in kindergarten classrooms today?; and (3) How do teachers consider play in the educational processes of kindergarten children under the standards based design?

The stories of the participants were varied and comprehensive in personal ways as each one’s life history contributed to the teacher that they had become. It appeared that family background, life events, teaching experiences, personality traits, as well as pre-service and in-service education contributed to the development of these teachers. In general, each teacher shared different stories of life events and personal goals that brought them to the point in their careers at which this study occurred.

A significant story was told by the teachers in this current study. The burden of accountability weighed heavily on their work every day and occupied much of their time with children. This focus of assessment did not allow teachers to work with young
children in ways that teachers felt more appropriate and meaningful. They each discussed the significant amount of time allotted to testing and the preparation for that aspect of their day.

Each teacher reflected on the trust and freedom that their principal showed them as professionals. He told them collectively that they were to teach the way they wanted to teach, but they just needed to “get the job done.” The teachers showed great respect for their building leader and felt that they had autonomy in their work; however, they were tied to scripted curriculum and the heavy weight of assessments. This present study showed that although feeling autonomous, teachers were controlled in their practice through mandates of curriculum and accountability.

In these three cases, instruction was found to be mainly teacher centered. There was limited time for social interaction. Other than answering questions in group settings and infrequent play time, children were focused on the teacher and the activities that were planned. During observations, Vygotsky’s ideas of scaffolding and social construction were absent. Instead, children were focused on academic instruction based in teacher directed practices. This was due in part to the looming assessment component that weighed on the teachers schedule and planning processes.

The stories revealed the complexity that is involved in teaching young children in kindergarten under an academic model with the accountability factor. Teaching in these kindergarten classrooms was a multifaceted process. Through observational data, it was evident that as teachers worked with young children in the daily routine of kindergarten, there was a complexity to the interactions, practices, and events that was not always obvious to those outside the educational environment. Teachers developed and
maintained relationships with young children that were built in trust and nurtured through mutual respect. The teachers successfully managed data collection and reporting with current technology. Planning for instruction was a complex process. Teachers utilized the essential curriculum and standards developed by the county to plan for instruction in their classrooms. They also managed to incorporate the necessary assessment tools within that instructional plan and adjust the schedule according to needs of the children.

Teachers were attentive to the needs of children. They were aware of joys and tears of some children as they attended to the worries and concerns of others.

Assessment was a major theme of the teacher’s stories. In today’s climate of accountability and academic achievement, assessment dominated everyone’s attention in the school setting. These teachers commented regularly on the pressures they felt to conduct, complete, record and send data from standardized assessments. Teachers accommodated to the testing ethos without surrendering their teaching ideals and love of their practice; however, the teachers faced the assessment cage in which they worked and highly prioritized that aspect of their work. While they shared their frustrations with the process of accountability, they did not seem to manifest interest in or show the ability to push back or effect change in the school, district, state, and national educational policies responsible for the creation of such an assessment burden.

As evidenced through the stories, the influence of teacher preparation programs has lessened during the course of these teacher’s careers as they developed a working model of teaching based on experience and administrative pressures with less consideration of child developmental theories and applications. Observations of classroom practices and interviews with the teachers revealed a disconnect in their
practices and theoretical base. During interviews, the teachers did not state any association of their practices and philosophy with DAP or child developmental theories. When I attempted to probe further into the grounding of their philosophy, each teacher replied with a working theory of teaching in which the use of developmentally appropriate practices has largely been replaced by skill based academic models of instruction that are highly didactic and teacher directed with play materials present in their classrooms but utilized on a limited basis if at all.
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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to all kindergarten teachers. You put your hearts, minds, smiles and tears into your work every minute of every day and young children are better for what you do. Through all of the changes in programs, curriculum, policies, and politics, over which you have little control, you continue to try to do what is best for children and make learning meaningful. Teaching is not what you do. It is who you are. Teaching is personal and for your commitment to the field, I am grateful.
Chapter 1
Introduction

My Teaching Life: What Brings Me to This Study

As a young child, I always knew what I wanted to be when I became an adult. My play revolved around school and I wanted to be the teacher. There was never a question in my mind as to what my career path would be. Many of my friends struggled as they began their college careers, trying to decide upon a major. I did not have that issue as I entered my undergraduate program. I knew I wanted to teach and I knew I wanted to work with young children. I wanted to be a kindergarten teacher and to this day, that level of public school teaching holds a great priority in the work that I do in the field of education.

When I entered my undergraduate program at James Madison University (JMU), I was excited to be able to specialize in the early childhood field. In Virginia, I was able to earn a certificate in teaching young children nursery aged through fourth grade. The program at JMU was exceptional. The professors guided and molded my philosophy in developmentally appropriate practices and cognitive development grounded in the work of various historical developmental theorists. We studied the uses and values of play with young children and we worked in many programs and classrooms prior to the student teaching experience. During student teaching, I became a true teacher. It was one of the most rewarding times of my life. I knew I had made the right choice and felt a true sense of personal and professional identity formation. The program that I completed
as an undergraduate gave me the foundation of early childhood that has enabled me to build a strong career and belief system for the education of young children.

I began my teaching career in a child care program in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. I was the head teacher working with twenty-five pre-K children, ages four and five. I worked to run a developmentally appropriate program and to provide a quality learning environment for so many children. I received minimum wage but put maximum effort into every day – achieving maximum reward in my professional fulfillment. The time I spent at the child care facility gave me the understanding of the issues facing families and child care workers. These experiences broadened my prospective about early childhood and the importance of quality child care and qualified teachers.

I was thrilled when I was offered a position as a classroom teacher in the East Pennsboro Area School District. I began my public school teaching career as a second grade teacher. Although I preferred younger children, I soon learned how important the ideas and beliefs of early childhood education are for children through the primary years. I began to see the need to coordinate the education of young children, the ideas of the early childhood education (ECE) community, with the beliefs of elementary (ELEM) principles. I moved to kindergarten after my second year and taught in that program for several years before transferring to first grade. After teaching first grade for many years, I was asked by a progressive principal to loop with my children from first to second grade. Through this time, I truly discovered the value of families in the education of young children. The relationships that were formed with and between families have continued to this day.
During this looping time, I began to organize research on the idea of full day kindergarten and share it with the district wide strategic planning committee. I wrote a research based proposal and presented it to the school board. After years of work, presentations, questions, meetings, and commitment to the process, the school board adopted full day kindergarten for all children in the district. I was asked to teach the pilot program the first year of implementation and knew that this was one of the highlights of my career. The bridge of early learning and elementary goes through kindergarten and the work during this year of schooling holds great significance for young children.

The World of Kindergarten

Teaching kindergarten is a complex process. Teachers of young children are faced with a multitude of decisions as they work in the early childhood setting. They must decide as to the level they will stress basic skills, how to group children, how to balance child-centered and teacher directed activities, what approach to guidance and management they should utilize, and countless other issues upon which momentary judgments have to be determined. Often, the early childhood teacher must make these decisions in a noisy room, full of busy children with immediate and pertinent needs. These same teachers are also involved in making and implementing policy decisions regarding curriculum choices, retention, evaluations and assessments – all areas that may have long term effect on the schooling of a child (Stipek & Byler, 1997).

This complex process of teaching young children is further complicated through public school requirements. Kindergarten is viewed as a fully integrated part of the K-12 system in the United States today. In reality, this is not always the case. Kindergarten
shares the same components of infrastructure – teacher licensing, including teacher certification and payment compensation levels. It also shares policies and practices with child care and early childhood educational philosophies. Kindergarten policies vary widely from state to state, including whether it is mandatory or compulsory, the starting age of children, the methods of funding and the length of the school day. Although the opportunities and advantages of early childhood education have been noted, the alignment of Kindergarten into the public school structure of K-12 has not been fully realized.

Kindergarten is a word, a memory that embraces special meaning for many people. For those who were able to attend a kindergarten program at the onset of their school career, many remember it as a happy place where a positive relationship between home and school began the path of formal education in the school system. At its inception over a century ago, kindergarten was implemented with a strong commitment to the creation of a learning environment that supports young children’s development in all domains; cognitive, physical, social, and emotional (Graue, 2001; Seefeldt & Wasik, 2002). Teachers work to connect learning to all developmental areas, informed through child developmental theories with the knowledge that all domains are interrelated and dependent upon the others.

Recently, national policy and legislation have challenged the importance of kindergarten’s child-centered philosophies. In the public school system of the United States, teachers are working under increased pressures of accountability and academic progress. The inception of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 brought standards based education and testing to a heightened level across the country. Schools
emphasize the mastery of academic skills, the achievement of preset outcomes, and the need for accountability. Teachers work to improve test scores and account for their teaching through the government’s method of assessment.

Kindergarteners are now under great pressure to meet inappropriate expectations, including academic standards that until recently were reserved for first grade. Many teachers use highly prescriptive curricula and follow scripts from which they may not deviate. Originally confined to the upper grades of elementary schools, the increasing curricular and instructional pressures associated with the NCLB policies have filtered down and are affecting the work of kindergarten teachers and more importantly the learning of young children. These practices, which are not well grounded in research, violate long-established principles of child development and good teaching. Child development experts are concerned about the risks of extending testing with highly structured and pressured upper level academic learning into programs for young children. Educators, particularly kindergarten teachers, are concerned that too many children enter first grade unfairly disadvantaged because their language, cognitive, emotional, and social skills are not yet adequately developed to ensure school success.

Purpose of Study

Much of the recent research on early learning programs highlights the importance of program quality on the positive impact on young children. This quality includes the curriculum, the environment, as well as many other factors that should be coordinated to present the finest educational experience to young children. One of the most important factors in program quality is the teacher. A growing body of research in early childhood
education (Barnett, Hustedt, Robin, & Schulman, 2005; Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2001) shows that the qualifications of the teacher have a great impact on the learning and development of the children in these programs. Many early childhood professionals who work with young learners are not required to hold any degree or certification specialization. In kindergarten programs that are part of a public elementary system, teachers are required to hold a bachelor’s degree and teaching certification; however, there is a mismatch of expectations for kindergarten teachers. Although there is a great amount of attention on the values of quality early learning experiences for children and the specialization of this field, many states do not require that kindergarten teachers hold certification or a degree in early childhood education specifically.

The central problem addressed in this study is that many kindergarten teachers, working in the current model of public education, struggle to teach young children in appropriate and meaningful ways. Reasons for this problem may be varied, including a teacher’s lack of knowledge in early childhood educational practices, a total academic based model of teaching, pressures from a system where accountability is greatly derived from standardized test scores, inappropriate curriculum models, or the teacher’s inability to implement appropriate pedagogical content knowledge presented in teacher preparation courses (Barton & Levstick, 2004).

Statement of the Problem

The kindergarten classrooms that many adults remember – the place where learning happened in an enjoyable manner with play and discovery, creative arts, music and movement activities, and time for social skill building – have largely disappeared
across the United States. Research tells us that more children are in full day kindergarten programs. Research also shows that in these all-day schedules, teachers spend four to six times more in literacy and math instruction and taking or preparing for tests with five year olds as in free play or “choice time” activities (Miller & Almon, 2009). Kindergarten teachers, as well as the children in the programs, are now under great pressure to meet inappropriate expectations, including academic standards that were at one time reserved for first grade students. High stakes testing and test preparation in public school kindergartens have overtaken the child centered researched based philosophy that was once early childhood. This testing of children at such an early age may have some uses. Screening instruments have been utilized to gain a better understanding of a child’s developmental level; however testing children under age eight is a highly unreliable method for assessing individual children.

As teachers are increasingly asked to implement highly didactic instructional practices, sometimes with scripted material and lessons, best practices and developmentally appropriate teaching and learning have been ignored and even ridiculed in some educational quarters. Doubt and skepticism about the value of these philosophies as well as the importance play in the development of children has been compounded by the commercial based products to make babies smart and teach them to read. As this phenomenon has grown, kindergarten education has become heavily focused on the direct teaching of academic skills and testing of young children. With this push down of expectations, preschool is also under pressure to increase their demands on young children. This research explored several kindergarten classrooms of today and described
the teaching practices, the environment, and the pedagogy that is present as teachers work with young children.

The Research Study and Questions

Using case study design with a narrative stance, I attempted to gain insight into the work and lives of kindergarten teachers. I collected data from November 2009 to March 2010. Multiple data sources were employed, including formal and informal interviews, field observations, and document analysis in order to gain an in-depth portrayal of the lives of kindergarten teachers as they worked in the same contexts, how they negotiated the pressures to lean toward a more academic achievement model of education, and how they delivered instruction to young children. Data analysis consisted of multiple case studies with a narrative design. With my interest on the education in kindergarten classrooms and the teachers who work with young children, several research questions guided my study:

1. What are the stories that are told by kindergarten teachers, working in an era when accountability and academic achievement are the focus?
2. How do teachers deliver developmentally appropriate instruction and make learning meaningful and engaging in kindergarten classrooms today?
3. How do teachers consider play in the educational processes of kindergarten children under the standards based design?
Significance of Study

There are several areas of significance of this study to the field of early childhood and elementary education and the K-12 educational system. First, few studies exist that examine kindergarten teacher’s stories and teaching as they work in the NCLB model of the education of young children. One study examined the DAP verses standards debate as it related to kindergarten classrooms (Goldstein, 2007). This study goes further into the teacher’s stories to comprehensively depict how they worked within the pressures of the accountability model and the understanding of appropriate educational practices for young children.

Another significant aspect of this study is as it describes or “tells” the stories of kindergarten teachers as they worked with young children in the first year of the public school structure. The study shares the teacher’s lives, their backgrounds, the high points and low points of their careers, and in doing so, provides a comprehensive picture of the complexities of teaching children in a public school kindergarten setting. It offers other teacher thoughts that were shared as their own words are used to convey the details and complexities involved in their lives and in their teaching stories.

This research study also examines and explores the focus on teaching literacy and other academic skills in kindergarten and how that movement has pushed educators to remove play from the daily schedule of young children. It describes how early childhood educators view play in the educational processes of young children and how they negotiate children’s needs for play with the push for more academic models of instruction.
This study contributes to the growing need for research that creates a picture of how children spend their time in some public kindergarten today, what materials are used in their daily routine, and the beliefs and attitudes of those who are in charge of nurturing their growth and development. It examines the thoughts of teachers on the accountability, high stakes testing and test preparation that is proliferating kindergarten classrooms around the nation. During the course of this study, I examined and shared the thoughts and reflections of the teachers on the time they spend on prescribed curriculum, scripted lessons and testing and their use of observational and curriculum embedded performance assessments. The teachers also shared their viewpoints on the use and value of play and how it does, or does not, work into their schedules.

Finally, this study offers some information on the increasing use of assessments with young children and the focus given each day to that component. It shares the importance teachers must place on preparing children for such tests and the time allotted to conducting assessment requirements instead of teaching children in meaningful and appropriate ways.

In the writing of the research, I included my own thoughts, memories, and experiences as part of the data collection. As stated in this introduction, my own background and life story brought me to this study. My experiences as a kindergarten teacher were bound to enter the research setting. One goal of this project was to evoke an empathic understanding of the experience of teaching and to move beyond the academic analysis to tell a story of everyday life. In order to add a level of emotional understanding that was not possible with traditional research methods, I used parts of autoethnography and reflexive ethnography methods of writing qualitative research, which allowed for the
incorporation of my personal experience into the telling of the teachers’ stories. I would not have been exploring this topic without my personal experience of teaching. The decision of how much of my personal experience to reveal and share became a struggle during the course of the project but also became a strength in that it was essential to understand the location of myself. Through personal accounting, I become more aware of how my own positions were imposed at each stage of the research process, from the development of the idea and research questions, to the selection of participants, and the representation through the written document. Through this thoughtful reflection and transparency, I was able to create a product that contains less distorted accounts of the social world and tells a comprehensive story of teaching kindergarten. This is a highly significant part of this research study.

Researcher Ideologies

It is important to be transparent in my teaching ideologies as I present the current study in kindergarten classrooms. My philosophy of effective teaching of young children is grounded in the uses and values of developmentally appropriate practices and play pedagogy. These theories were bound to influence my interpretation of the teaching in these kindergarten classrooms and appear within the data collection and reflections; therefore, I must be clear to the reader that these beliefs and principles may appear throughout the research study.
Chapter 2
Review of the Literature

The purpose of this research study is to share the stories of kindergarten teachers, their beliefs, their backgrounds, their philosophies, their experiences, and their work, and in sharing those stories, describe how those professionals provide quality instruction as they attempt to balance developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) with state mandates towards increased academic pressure and standardized testing. Specifically, the questions to be discussed are: 1) what are the stories that are told by kindergarten teachers working in an era when accountability and academic achievement are the focus; 2) how do kindergarten teachers deliver developmentally appropriate instruction and make learning meaningful; and 3) how do kindergarten teachers consider play under the standards based design?

In this chapter, I will review the relevant literature as it relates to this study. In particular, I will focus on the following areas: 1) Conceptual Framework; 2) Kindergarten Teaching in Classrooms Today; 3) Teachers’ Stories; 4) The Researcher’s Story; 5) Emotions in Teaching; 6) Play in Educational Processes of Children; 7) Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP); 8) Assessment and Accountability; and 9) Background Literature Concerning Methodology.

Conceptual Framework

First, it is important to position the context of this study within a theoretical or conceptual framework. A conceptual framework involves the presentation of a specific theory and conceptual work about the theory. The framework is the structure or the
frame of the study. This construction is derived from a disciplinary orientation and the related literature to the topic under investigation. For the purposes of positioning this study, I have identified the framework of Socio-Cultural Theory from the Vygotskian perspective and the Ecological Theory from Bronfenbrenner.

The major tenets of these theories are rooted in the work of Lev Vygotsky and are increasingly employed in research of learning, development and cognition. This view has profound implications for teaching, schooling, and education. One key premise of the socio-cultural theory is that higher order functions develop out of social interactions. Vygotsky (1978) argued that we must not try to understand development in the vacuum of the individual, but examine the social world and life in which that individual has developed. Learning, therefore, can be viewed as embedded within social events and occurring as individuals interact with people, objects, and environments during the course of their life.

Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Theory holds that development reflects the influence of several environmental systems with the child or individual as the core nucleus of the system. This theory identifies five environmental systems: 1) Microsystem; family, peers, school; 2) Mesosystem; family experiences, peer experiences, school experiences; 3) Exosystem; friend of family, work, neighbors, media; 4) Macrosystem, culture, beliefs, behaviors; 5) Chronosystem; environmental events and transitions over life course, sociohistorical circumstances. Bronfenbrenner’s contributions include a systematic examination of macro and micro dimensions of environmental systems (Bronfenbrenner, 2000).
When thinking of the ecological framework, it is also important to look at social constructivism and the theory of action, including the multiple levels of analysis that can be connected to events. The fundamental tenet of a constructivist epistemology is that human subjects construct their knowledge by interacting with other human beings or objects in the environment. In this view, knowledge is not found in the subject alone, but rather from the interactions between and among them. Piaget (1952) and Vygotsky (1960) proposed their versions of a constructivist epistemology through theories of psychology. They shared the general assumption that knowledge arrives from interaction between the subject and the object; however they differ in how they view the nature of the interaction and the levels of involvement within such interactions.

Wertsch and Lee (1984) provide an explicit account of the various analytic levels involved in a theory of action in a cultural historical theoretical framework. These sociological levels are both complementary and supplementary to the ecological systems presented by Bronfenbrenner. Wertsch and Lee begin with the individual level, as in psychology this is the beginning of analysis involved in action-theoretic approaches. In this research study, the teacher is seen as the individual.

The second level is described as the microsociological level. In this domain, the investigator can not specify what someone is doing solely in terms of individual action, but rather within the unique dynamics of social interaction. Certain types of interactive situations depend on the joint actions of the participants so that a mutually attuned definition of the situation must be assumed if any person is to achieve his or her goal. Such participation precedes any conscious representation of the intentions of others and provides the grounding of the construction of the representations (Wertsch, 1984). The
interpersonal interactions and relationships of the teachers, the principal, the children, and the families provide the microsociological level in this study. This level is also influenced by the schedules, routines, and activity setting of the classrooms. In the microsociological level, there is a tendency to equate the social and the intersubjective.

Many studies have stopped with dyadic dynamics in the microsociological levels of analysis. The principles which direct the development of a constructivist epistemology may have to recognize the interactive circumstances, objects, and agents as their physicalistic and intersubjective components are and may influence the participants by determining their range of contextual variation and interconnection (Wertch, 1984). The activity system, the institutional beliefs, the culture of the community, the societal influences, and the political climate provide the components in which the teachers interact at the macrosociological level, the third level in Wertsch and Lee’s (1984) cultural historical perspective.

Several major themes of the socio-cultural and cultural historical theory can be applied to the research on teachers in kindergarten classrooms under the standards based accountability model: 1) social interaction plays a major part in development of cognition; 2) knowledge is constructed by learners; and 3) learning is situated in the activity, context, and culture and history in which it occurs. Within the social constructivist domain, the individual teachers are the acting agents as their stories are constructed through their unique experiences and involvements. The interactions between the teachers in the group provide the connection to and fall under the socio-cultural domain, while the community history, the county pressures, and the political climate create the link to the cultural historical theory.
Social constructivists believe that reality is constructed through human activity. Members of a society together invent the properties of the world (Kukla, 2000). For the social constructivist, reality cannot be discovered: it does not exist prior to its social invention. To social constructivists, knowledge is also a human product, and is socially and culturally constructed (Beck & Kosnik, 2006; Gredler, 1997; Prawat & Floden, 1994). Individuals create meaning through their interactions with each other and with the environment in which they live. Social constructivists view learning as a social process. It does not take place only within an individual, nor is it a passive development of behaviors that are shaped by external forces. Meaningful learning occurs when individuals are engaged in social activities (Rogoff, 2003).

Teaching Kindergarten in the United States

More than a century ago, kindergarten was established in the United States and was shaped by a belief in the creation of learning environments that support young children’s development in all areas: cognitive, social, emotional, and physical domains (Graue, 2001). Over the past decade, expectations for kindergarten children have changed dramatically (Hatch, 2005). The curriculum, practices, standards, and accountability measures have experienced a radical change as an academic achievement model has become the focus in the teaching of five year olds and has moved the teaching of young children away from the developmentally appropriate methods grounded in early childhood and brain based research. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) requires that states implement accountability systems based in challenging standards to annually test mastery in the areas of reading and math for all public school children in
grades 3-8 (No Child, 2001). Initially, primary grade students were not part of the legislation of NCLB; however, with the increasing pressure for eight year old students to perform on standardized tests as early as third grade, primary classrooms began to feel the pushdown of curriculum to help lay the foundational skills necessary to achieve acceptable scores (Hatch, 2002). In many schools, the academic model that stresses student mastery of predetermined skills and standards has descended through the early grades all the way to kindergarten and even pre-kindergarten classrooms. Hatch (2002) refers to this phenomenon as “accountability shovedown.” In essence, the pressure to perform has been pushed to younger grades as they prepare students for tests.

Early childhood teachers, from pre-K and kindergarten, are not opposed to standards. They view standards as shared expectations or goals for learning (Catapano, 2005). Hyson (2003) has shown that the field of early childhood has a history of establishing standards and advocating for high expectations in classrooms. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) released a position statement in 2002 to clarify their views on standards for young children. In this document, NAEYC provided recommendations designed to guide the creation of early learning standards of high quality. NAEYC states that while early learning standards have the potential to be a valuable part of a comprehensive system of services for young children that will contribute to their educational experiences and future success, standards also have the potential to harm young children unless they: emphasize significant, developmentally appropriate content and outcomes; are developed and reviewed through informed, inclusive processes; use implementation and assessment strategies that are ethical and appropriate for young children; and are accompanied by strong supports for early
childhood programs, professionals, and families (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2002, pp. 2-3).

In elementary environments, standards have become so vital in the teaching of children that the understanding of them has become confusing. Definitions are varied and applied differently across grade levels (Ardovino, Hollingsworth, & Ybarra, 2000; Catapano, 2005). The standards which public schools teachers must include in their instruction were not created according to the recommendations of NAEYC, but rather within the structure of the K-12 educational system. In this context, kindergarten functions as the starting point that extends through the high school grades. In this manner, standards for kindergarten children are aligned with the K-12 curriculum and identical to the standards for the upper grades. This results in kindergarten learning standards that do not reflect the core values determined by NAEYC’s recommendations for early learning but have been widely employed across the U.S.

This implementation has drastically affected the way kindergarten children receive instruction and educational experiences. The K-12 standards have changed expectations of children and the teaching of kindergarten in radical ways (Devault, 2003; Geist & Baum, 2005). The biggest change that is evident is the focus on academic skills (Booher-Jennings, 2005; Hatch, 2005). Five year old children now spend more time in diadatic classrooms, being taught and tested on literacy and math skills, than they do in exploratory and developmentally appropriate activities. In classrooms across the nation, recess time has been drastically reduced or even eliminated to provide more time for skill based academic instruction (Booher-Jennings, 2005).
By aligning the standards for kindergarten children with those of grades 1-12, schools promote the same instructional strategies that are effective with older students be used with five year old children. School administrators and parents often do not understand the value and meaning of developmentally appropriate practices and experiences in young children’s development and learning. The pressure to conform to the expectations of the upper grade practices has made it difficult for kindergarten teachers to justify the use of play, integrated instruction, and developmentally appropriate learning in their classrooms (DaRos-Voseles, Danyi, & Aurillo, 2003).

The widespread belief that direct instruction based on didactic teaching practices is more effective than other methods has forced kindergarten teachers to align their approaches in that assumption (Graue, 2001; McDaniel, Issac, Brooks, & Hatch, 2005). This pressure discourages teachers from using researched based methods grounded in child developmental knowledge. Instead, teachers are mandated to use district curriculum materials that specify the use of teacher centered instructional practices. Kindergarten teachers are expected to use highly prescriptive curricula and materials geared to state standards and guaranteed by commercial based companies to raise test scores. In these models, teachers are required to read the lesson, follow the script and not deviate from the plan. The belief that paper-pencil tasks contribute more directly to preparing students for success on high stakes testing has significantly inhibited and influenced early childhood educators’ pedagogical decisions (Booher-Jennings 2005; Geist & Baum, 2005).

The latest research indicates that children in full day kindergartens spend four to six times as much time in literacy and math instruction and taking or preparing for tests
as they do in developmentally appropriate activities (Miller & Almon, 2009). In New
York and Los Angeles, teachers reported spending much more time in teacher-directed
instruction, especially in the areas of literacy and math. 34% of teachers in N.Y. spent at
least 90 minutes in literacy instruction and 61% reported allowing more than sixty
minutes of math instruction. 37% spent more than 30 minutes each day on assessment or
test related activities (Miller & Almon, 2009).

**Teachers’ Stories**

Connelly and Clandinin (1988) define teacher knowledge as:

“a term designed to capture the idea of experience in a way that allows us to talk
about teachers as knowledgeable and knowing persons…Personal practical
knowledge….is in the person’s past experience, in the person’s present mind and body,
and in the person’s future plans and actions…..It is seen and found in our practices” (p. 25).

This understanding highlights the ways a teacher’s knowledge is interwoven with
a teacher’s life. It cannot be separate from the life of the teacher and we see teacher
knowledge in terms of narrative life history, stories of life’s events. The stories that
teachers tell about their lives and their work are personal, reflecting a person’s life
history. The stories are also social, reflecting the situation and the contexts in which
teachers work and live every day (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999).

According to Clandinin and Connelly (1996), there is an argument for
understanding the context for teacher knowledge in terms of individual teacher
knowledge, the working landscape, and the ways in which this relates to policy and
theory. In their view, the professional working knowledge is positioned at the interface of theory and practice in the lives of teachers. They argue that this professional knowledge landscape creates epistemological dilemmas that are understood narratively in terms of secret, sacred, cover stories. By conceptualizing this landscape, we are provided a way to contextualize teachers’ personal practical knowledge (Connelly, 1999).

The uncovering of these teachers’ stories provides a map for understanding the dynamics between teachers’ personal lives and their professional ones. Teachers talk about their lives in and out of school. They live in communities where their personal lives unfold. They also live in school environments, in their professional role as teacher. Teachers cross the threshold of these lives many times each day.

Classrooms are for the most part, safe places for teachers to live out their stories. The teachers are able to close their doors and essentially live secret lives with many stories untold. When these stories are shared, they are usually with other teachers in secret places. These may be referred to as their true story.

When teachers move out of their classrooms into the alternate landscape, they live and tell cover stories. These are stories in which teachers portray themselves as experts, with characterizations that place their work within the acceptable range of their professional lives. These cover stories enable teachers whose teacher stories are marginalized by whatever the current story of school is to continue to practice and to sustain their teacher stories (Clandinin, 1996).
The Researcher’s Story

Krieger (1991) argued that social scientists invariably and inevitably are talking about themselves when they discuss participants in their research. She suggested that the self-reflective nature of our statements is inescapable; it is human nature to try to comprehend others by projecting ourselves onto them in some fashion. She took the view that there is no correct balance between self and other in a study, but that there are simply different ways of expressing or using the self within social science research. When reading social science research, Krieger believes that what matters is not making judgments about whether the researcher talks too much or too little about self, but whether they talk about self, other, and the world in a way that is interesting or useful. She stressed the importance of researchers informing how their own world influences their research: “It is important to reveal not only more of the outer world on which we focus our gaze, but more about the inner worlds in which we assemble what we choose to say” (p.6). A researcher’s intelligent and deliberate reflection on the experiences and emotional reactions to the research can prove beneficial to the research findings. Not including this could be seen as dishonest (Gilbert, 2001).

The implication of this debate is not necessarily that inclusion of the researcher’s self is appropriate in all types of research. I believe, however, that if the topic, research questions, and research design have clearly and consciously evolved from the researcher’s own life experiences, then the researcher should include as much about herself as is relevant. Researchers with personal experience with their subject have espoused a similar stance (e.g., Daly, 1992; Farnsworth, 1996).
Emotions in Teaching

There is little research about the emotional aspects of teachers’ lives. Teachers’ emotions are rarely mentioned in professional journals and handbooks, such as the Handbook of Educational Psychology (Borko & Putnam, 1996) or the Handbook of Research on Teaching (Richardson, 2001). These texts contain chapters on beliefs, thinking and knowledge. Other chapters stress attitudes, identity and personal meaning. Neither resource addresses emotions.

Despite the growing body of research on emotions since the 1980s, researchers know surprisingly little about the function of emotions in learning to teach, how teachers’ emotional experiences relay to their teaching practices, and how the socio-cultural framework of teaching interacts with teachers’ emotions. Researchers also know little about how teachers regulate their emotions, the association between teachers’ emotions and professional motivation, and how vital emotional experiences are in teacher development (Sutton & Wheatly, 2003).

Emotions however are an integral part of teachers’ live and the work that they do in their classrooms each day. Motivation, cognition, and emotions are three fundamental classes of mental operations recognized by psychologists (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2000). Knowledge of teachers’ emotions is essential in understanding the stories of teachers and their practices in the classroom.
Play in the Educational Process

From birth, children are actively exploring their world. They utilize their senses to form understanding of people, place and things with which they come into contact. This active engagement provides avenues for learning that help to expand the development of the child. In play, children explore worlds and perspectives and are able to elaborate on their understanding of many concepts (Owocki, 1999).

Play serves all areas of development: cognitive, physical, social and emotional. Through play, children are allowed fluid movement for individual or differentiated needs allowances. Those who are ready to progress to another level move on by their own notion or with guidance from the teacher. Other children may require more time in the play setting. At every level of development, play takes on some degree of predictability or stage related activity (Stegelin, 2005).

The use of play in the educational setting has great impact on all dimensions of development. In the cognitive aspect, areas addressed include language, cognition, and approaches to learning (Kagan & Lowenstein, 2004). In language development, play has been found to enhance and accelerate verbal and non-verbal communication. Conversation increases and naturally occurs when children are in small groups (Bruner, 1960). Children who are given many opportunities to talk have higher scores on tests of both verbal and general ability. This is especially true when teachers encourage, question, and guide children’s exploration and learning (Nation Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2000).

In play, children speak and experiment with words and language. They are actively involved in the experiences instead of functioning as a passive recipient.
Research informs the practice with scientific information relating to the development of the brain. Quality early childhood programs that include rich play environments contribute to this development and the continuation of learning into the primary grades.

Play, especially open ended child initiated play, is now a minor component in kindergarten classrooms across the U.S. In fact, in most public school kindergartens, play is all but eliminated. Teacher directed instruction in math and literacy comprise most of the day, even in full day classrooms. Preparing students for standardized tests and assessing kindergarten children on literacy and math skills has assumed much of the time allotted in the kindergarten schedule. Play is seen as a reward instead of a learning tool or process.

Play has historical grounding in the teaching of young children and in particular in kindergarten classrooms. Plato, the Greek philosopher, wrote about children’s play as an important part of the learning process: “Enforced learning will not stay in the mind...let your children’s lesson take the form of play” (Cornford, 1951, p 536). During the Enlightenment and westward movement, children were viewed as innocent and play was seen as a positive experience for helping them grow, learn, and mature in all areas of life.

Play is the central and directing mode of learning during early childhood. Children learn best through self-created learning experiences. This was understood by Friedrich Froebel, the father of kindergarten, who created open-ended play products that allowed children to create their own realities (Frobel, 2003).

Young children work hard at play. They invent situations, solve problems, and negotiate roles. In play, children are highly motivated and fully engaged.
dramatic play situations, children are found to have greater language skills and social
skills. They are also able to show more empathy and imagination than non-players
(Elkind, 2007). Research shows the links between play and foundational capacities such
as memory, self-regulation, oral language abilities, social skills, and success in school
(Elias & Berk, 2002).

Skilled early childhood teachers, and in particular kindergarten teachers, know
that children can only imitate actions they can already perform. Children are unable to
copy or learn new skills simply by watching a teacher demonstrate them. Research shows
that when children spend more time in adult directed activities, forms of child play
characterized by imagination and rich social interactions declines (Golinkoff, Hirsh-
Pasek, & Singer, 2006). It is crucial to value and encourage the self-directed activities of
young children and scaffold imaginative play in early childhood settings so children are
to develop the sustained mature play that contributes significantly to their self-regulation
as well as cognitive, linguistic, social and emotional development.

There is now widespread skepticism about the value of play as hundreds of baby
smart products have appeared on television advertisements promoting the false belief that
the earlier children begin to master the basic elements of reading, phonics and letter
recognition, the better the chance for early success in school. Long term research shows
that this assumption of “the earlier the better” is not factual or based in sound child
developmental practices. A study in German kindergartens in the 1970’s showed that
children who participated in play based learning centers were more advanced in reading
and mathematics and better socially and emotionally adjusted than their counterparts who
were enrolled in cognitive early learning centers (Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 1992). This study led the German schools to return their kindergarten to play based designs.

The United States often envies the schooling that children receive in China and Japan as their children excel in science and mathematics; however, it is rarely noted that the philosophy of teaching prior to second grade in those nations is grounded in playful and experiential methods instead of teacher directed activities. In addition, in Finland, where 15 year olds consistently receive the highest scores on the PISA exam, children attend playful kindergartens and begin first grade at age 7.

Didactic instruction and standardized testing have pushed play out of classrooms including early childhood settings and kindergarten environments. Kindergarten has changed dramatically over the last twenty years as children spend more time being taught and tested than on play and exploration activities that exercise their minds and bodies. Kindergartens today use highly scripted lessons geared to standards and guaranteed to increase test scores. These practices are at odds with child development research and early childhood pedagogy (Miller, 2009).

Developmentally Appropriate Practices

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has adopted a position statement to promote excellence in early childhood education by presenting a framework for best practices with children from birth through age eight (8). Grounded in research on child development and the knowledge base regarding educational effectiveness, this framework provides an outline of practices that promote optimal learning and development for young children. The framework, initially adopted
in 1986, is known as developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) and was updated in 2009 (Bredekamp, 2009).

In 2006, early childhood educators with knowledge from infancy through the primary grades, were invited to comment as the position statement and framework were repositioned within the context of the ever-changing educational structure of the nation. Since the inception of DAP in the 1980’s, significant changes have occurred and issues have grown in importance in early childhood education in the United States. The shortage of quality care for children in the vulnerable infant and toddler years has become significant. With the steady growth of immigrant families, issues involving home language, culture and second language learning have increased. There are a higher number of special needs children participating in early childhood educational settings than in the past. The nation continues to struggle to produce and maintain a qualified teaching force, and the difficulty is especially acute in the early childhood area.

It is also significant that the public and policy makers have become more aware of the importance of the early years in shaping the future of children. There is now widespread recognition of the critical role that quality early learning experiences plays in the overall educational outcomes of students. Therefore, the revised DAP statement highlights three challenges: reducing learning gaps and increasing achievement of all children; creating improved better connected education for preschool and elementary children; and recognizing that teacher knowledge and decision making as vital to educational effectiveness (Bredekamp, 2009).

DAP is informed by what is known from theory and literature about how children develop and learn. A review of that literature generates a number of well supported
generalizations or principles. Due to the complexity of child development and learning, no one list can account for comprehensiveness of the process. The principles in DAP describe individual factors. Just as all areas of child development are interrelated, these principles also interconnect and form a solid basis on which decisions should be made about how to best meet the needs of young children:

1. All the domains of development and learning are important and they are closely interrelated. Children’s development and learning in one domain influence and are influenced by what takes place in other domains.
2. Many aspects of children’s learning and development follow well documented sequences, with later abilities, skills, and knowledge building on those already acquired.
3. Development and learning proceed at varying rates from child to child, as well as at uneven rates across different areas of a child’s individual functioning.
4. Development and learning result from a dynamic and continuous interaction of biological maturation and experience.
5. Early experiences have profound effects, both cumulative and delayed, on a child’s development and learning; and optimal periods exist for certain types of development and learning to occur.
6. Development proceeds toward greater complexity, self-regulation, and symbolic or representational capacities.
7. Children develop best when they have secure, consistent relationships with responsive adults and opportunities for positive relationships with peers.
8. Development and learning occur in and are influenced by multiple social and cultural contexts.
9. Always mentally active in seeking to understand the world around them, children learn in a variety of ways; a wide range of teaching strategies and interactions are effective in supporting all these kinds of learning.
10. Play is an important vehicle for developing self-regulation as well as for promoting language, cognition, and social competence.
11. Development and learning advance when children are challenged to achieve at a level just beyond their current mastery, and also when they have many opportunities to practice newly acquired skills.
12. Children’s experiences shape their motivation and approaches to learning, such as persistence, initiative, and flexibility; in turn, these dispositions and behaviors affect their learning and development.

(Bredekamp, 2009, p 11-15)
Practice that promotes DAP is grounded both in the research on child
development and learning and in the knowledge base of educational effectiveness in early
education. Policy makers, administrators, teachers and families are involved in decisions
that determine whether or not practice is developmentally appropriate in classrooms
around the nation. NAEYC developed guidelines to address decisions that early
childhood professional make in the five key areas of practice:

1. Creating a caring community of learners
    a. Each member of the community is valued by the others
    b. Relationships are an important context through which children develop
       and learn.
    c. Each member of the community respects and is accountable to the
       others to behave in a way that is conducive to the learning and well-
       being of all.
    d. Practitioners design and maintain the physical environment to protect
       the health and safety of the learning community members, specifically
       in support of young children’s physiological need for activity, sensory
       stimulation, fresh air, rest, and nourishment.
    e. Practitioners ensure members of the community feel psychologically
       safe.

2. Teaching to enhance development and learning
    a. Teachers are responsible for fostering the caring learning community
       through their teaching.
    b. Teachers make it a priority to know each child well, and also the
       people most significant in the child’s life.
    c. Teachers take responsibility for knowing what the desired goals for the
       program are and how the program’s curriculum is intended to achieve
       those goals.
    d. Teachers plan for learning experiences that effectively implement and
       comprehensive curriculum so that children attain key goals across the
       domains and across the disciplines.
    e. Teachers plan the environment, schedule, and daily activities to
       promote each child’s learning and development.
    f. Teachers possess an extensive repertoires of skills and strategies they
       are able to draw on and they know how and when to choose among
them, to effectively promote each child’s learning and development at that moment.

g. Teachers know how and when to scaffold children’s learning – that is, providing just enough assistance to enable each child to perform at a skill level just beyond what the child can do on his or her own, then gradually reducing the support.

h. Teachers know how and when to use the various learning formats/contexts most strategically.

i. When children have missed some of the learning opportunities necessary for school success, programs and teachers provide them with even more extended, enriched, and intensive learning experiences than are provided to their peers.

j. Teachers make experience in their classrooms accessible and responsive to all children and their needs – including children who are English language learners, have special needs or disabilities, live in poverty, or other challenging circumstances or cultures.

3. Planning curriculum to achieve important goals

    a. Desired goals that are important in young children’s learning and development have been identified and clearly articulated.

    b. The program has a comprehensive, effective curriculum that targets the identified goals, including all those foundational for later learning and school success.

    c. Teachers use the curriculum framework in their planning to ensure there is ample attention to important learning goals and to enhance the coherence of the classroom experience for children.

    d. Teachers make meaningful connections a priority in the learning experiences they provide children, to reflect that all learners, and certainly young children, learn best when the concepts, language, and skills they encounter are related to something they know and care about, and when the new learnings are themselves interconnected in meaningful, coherent ways.

    e. Teachers collaborate with those teaching in the preceding and subsequent grade levels, sharing information about children and working to increase the continuity and coherence across ages/grades, while protecting the integrity and appropriateness of practices at each level.

    f. In the care of infants and toddlers, practitioners plan curriculum.
4. Assessing children’s development and learning

a. Assessment of young children’s progress and achievements is ongoing, strategic, and purposeful. The results of assessment are used to inform the planning and implementing of experiences, to communicate with the family, and to evaluate and improve teachers’ and program’s effectiveness.
b. Assessment focuses on children’s progress toward goals that are developmentally and educationally significant.
c. There is a system in place to collect, make sense of, and use the assessment information to guide what goes on in the classroom.
d. The methods of assessment are appropriate to the developmental status and experiences of young children and they recognize individual variation in learners and allow children to demonstrate their competence in different ways.
e. Assessment looks not only at what children can do independently but also at what they can do with assistance from other children or adults.
f. In addition to this assessment by teachers, input from families as well as children’s own evaluations of their work are part of the program’s overall assessment strategy.
g. Assessments are tailored to a specific purpose and used only for the purpose for which they have been demonstrated to produce reliable, valid information.
h. Decisions that have a major impact on children, such as enrollment or placement, are never made on the basis of results from a single developmental assessment or screening instrument/device but are based on multiple sources of relevant information.
i. When a screening or other assessment identifies children who may have special learning or developmental needs, there is appropriate follow-up, evaluation, and if indicated, referral.

5. Establishing reciprocal relationships with families.

a. In reciprocal relationships between practitioners and families, there is mutual respect, cooperation, shared responsibility, and negotiation of conflicts toward achievement of shared goals.
b. Practitioners work in collaborative partnerships with families, establishing and maintaining regular, frequent two-way communication with them.
c. Family members are welcome in the setting, and there are multiple opportunities for family participation.
d. Teachers acknowledge a family’s choices and goals for the child and respond with sensitivity and respect to those preferences and concerns, but without abdicating the responsibility that early childhood practitioners have to support children’s learning and development through developmentally appropriate practices.
e. Teachers and the family share with each other their knowledge of the particular child and understanding of child development and learning as part of day-to-day communication and in planned conferences.  
f. Practitioners involve families as a source of information about the child and engage them in the planning for their child  
g. The program links families with a range of services, based on identified resources, priorities, and concerns.  

(Bredekamp, 2009, p 16-23)

Teachers in early childhood education are critical players in shaping the future of the nation. They are the ones who provide the consistent, compassionate, respectful relationships that are required for young children to build strong foundations of learning. By attending to all domains of child development and needs and employing developmentally appropriate practices, early childhood teachers engage children in early learning experiences that prepare them for future academic achievement and life-long success.

Assessment and Accountability

In the current climate of educational accountability, especially under the academic model and the enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act, assessment is center to everything that is happening in classrooms. In the early childhood community, there has been an ongoing debate as to the role assessment should play and the forms it should take as we work with young children each day. Children are being assessed at younger ages and on a more frequent occurrence than ever before (Gullo, 2006). Therefore, it is important to discuss what types of assessments are appropriate for young children and what uses and misuses can result from making decisions based on assessments.
Assessment is a procedure used to measure the degree to which an individual child possesses a particular attribute. Assessment has also been defined as a process for gathering information to make decision about young children (Gullo, 2005). A major problem with kindergarten assessment is that they often do not meet usual standards for reliability and validity. Kindergarten children have a fifty percent chance of being misplaced when standardized assessment results are used for placement (NAECS/SDE, 2000). Most kindergarten evaluations are not reliable or valid due to the developmental distinctions and limitation unique to young children (Meisels & Atkins-Burnett, 2005).

More than other school grades, kindergarten children’s behavior is highly variable each day. This inconsistency occurs in each domain of development and between the various domains. It is crucial that kindergarten teachers are aware of development and how it can and may affect assessment procedures and results.

Kindergarten teachers must understand that using an assessment technique or procedure that offers a child one chance to demonstrate a skill or some knowledge may not give an accurate result or authentic account of what the child truly knows or is capable of doing. They must also recognize that many assessment procedures are not matched appropriately to the developmental capabilities of young children (Wortham, 2001). Young children can be impulsive and that characteristic can affect the reliability and validity of tests. Children will often respond with the first thing that comes to their mind without reflection. This appears in assessment settings as children respond in ways that are inconsistent with adult expectations. Kindergarten children are limited in their ability to transfer knowledge from one situation or circumstance to another; therefore, they may not perform in one setting what they are able to do in another. If children are
taught mathematic concepts using concrete materials and then expected to demonstrate that knowledge on a paper-pencil assessment, the result of their understanding may be unreliable and inaccurate.

Proper assessment in kindergarten can help teachers understand the abilities and qualities of each child and supply useful information to help guide planning and instruction. The assessments should benefit children by leading to improvements in the programming. They should have a specific purpose and be reliable and valid. Assessments used with young children should recognize the developmental limitations of young children and be age appropriate in content and collection method. These assessments should be free from linguistic or cultural biases as children’s backgrounds have a profound influence on their knowledge, vocabulary, and skills (McAfee & Leong, 2002; McLean, 2000). Finally, kindergarten children’s families should be considered an important source of assessment information. The links between the school and the family are often strongest at the kindergarten level and families can offer insights into their child’s behaviors that school assessments alone cannot provide. At the same time, teachers must use assessments to provide information to families about their child’s development and progress (Shepard, Kagan, & Wurtz, 1998).

Background Literature Concerning Methodology

Case Study Research

Qualitative research provides an established field and methods that are used to understand some social phenomena from the perspectives of those involved, to contextualize issues in their particular socio-cultural-political setting, and sometimes to
change social conditions. It is used to make sense of personal narratives and the ways in which they intersect (Glesne, 2006). Part of the qualitative process is learning to listen well to others’ stories and interpret and retell those accounts. Qualitative researchers seek to understand and clarify how the various participants in a particular social context construct the world in which they are present.

Case study research is “highly personal research” (Stake, 2000, p.135). By using this method, the teaching experience can be studied in depth and the researcher is able to include his or her personal and professional perspective into the interpretation of the events (Stake, 2000). Using a case study design, I was able to reflect upon my own experiences as a kindergarten and elementary teacher as well as my knowledge of early childhood educational practices as I interpreted the data and drew conclusions from the research.

According to the literature, a dilemma arises regarding what the case is and where the case leaves off (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Case study is a holistic description and analysis of a single event or phenomenon. It is also an empirical examination that studies a situation in a real life context, adding depth and texture to the data. Yin (2003) states that as a research endeavor, the case study contributes uniquely to the knowledge of individual, organizational, social and political phenomena. In all instances, the need for a case study design arises out of the desire to understand complex social situations. It allows an investigation while preserving the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real life events (Yin, 2003).
Narrative Inquiry

As a methodology, narrative inquiry frequently appeals to teachers and teacher educations. From the background of a former elementary teacher turned teacher educator, there is a sense of comfort that comes from thinking about telling and listening to stories. This comfort carries a sense of reassurance with research that attends to teachers’ stories. As a teacher, telling stories was part of the job description.

Some see narrative inquiry as an easy kind of research and assume that it will be simpler and less complicated to design, implement, and write. Narrative inquiry, however, is much more than the telling of stories (Clandinin et al, 2006). It is a complex process with dimensions of research that require a particular kind of reflection and awareness.

Narrative inquiry was first used in the research field by Connelly and Clandinin (1990) in an article published in *Educational Researcher*. Their work was strongly influenced by John Dewey and the notion that life is education. The interest in narrative inquiry is lived experiences – that is lives and how they are lived (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). As a definition, Clandinin and Connelly write:

Arguments for the development and use of narrative inquiry come out of a view of human experience in which humans, individually and socially, lead storied lives. People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Viewed this way, narrative is the phenomenon studied in inquiry. Narrative inquiry, the study of experiences as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experiences. Narrative inquiry as a methodology entails a view of the phenomenon. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular narrative view of experience as phenomena under study (p 477).
Connelly and Clandinin (2006) identified three commonplaces of narrative inquiry which specify dimensions of an inquiry space. They placed those dimensions in the realm of checkpoints or places to direct one’s attention when carrying out a narrative inquiry. They also view these areas as interrelated and connected in a way that there must be simultaneous exploration of all three commonplaces (Connelly, 2006).

Commonplace One: Temporality

Events in research are in temporal transition. The events and people always have a past, present, and future. Therefore, it is important to try to understand the context as in process and always in transition.

Commonplace Two: Sociality

“Narrative inquirers are concerned with personal conditions and, at the same time, with social conditions. By personal conditions, we mean the feelings, hopes, desires, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions of the researcher and the participants” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 480). There should be attention to the existential conditions, the environment, and the surrounding factors that shape the participant’s context.

There is also a dimension of sociality commonplace in the relationship between the participant and the researcher (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). In a study where there are participants, “inquirers are always in an inquiry relationship with the participants’ lives. We cannot subtract ourselves from relationship” (p. 480).
Commonplace Three: Place

Place refers to “the specific concrete, physical and topological boundaries of place or sequence of places where the inquiry and events take place” (p. 480). It is important to recognize that all occurrences happen within the borders of a place and the researcher must consider the impact of each place on the experiences.

Reflexivity in Qualitative Data Analysis

The concept of reflexivity emerged out of a shift in the understanding of data and its collection. The reflexive ethonographer does not simply report facts or truths, but actively constructs interpretations of his/her experiences in the field (Clifford & Marcus 1986; Van Maanen, 1988). Helen Callaway (1992) writes: “Often condemned as apolitical, reflexivity, on the contrary can be seen as opening the way to a more radical consciousness of self in facing the political dimensions of fieldwork and constructing knowledge. Other factors intersecting with gender – such as nationality, race, ethnicity, class, and age – also affect the anthropologist’s field interactions and textual strategies. Reflexivity becomes a continuing mode of self-analysis and political awareness” (p 33). It could be said, therefore, that reflexivity is ubiquitous. It infiltrates every phase of the research project, demanding a more effusive awareness of the ideology, culture and politics of the research participants as well as the audience.

Researchers are now recognized as active participants within the research process. In that knowledge, it is essential to understand the researcher’s location of self. Through personal accounting, researchers should become more aware of how their own positions are imposed at each stage of the research process, from the development of the idea and
research questions, to the selection of participants, and the representation through the written document. Through this thoughtful reflection and transparency, the researcher is able to create a product that contains less distorted accounts of the social world (Harding, 1986).

Articles on reflexivity highlight the clashing of cultures between the researcher and the subject and how personal differences and similarities are reconciled. Some scholars are interested in sharing with their audience how they became sympathetic to those whose views they do not share (Ginsberg, 1989). In other articles, scholars tell of their inability to find common ground with their respondents and how barriers could not be crossed (Wasserfall, 1993).

The importance of being reflexive is accepted within social science research and there is widespread acknowledgement that the interpretation of data is a reflexive practice through which meanings are made rather than found (Mauthner, Perry, & Backett-Milburn, 1998). The problem arises in the ways in which our subjectivity becomes entangled in the lives of others’ (Denzin, 1997). There is a concern that through the recognition that as social researchers we are integral to the world we study and that the participant’s presence is directly connected to the writer’s self-presence in the text (Denzin, 1994). Feminist, postmodern, interpretive and critical discourses recognize that knowledge is contextually and historically grounded. It is also linguistically composed (Denzin, 1994).
Voice Centered Relational Approach

The voice centered relational approach to reading and understanding the data, developed by a group of researchers at Harvard University Graduate School of Education (Brown, Debold, Tappan, & Gilligan, 1991; Brown, Tappan, Gilligan, Miller, & Argyris, 1989; Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg, & Bertsch, 2003). This method was initially developed as an interpretive method for reading and analyzing narratives of moral conflict and choice in young girls. Grounded in feminist theory, it emphasizes the relational nature of research, specifying that research is a product of two or more people, the researcher and the researched. The assumptions underlying this approach are that individuals are relational beings embedded in a larger social-relational context. Narratives are seen as revealing how individuals construct their perception of an experience – what they focus on as relevant issues, what they define as the primary conflicts, and how they decide to approach the experience. Further, the way an experience is viewed is dependent on the context the individual is embedded in – such as their relationships, the physical, cultural, and historical context, who is involved with them in the experience, and the individual’s personal and cultural history.

A true voice-centered relational method involves four readings of the transcript: (1) reading for the overall plot of the story, including the context, the drama, the players, and so on. During this reading, the reader should also attempt to place him/herself, with his/her own history and experiences, in relation to the narrator; that is, how the researcher is responding emotionally and intellectually to the person, particularly if what is said does not resonate with her (Mauthner & Doucet, 1998); (2) reading for self and the voice of the “I” – listening for how the individual experiences, feels, and speaks about
him/herself, by watching for use of pronouns (I, we, you). This allows for understanding how individuals speak about themselves before attempting to speak for them. The third and fourth readings involve listening for other relational voices that are relevant to the specific topic at hand; (3) reading for relationships – listening for how individuals speak about their interpersonal relationships, both with close family and friends as well as the larger social networks they live and work in. This reading reveals how these relationships influence the individual’s perception of their experiences; (4) reading for the larger cultural and social structures in which individuals are embedded, in order to understand how these basic forces influence the individual’s process of making sense of his or her experiences.

The value of this approach is that it allows for viewing and staying close to the participants’ voices, views and perspectives rather than simply and quickly placing their words into our own ways of understanding the world or into the categories of the literature in our area (Mauthner & Doucet, 1998, p. 130). Further, the reading for the individual’s voice of self is distinct from other qualitative research methods in that it preserves the individual’s processes of reflection and decision making, rather than focusing on general themes of action and interaction. As well, the method displays respect for the perspectives of the individual, while at the same time recognizing and addressing the inevitable and necessary role of the researcher’s own voice and perspective in interpreting the stories. Finally, any consistencies and inconsistencies between the various voices reveal important information of the individual’s ability to make sense of her experiences.
Chapter 3
Methodology

Given the exploratory and descriptive nature of this research, a qualitative study design was employed. The primary research question in this study was: What are the stories that are told by teachers, working in an era when academic achievement and accountability are the focus? In addition, the study aimed to explore (1) to what extent kindergarten teachers include developmentally appropriate instructional practices in their teaching? (2) how they make learning meaningful and engaging for young children? (3) and how kindergarten teachers consider play in the educational processes of children under the standards based design?

In order to answer the research questions posed in this study, it was crucial to employ the methodologies of qualitative design to hear the stories of teachers, interpret their meanings, and describe the complexities of teaching kindergarten children under the standards based design. Focusing on numbers alone would exclude the voices and realities of the teachers themselves, discounting the importance of their attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge in the education of young children. By listening to the stories of teachers, and watching them participate in their practice in the authentic setting of the kindergarten classroom, I was able to consider the context in which they work, the social setting of the environment, the culture of the society, and the relationships that contribute to their methods of teaching. Therefore, I employed the qualitative methods of interviews, observations, follow up interviews, and document analysis to produce a research study that is of high quality (Hatch, 2007) and effectively describes through the narrative stance
the dimensions of teaching kindergarten in an era of increasing academic achievement, high expectations, and escalating accountability.

One goal of this project was to arouse an empathic understanding of the experience of teaching (Ellis, 2004). I attempted to move beyond an academic analysis of the experience of teaching to revealing “life as lived” (Ellis & Berger, 2003, p. 173) in order to add a level of emotional understanding that is not possible with traditional research methods. I pulled from autoethnography and reflexive ethnography methods of writing qualitative research, which allowed for the incorporation of my personal experience into evocative portrayals of the teachers’ stories (e.g., Cherry, 1996; Ellis, 2004; Ellis & Berger, 2003; Ellis & Bochner, 1992; Ronai, 1996; Tillmann-Healy & Kiesinger, 2001). Alternative forms of qualitative writing, like evocative narratives, employ writing techniques such as changing voice and tense, setting up scenes, writing in dialogue form – in short, using writing techniques to “tell a good story” that is true to participants’ stories and compels readers to both know and feel the participants’ experiences (Ellis, 2004).

One benefit of this post-modern, non-traditional form of qualitative research is to permit readers to judge for themselves how my experiences and subjectivities inevitably influenced how I interpreted, understood, and portrayed the experiences of the teachers. Researcher self-reflection or reflexivity is particularly important and useful when a researcher has had personal experience with the topic at hand (Farnsworth, 1996). My personal stories and reactions serve as an honest revelation of how I arrived at my interpretations of the teachers’ stories, allowing readers to judge for themselves how my personal experiences influenced my interpretation and presentation of others’ experiences.
(Gilbert, 2001). Revealing aspects of my personal experience also serves as an additional source of data in this attempt to better understand the teaching experience.

I would not have been exploring this topic without my personal experience of teaching. The decision of how much of my personal experience to reveal and share became a struggle during the course of the project. I have carefully considered the dilemma of using my experience yet not allowing it to cloud my interpretation of participants’ stories. The thought of discussing my feelings and emotions and other personal stories about my own teaching has made me feel exposed and somewhat “unscientific.” As Krieger (1991) and others have pointed out, however, the richness of knowledge that can be created when researchers are willing to take that risk is something worth pursuing.

Research Design

This study follows the multiple case study approach written in a narrative stance in order to gain an in-depth understanding of teaching in three (3) kindergarten classrooms. An exploratory design was utilized since the findings of this research will be used to influence policy, practice, and future research in early childhood education and the teaching of young children. Exploratory design is considered by Hancock and Algozinne (2006) as a prelude to further research and future consideration. It involves fieldwork and the collection of information from which new research may be derived and developed.
Multiple Case Study

It was essential to frame this study in the context of the research methodology of multiple case studies. “A case study is an exploration of a ‘bounded system’ or a case (or multiple cases) over time and through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context” (Creswell, 1998, p.61). A case may be an individual, a group, a program, or an event and it may involve a single case or multiple cases—otherwise referred to as collective case study (Stake, 1995, 2000; Yin, 2003).

This multiple case study explored the teaching and beliefs of kindergarten teachers under the standards based, academic achievement model of education. The purpose of this study was to share the stories of kindergarten teachers, their beliefs, their backgrounds, their philosophies, their experiences, and their work, and in sharing those stories, describe how those professionals provide quality instruction as they attempt to balance developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) with state mandates towards increased academic pressure and standardized testing. Additionally, this study explored the place of play in the educative processes of children in the kindergarten model and how teachers view this aspect in their teaching pedagogy.

Case study design allowed for an in depth examination for understanding events and occurrences (Creswell, 1998) in the complexity of kindergarten teaching. Case study is chosen as the method of design when the researcher has little control over the situation that is to be studied and when the focus is on the real life events (Yin, 2003). This type of research is employed by following a detailed and comprehensive data collection process. It relies on multiple layers of evidence such as observations, documents, and
interviews (Yin, 2003). The data are then analyzed and written in a descriptive style (Stake, 2000).

Case study research requires skills that are more demanding than experiments and surveys. The researcher must conduct a high-quality case study because of the continuous interactions between the theoretical issues being studied and the data that is collected. The researcher must take advantage of unexpected opportunities, much like the teachable moments in educational practice. It is also crucial to exercise care against potentially biased procedures (Yin, 2003). My experiences as a kindergarten teacher and my skills as a researcher allowed me to complete a quality study, taking advantage of every situation that occurs and drawing upon my knowledge and connection to the kindergarten teaching practice.

Yin (2003) states that some common required skills in case study research would include (1) a person who is able to ask good questions and interpret the answers; (2) a person who is a good listener and not trapped by his or her own ideologies; (3) a person who is adaptive and flexible; (4) a person who has a firm grasp of the issues being studied in order to reduce the relevant events and information into manageable proportions; and (5) a person who is unbiased by preconceived notions, thus sensitive and responsive to contradictory evidence (p 56). As a former teacher in early childhood settings as well as elementary classrooms, I was able to draw upon my personal qualities to meet those expectations of a researcher about which Yin writes.
Narrative Description

Using narrative description, the researcher is able to create the picture of the occurrence through a detailed account and colorful description (Merriam, 1998). In this study, the narrative of the teaching events attempts to convey the actual proceedings in the kindergarten classroom and detail the complexities that were involved in the work of an early childhood environment where developmentally appropriate methods are combined with academic achievement models of instruction. This was achieved by the use of interviews of the teachers, observations within the classroom, and document analysis of the teaching materials. These elements provided a rich body of resources from which a picture was created through the narrative description component.

Further, by approaching the teaching experience from a narrative perspective, I invited teachers’ words and expert insights more fully into the research. Unparalleled in other research methods, a narrative inquiry has the influence to form meaning and protect the power of the lived experience (Ellis, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 1992; Emihovich, 1995). The narrative stance permitted access into teachers’ innermost cognitive and emotional ways of understanding the world, and presented a vision into their identity and personality (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). Unlike qualitative methods that break participants’ stories into themes and categories of meaning, the narrative methodologies maintained the context of which the participants told their stories, thereby preserving more of the individual’s identity (Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992).

To many researchers, especially those who favor forms of traditional experimental/quantitative methods, the inclusion of personal experience in the research may seem radical. Some may even judge this method as unscientific. As I began to
explore qualitative methods, and in particular narrative inquiry, I deemed this the “right” way to format my study. I brought myself into this setting and that was not avoidable. I was not able to remove my own teaching experiences from those I observed.

The Researcher’s Story

In the narrative format, I brought my own story along with those of the participants to the research. Experience was a key term in this inquiry. John Dewey believed that experience is both personal and social. According to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), “People are individuals and need to be understood as such, but they cannot be understood only as individuals. They are always in relation, always in a social context” (p 2). I have been positioned at different places in the educational landscape – as a teacher, as a student, as a teacher educator, and now as a researcher. All of our experiences come with us to the present and into the future. There is always a history and it is always going somewhere (Clandinin, 2000).

I hesitated as I considered including my own stories within the study. Scientists have found themselves questioning the conventional view that the researcher should be impartial and invisible and should only state facts. The study should be about the teachers I observed, not about myself; however, over the past few decades, researchers have begun to recognize that the researcher’s self directs all research (Farnsworth, 1996, Gilbert, 2001). It is suggested by some in the research field that because of the expected influence of the researcher’s views, values, personality, and experience, the ethical thing to do is to be as transparent as possible about his or her personal traits and how they might infiltrate the research (Gilbert, 2001, Krieger, 1991, Peshkin, 1988).
In the narrative stance, I entered the school setting as a researcher and as a former kindergarten teacher. I told the stories of the professionals within the building and expressed the data in social stories. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) state that in the narrative approach, we see teaching and teacher knowledge as expressions of embodied individuals and social stories and that we think narratively as we enter the relationship between researcher and teachers, creating field notes and writing storied accounts of the teacher’s lives (p. 4).

As I wrote this research in the multiple case study format with a narrative stance, I was aware of the concern that case studies provide very little basis for scientific generalization. Like experiments, however, case studies are generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations. The case study does not represent a sample and the goal is to expand and generalize theories, not enumerate frequencies (Yin, 2004). It is important to note that this study derived data from a small population of kindergarten teachers and, therefore, offered modest empirically based conclusions but will encourage future research into early childhood educational topics. The findings do not attempt to make a broad statement about the overall practices of kindergarten teachers, but explores what is potentially prevalent in the way teachers work with young children in the public school kindergarten today.

The Research Setting

This study was conducted in six (6) kindergarten classrooms at Middleberg Primary School in the Fair County Public School (FCPS) System. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the school and county. The school opened in the fall of
2006 and houses kindergarten through second grade. A pre-kindergarten class and a special education pre-kindergarten class are in operation within the building. Middleberg Primary is one of thirty-six (36) elementary schools within FCPS system and the only primary structured building where the total focus is on early childhood education. The total student population is four hundred thirty-three (433) with an ethnic breakdown of 394 Caucasian, 11 African American, 3 American Indian, 15 Asian, and 10 Hispanic children. Of the total population, 7.5% receive free or reduced lunches, 2.4% are limited English proficient, and 9.3% receive special educational programming.

The school states that they recognizes the importance of building relationships with students and their families, and that their goal is to create a learning environment that not only promotes high academic achievement, but one that makes children love coming to school. There are six kindergarten classrooms serving children at Middleberg Primary. In addition, there are two pre-kindergarten teachers, six first grade teachers and six second grade teachers. The faculty is supported by the principal as well as an assistant principal. One counselor is on staff as well as a school nurse, two special education teachers, and four reading specialists.

Participants

I chose to study kindergarten teachers specifically as I sought to add to the body of research on early childhood education in public school settings. While elementary grade levels are part of the primary system of teaching and considered by the early childhood field to be included in the research, kindergarten is truly the crossover grade
between traditional early childhood settings and elementary grade level configurations.

Kindergarten is viewed as the outset to formal K-12 education.

Initially, I involved the entire team of kindergarten teachers within the building as they each seemed eager to participate. There were six (6) teachers at the kindergarten level. Pseudo names were used to protect identities:

**Jenny** is the senior member of the kindergarten team. She has been teaching about 23 years. She comes from a large family with 11 children. Her mother was a kindergarten teacher and her father was a principal at the same school. Jenny first went to college to study engineering, but switched her program during her junior year. She is an accomplished pianist and was the music director at her church for many years. Jenny has two grown children and she lives with her husband in the community. Jenny serves as the kindergarten team leader. She has a bachelor’s degree in early childhood education with a minor in special education. She has taken over 36 hours of graduate work, but did not receive her master’s degree. Jenny has also taken many sign language classes.

**Michelle** has been teaching almost 20 years. She lives in the community and has three children in the schools; two girls in high school and one boy in middle school. She lives with her children and her husband about 10 minutes from the building. Michelle graduated from college in 1986, so that positions her career at about the same time frame as my own. Michelle has always taught kindergarten, although for the first 10+ years of her career, she was the only K teacher in another building. Michelle has her bachelor’s degree in elementary education with a minor in early childhood. She has her bachelor’s degree in elementary education with a minor in early childhood. She has a master’s degree in counseling.

**Nicole** is another member of the kindergarten team. She has also been teaching about 20 years. Nicole also lives in the community and has children at the high school. She has her bachelor’s degree in early childhood education, her master’s degree in elementary/special education, and her principal’s certification. Nicole was nominated and won a teacher of the year award from the Washington Post. Families and colleagues wrote about her and worked to help her be awarded this distinguished honor.

**Cathy** was the former team leader of kindergarten when it was just two teachers in a separate building with no principal. She worked with Crissi (profile to follow), who had been her student teacher. They also taught half day kindergarten then while other schools in the district were doing full day. She has been teaching about 10 years and has two small children of her own, aged 3 and 1. This presents a different struggle for her as a working mother with small children. She and Crissi are suitemates in the kindergarten hallway. They continue to share a team approach of their own, while working together with the full team. Cathy has a bachelor’s degree in Interdisciplinary Studies (Elementary Education with concentrations in math and special education) and a master’s degree in reading.

**Sue** has a bachelor’s degree in economics. She went to work after college with her father at his insurance company. Sue went back to college for a Master’s of Art in Teaching, which was a one year intensive program during which bachelor degreeed individuals earn both a master’s and certification to teach elementary (1-8). She took the early childhood praxis to be certified in K. She has been teaching about 9 years, beginning in first grade before she began teaching kindergarten. She has reading groups established and pulls children each day to conduct these
lessons. Sue has a daughter in kindergarten in Crissi’s room. She also has an older daughter in the middle school. She and her family live in the community. Sue and Nicole are suitemates in the k hall.

Crissi is the novice teacher of the group. She has been teaching for five years, all of which have been in kindergarten. She was the team member with Cathy in kindergarten when they were separate from the elementary school. Crissi has her bachelor’s in elementary/early childhood education and is currently working on her master’s degree in reading with a completion date of July 2010. Crissi is adopted from India. She has younger special needs brothers and a sister who are also foreign adoptions. She helps care for these siblings as she continues to live with her parents. Crissi is a single mother of two with her oldest son in kindergarten with Nicole. Her daughter is in childcare and is two years old.

After conducting initial interviews, observations, and document analysis on all of the teachers, I outlined field notes for all six and made the determination of major themes that appeared from each of them. As I began to write the first case/story I found that I needed to be more comprehensive in the storytelling and in the report of the case. There were similarities of themes and to report all six cases would have provided redundant and superfluous information that would not contribute differentiated data to the research. Using all six cases would make an informative study less meaningful and quite possibly verbose. I, therefore, decided to include those three stories that were more divergent and unique to tell a more comprehensive story and answer the research questions in the most complex and holistic manner. The additional three stories that were not in focus during the writing are mentioned in the chapters as their lives intertwined with the main cases.

Data Collection Methods

Qualitative research requires methods which are multiple, interactive, and humanistic (Creswell, 2003). In order to gain the most detailed picture of the teaching in the kindergarten classrooms, data sources will include interviews, observations, and
document analysis. Each of these methods alone has strengths and weaknesses. By collectively incorporating them in this study, I will be able to compensate for the weaknesses of one specific data collection method with the strengths of another (Merriman, 1988). I will use all three components to triangulate the data. In order to establish the trustworthiness of the research, the researcher must triangulate the data. As defined by Creswell (2003) triangulation is the use of several methods of collecting data to verify the evidence from each source to cast light on a theme or perspective. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) “no single item of information (unless coming from an elite and unimpeachable source) should ever be given serious consideration unless it can be triangulated” (p.283). Triangulation is an attempt to relate different kinds of data so as to counteract the threats to validity identified in each (Berg, 1995).

Interviews

Interviews are interactions. According to Glesne (2006), “researchers ask question in the context of purposes generally important primarily to themselves. The respondents answer questions in the context of their dispositions (motives, values, concerns, needs) that researchers need to unravel in order to make sense out of the words that their questions generate” (p79). New questions may emerge during the course of an interview and this process of question formation is ideal in qualitative inquiry (Glesne, 2006).

The interviews provided background information about each teacher as well as stories of their experiences in life and in the classroom. The observations also provided avenues for discussion and further conversation and the basis for later data collection.
during other observations. In the interpretive tradition, the interviews were used in conjunction with data from observations and document analysis. The interviews were structured and had an orderly process; however, during observations, informal comments and discussions were used to provide additional data. The interviews fell into the perspective of oral history, focusing on historical events, skills, ways of teaching, and changes that are occurring in early childhood classrooms. These same interviews included elements of life history as teachers reflected on their backgrounds as well as their intentions on becoming a teacher (Glesne, 2006). These types of interviews allowed a focus on the teaching culture that was evident at (Middleburg Primary) but more importantly, on the teachers themselves; their stories, their thoughts, their lives. This questioning “gets people talking about their lives, experiences, or understandings” (Rubin and Rubin, 1995, p178).

The tape recorded formal interviews of all six (6) kindergarten teachers occurred from November to December, 2009. The teacher decided the time, day, and location of the meeting. Each interview took place in the participant’s classroom and was either before school, during planning periods, or after school. I only did one interview on a specific day so that I could manage time to listen to the audio tapes, determine strong themes, and transcribe the conversations. Three interviews were fully transcribed (see Appendix C). My own thoughts, feelings, reactions, and impressions were also recorded in my notes before and after interviews and served as a check on my interpretation of the stories that were told. Several of the kindergarten teachers also shared photos, momentos, and unsolicited documents as part of their interview.
I began each interview with a review of the study and the purposes of the research, about which the participants were aware prior to the interview date. We discussed the goals of sharing their stories, such as informing the educational community of the complexities of teaching kindergarten in the accountability academic achievement model. The interviews were structured in that I began each one with the same question: Tell me about your background in teaching. After the initial question, I attempted to stay with the planned interview questions; however, each teacher told their stories in different ways. Some addressed questions that were listed later in my interview sheet. Others told stories that led into other areas that were not planned in the initial interview schedule. Each interview lasted longer than expected and involved more time that we planned; therefore, additional time was scheduled on other days to continue.

Observations

Through observation, the researcher carefully observes, systematically experiences, and consciously records in detail the many aspects of a situation (Glesne, 2006). The observer must constantly analyze the observations for meaning and for evidence of personal bias. The questions that must be asked during observation are (1) what is going on here? and (2) am I seeing what I hoped to see? All of this is instrumental to the goals of the research because the researcher is present in particular situations for a reason. Direct observations allow the researcher to better understand the research context and give him or her the opportunity to gain additional insight into areas that the participants may not share in the interview component (Patton, 2002).
Field observations were conducted following the initial interview of each teacher. During the observational visits, I recorded detailed and descriptive notes on the teaching practices in the kindergarten classroom and the teacher’s actions. Specifically, I attended to the teaching pedagogy, the methods of instruction, the types of activities that occurred, and the amount of time spent on direct instruction as well as child driven activities. I noted the amount of play time and play experiences that the teacher allowed for during the full day kindergarten program.

Observer as participant lens was used during these observations. This is a classic typology discussed by Gold (1969). In this method, the group (the teachers) knows the researcher’s activities prior to the observation and the gathering of information is the primary purpose. In this role, I was present in everyday situations that enhance my awareness and curiosity about the interactions taking place. I was immersed in the setting, the teaching, and the research questions. In doing so, I developed a growing determination to understand the issues at hand from the teacher’s perspectives (Glesne, 2006) and to determine how the life of the teacher was evident in her work with children. This allowed me to see things I may not have noticed before.

From November 2009 through mid-February 2010, observations were conducted in each classroom. I began with visits to Jenny’s room and then followed with Nicole, Michelle, Cathy, Susan, and Crissi respectively. I interwove the visits and returned to classrooms for additional observations during the process. The teachers allowed me free reign of the hallway for visitation purposes and agreed that I should be able to stop in any classroom at any time. That afforded me the opportunity to spend more time than I had planned with each teacher and engaged me in the day to day aspects of their work. The
supplementary time also allowed more detailed and descriptive data to be gathered to report in their stories of teaching.

Document Analysis

In qualitative case study, the use of document analysis is particularly useful as they “ground an investigation in the context of the problem being investigated” (Merriam, 1998, p109). Documents corroborate the observations and interviews and help make the findings of the study more trustworthy. By analyzing documents, the researcher is provided with a historical, demographic and sometime personal picture that is not available through other sources (Glesne, 2006). Document analysis is also important for qualitative researchers who wish to “explore multiple and conflicting voices, differing and interacting interpretations” (Hodder 2001, p705). This relates to the focus of this research as the documents may support or conflict with the observations and interviews.

Examination of documents within the school and individual rooms allowed for a better understanding of what was taking place in the teaching of young children and the historical and contextual background of the situation. The documents that were examined are listed below:

- County language arts curriculum and pacing guide for the year; county indicators (2009-2010)
- County math curriculum and pacing guide for the year; county indicators (2009-2010)
- Teachers’ manuals for math and social studies
Teachers’ informal lesson plans

Photographs of room environments

Data Analysis

In qualitative research, data collection and analysis are considered an interactive process (Marshall and Rossman, 1995; Merriam, 1998). When completed simultaneously, this enables the researcher to focus and shape the study as it proceeds (Glesne, 2006).

Thematic analysis involves coding and segregating the data for further analysis and description. This provides a way of seeing the data as well as a process of coding information. In this manner, the researcher must make many decisions about the process of identifying themes and to inform why categories are chosen. Analysis does not refer to a piece of the research process. It is a continuing process that begins as soon as the research begins (Glesne, 2006). The analysis is interrelated to the data collection.

Polkinghorne (1995) categorized narrative inquiry into two distinct types: (1) analysis of narrative and (2) narrative analysis. In an analysis of narrative, a researcher collects stories as data and analyzes them with a paradigmatic process – that is, looking for general themes, principles, and categories in the narrative and applying a chosen philosophical and methodological approach such as grounded theory, phenomenology, etc.

Narrative analysis, on the other hand, involves creating a narrative that integrates and makes sense of multiple sources of data, some of which may be written or interview narratives. The latter was used in this study to analyze and present participants’ stories.
from their interviews and the observations of their teaching. The final product of my analysis of the teachers’ stories has taken the form of a narrative that incorporates some or all of the following: interview transcripts, my observational notes and reflections on my personal experiences and responses to participants’ stories, and document analysis.

The analysis procedures I adopted consisted of two phases: analyzing and interpreting the data; and writing an interpretive narrative that presents the analysis in a way that preserves the richness and intensity of participants’ individual stories, as well as revealing a meaningful depth of understanding of teaching told by these early childhood professionals.

As a way of approaching the data and forming initial interpretations, I used a varied “voice centered relational” approach to reading and understanding the data, developed by a group of researchers at Harvard University Graduate School of Education (Brown, Debold, Tappan, & Gilligan, 1991; Brown, Tappan, Gilligan, Miller, & Argyris, 1989; Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg, & Bertsch, 2003). While it was rare for me to explicitly refer to the method or the “voices” in my telling of the stories, this approach to the transcript data was a guide in how I came to interpret the stories and view the teachers’ attempts at meaning making.

The voice-centered relational method was initially developed as an interpretive method for reading and analyzing narratives of moral conflict and choice in young girls. Grounded in feminist theory, it emphasizes the relational nature of research, specifying that research is a product of two or more people, the researcher and the researched. The assumptions underlying this approach are that individuals are relational beings embedded in a larger social-relational context. Narratives are seen as revealing how individuals
construct their perception of an experience – what they focus on as relevant issues, what they define as the primary conflicts, and how they decide to approach the experience. Further, the way an experience is viewed is dependent on the context in which the individual is embedded. These could include relationships, the physical, cultural, and historical context, who is involved with them in the experience, and the individual’s personal and cultural history. This method was therefore well suited to studying the stories of teachers to determine how they understand their experience and the multitude of influences on their meaning-making process.

In order to move from the holistic understanding of each individual to an understanding of the participants’ stories as a whole, I identified common or universal themes that were especially salient across the three teachers’ stories. This involved looking through participants’ stories for recurring themes and sub-themes that connected individual stories to a shared social story (Mauthner & Doucet, 1998). While this procedure resulted in a dissecting of the individual and her stories, it was an important step in achieving a sense of the data set as a whole and in adding a broader level of understanding of the experience of teaching in kindergarten under the standards based design.

The last piece of data was derived from document analysis and embedded within the stories of the teachers. The examination of these items shared the history, the situational disposition of the educational environment, the level and pressures of outside influences, and the actual products of the educational setting. This gave a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of the situation and the complexities of kindergarten teaching. For ease of understanding and to allow flow in the teacher’s stories, sections of
document analysis are included in this chapter. Below, photographs of each teacher’s classroom are labeled and analyzed:

Figure 1: Blocks in Jenny’s Classroom

Within the environment in Jenny’s classroom were various play materials. In this section shown in Figure 1, building materials were arranged including unit blocks, foam blocks, bristle blocks, leggos, cubes, linking blocks, and train sets. On the back of this shelf, Jenny placed various puzzles for the children to use. The materials were well organized and labeled, including literacy elements within the play setting. These materials were evidence of play based theory of teaching in Jenny’s story. Although the play materials were prominent in the environment, time to play was limited as children were provided center time for approximately 3 hours each week.
Figure 2: Puzzles and Blocks in Jenny’s Classroom

The materials were well organized and labeled, including literacy elements within the play setting as seen in Figure 2. These materials were evidence of play based theory of teaching in Jenny’s story. In Jenny’s classroom, these play materials were prominent; however, their use was limited as children were provided center time for approximately three hours per week.
Also within the play materials were curricular related items. Next to the building blocks, Jenny arranged the math manipulatives as shown in Figure 3. On these shelves, children could find and use bear counters, pattern blocks, shape blocks, unifix cubes, tangrams, beads, number tiles, and marker boards. Although playful in their appearance and concrete in the experience, I observed that these materials were used during math lessons that were teacher directed. During center time, I noted during observations that children rarely chose these items to use. These data showed that children did not view these items as play related but rather as work related.
Nicole’s classroom was colorful and welcoming. The rug area at the front of the room was used for large group instruction and class gatherings as shown in Figure 4. When children were observed in this area, the activities were teacher directed and highly didactic in nature. The desks were arranged into table groupings, but when children were observed in that activity setting, their attention was focused on instruction based from the technology cart (as seen in picture) or on individual paper/pencil tasks.
As the children entered the classroom, this activity area illustrated in Figure 5 was directly to their left. The passageway to Susan’s room is visible in this photograph as well. These centers were labeled as the science center and the math nook. In each area, directions for play were provided for the children. There was an expectation that as children worked at these play centers, they would complete the required task. In this way, there was no freedom of choice and use of materials allowing for little creativity and construction of knowledge. The materials were well organized and colorful.
Nicole placed a kidney shaped table at the back of the classroom as shown in Figure 6. In this area, children were observed in small group, teacher directed experiences, such as guided reading. Assessments were also conducted in this area, creating the feeling of a teacher centered table, for which the kidney shaped table is designed. On the wall, Nicole posted the “Wow Words” that were vocabulary introduced during vocabulary groups. On top of the file cabinets, a stack of assessment notebooks was visible. The tall cabinet was covered with artwork that was freely created by the children in Nicole’s classroom.
Figure 7: Group Meeting Area in Crissi’s Classroom

Crissi’s room was also very colorful and attractive. She arranged the environment to provide areas for large group, small group, and individual instruction. Crissi’s classroom was highly organized. As visible in Figure 7, children used chair packs, placed on the back of their chairs, to organize and keep pencils, crayons, books, and papers. When the kindergarteners came to the rug, they sat in an assigned color square and did not change position. This rug area was used for group instruction that was teacher directed.
Figure 8: Puppets and Play Materials in Crissi’s Classroom

Play materials were present in Crissi’s classroom. In Figure 8, hand puppets are displayed near a puppet theater. These items were never observed in use by the children or the teacher. To the left, jars and tubs of manipulatives were placed on the shelves. Although playful in theory, these items were used only as filler activity when children finished paper/pencil tasks and time was required to wait for others to complete the assignment.
In Figure 9, a writing center is shown. This area was very organized with paper, writing utensils, and clipboards. Prompts were provided for use by the children if they were at this play center. There was little free choice in writing, allowing for limited creativity and control by the children.
Writing the Research Story

Within a narrative inquiry, the process of writing a narrative that makes sense of the data analysis can be seen as an additional step in the analysis procedure. With this in mind, I used alternative writing techniques in an attempt to present the narrative data in a unique, provocative, and meaningful way that preserved the richness of the stories. Such alternative writing techniques also allowed for the inclusion of my own experiences, such that the reader can distinguish between my perspectives and those of participants.

My decision to present the teachers’ stories using such writing techniques was based on others who have experimented with unconventional forms of presenting qualitative data (e.g., Cherry, 1996; Ellis & Bochner, 1992; Ellis, 2004; Ellis & Berger, 2003). They presented the participants’ stories as “evocative narratives,” which are narratives that were created based on multiple sources of information collected, including the researcher’s personal experience with the topic at hand. The narratives were constructed by influencing voice, using scenes/episodes and dialogue between participants in the story, and writing in poetic form to transport readers experientially through the text. For example, transcript pieces might be presented in a form that accentuates word repetitions or other characteristics of language that adds to the impact of the conveyed message (Richardson, 2003). Another technique might include a first-person dialogue written to capture a participant’s verbatim story while also drawing in descriptions of the interview setting and the researcher’s in-the-moment internal emotional responses. Researchers constructed narratives that were based on the histories and experiences as told by participants using their words directly as well as using their own words in order to “tell a good story.” Thus, at times transcript excerpts were
presented essentially verbatim, while other parts of the narrative were constructed in a way that captured the spirit and proposed meaning of participants’ stories, but in a form that makes their entire stories come alive. These researchers recognized the importance of using self-reflection and other distancing and member-check techniques in order to ensure that the narrative constructions did not turn into fiction, or become solely a reflection of their own perspectives rather than those of their participants.

These writing techniques are obviously unconventional, even within a qualitative methodology that strives toward unique ways of understanding human experience. It is therefore important to comment on how I addressed the issue of trustworthiness of my analysis and presentation of results in light of using such techniques.

Methods of Verification

Trustworthiness, or research validity, is an issue that must be considered throughout the research design and the data collection process (Glesne, 2006). In this qualitative study, the use of multiple data sources is considered a strength. Triangulation, member checking, and thick, rich descriptions ensure the credibility of the findings of this multiple case study written in a narrative stance.

By using interviews, observations, and document analysis, the teaching experience in kindergarten classrooms under the standards based educational design was explored and described in order to gain insight into the teacher participant’s experiences. According to Maxwell (2005), triangulation reduces the risk of chance associations and of systematic biases due to a specific method. The use of triangulation also allows for a
better assessment of the generality of the explanations that are developed (Maxwell, 2005).

Member checking is the process in which the researcher determines the accuracy of his or her findings by requests feedback from participants. Member checks, or participant validation (Rossman & Rallis, 2003), occurred after the interview transcripts were completed. The transcripts were reviewed with the teacher to correct any mistakes and to elicit further information. After observations were recorded, the participant had the opportunity to discuss the events and share any information they felt should be included. I also scheduled and conducted a final meeting with each participant to review their story and allow for additions or clarifications in any of the data collection pieces. In this way, I worked to accurately represent the teaching experience and maintain rigor in the research process.

Rich, thick descriptions attend to issues of transferability as the researcher writes such detailed descriptions of participants that readers could convey that information to other settings (Creswell, 1998; Erlandson et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 2005). According to Erlandson, et al. (1993), thick, rich description brings the reader vicariously into the context being described. As findings were presented from the interviews, the participant’s own words, as obtained primarily from interview transcripts as well as observations, were included. I used direct quotes and interview transcripts to help depict the naturalistic setting and situation of the teaching experience. In this way, the reader is be able to identify with the teaching condition and gain a better understanding of the teacher’s thoughts and actions. The detailed descriptions of the classroom environment, the actions, and the teaching provide a thorough account that
completes the triangulation of the data. This takes the reader into the participant’s context and enables them to fully identify with the findings.

Researchers have proposed the need for criteria that are specific to using a narrative stance as they believe this method of research has unique characteristics in comparison to other qualitative approaches. Blumenfeld-Jones (1995) proposed the criterion of fidelity. Fidelity of a narrative refers to whether it portrays what a person’s story meant for them, as opposed to “truth,” which looks to the truth of the situation in a more objective sense. Blumenfeld-Jones argued that narrative inquiry combines social science and a more aesthetic or artistic mode of representation. As researchers, we must find some way to satisfy the sometimes conflicting demands of these two orientations.

To achieve fidelity, I was mindful of suggestions made by Blumenfeld-Jones. The inquiry should acknowledge the intersubjective bond between researcher and participant that influences the storytelling. At the same time, the larger social and historical context of the participant needs to be considered and preserved in the interpretations and in selecting prominent data in the analysis. There should be believability of the interpretation as being a reasonable portrayal of the teacher’s story, while also achieving meaning with the reader’s experiences. Researchers must also be open and honest about the inevitable influence of their perspectives and experiences in the re-telling of participants’ stories.

This last point is suggestive of what others have termed reflexivity, which refers to actively exploring, recognizing, and making clear in the writing how the researcher’s own personal history, subjectivity, and theoretical stance have influenced the interpretations of participants’ stories (Mauthner & Doucet, 1998; Mauthner, 2003).
Reflexivity is accomplished by documenting the data analysis process and the choices and decisions made, so that readers can judge for themselves what has been lost and what has been gained (Mauthner & Doucet, 1998; Mauthner, 2003). In this study, reflexivity was even more of a consideration because of my personal connection to the topic of teaching kindergarten, as well as my use of unconventional writing methods. Including my reactions, beliefs, preconceptions, and choices in what I wrote was particularly important as a way of remaining true to the teachers’ intended meanings while also writing a good story.

Ethical Considerations

My own personal experience of teaching young children has guided me at every stage in this process. From formulating the research questions and designing the study, conducting the interviews, analyzing the data, and writing the final document, the kindergarten teacher in me has been present. Farnsworth (1996) discussed the potential benefits of having personal experience with one’s research topic. In her study, she found that participants were anxious to share their feelings and stories with a researcher who was also shared similar experiences. In this study, the kindergarten teachers expressed their comfort and connection with me because of my shared experiences. We were members of the same group which seemed to allow stories to flow more freely.

Such personal experience, however, simultaneously presents challenges to the conduct of the research. Like any researcher, those with an “insider’s perspective” approach their topic with predetermined expectations and assumptions. Insiders, however, have a taken-for-granted reality that presents a potentially greater challenge to
their ability to recognize when their own stories are drowning out those of their participants (Daly, 1992). Daly suggested that this tendency can play itself out in terms of overlooking certain aspects of participants’ perspectives, and assuming familiarity when the participants’ realities are in fact quite distinct from those of the researcher. Daly recommended that researchers therefore “manufacture distance” (McCracken, 1988) by actively finding ways to view the issues from a different perspective. Researchers with an insider’s perspective must strictly adhere to the principles of self-reflection and openness about choices made throughout the research process, possibly even more so than other qualitative researchers (Edwards & Ribbens, 1998). This is necessary not only to ensure that the findings of a study are credible, but also to protect and display respect for participants’ realities.
Prelude to the Stories
Teacher’s Stories of Life, Experience, and the Education of Children

“I think in many ways as it turned out my entire life up to that moment had been a
preparation to handle that particular moment”
- Captain Chesley “Sully” Sullenberger

The day was finally here. It was the beginning to the next phase of my own life as
I drove into the parking lot of the school and found a spot to place my car. Would I find
a place for my person inside that building as easily as I found a parking place? My heart
beat quickly as I turned off the ignition and reflected upon what I was about to do. Was I
prepared? What was I looking for? What would I find inside? What stories would I be
able to share with the world? How do I do this thing called research? Was I ready?

And then, amidst all of my questions, contemplations and self-doubt I
remembered something. The answers weren’t there in my head. No book, or theory, or
philosophy could tell me what I wanted to know. The answers were waiting for me inside
that building, with those teachers, and in the time that we would spend together over the
next several months of our lives.
Chapter 4
Case One – Jenny’s Story of Life, Family, and Teaching

“So I think if you want to know about me, you first need to know about my family”

The First Meeting

When I first met Jenny, her strong personality and direct speaking made me feel a little intimidated. She was introduced to me as the team leader, the one who needed to be won over to make this research work. If I had Jenny in my corner, the other teachers would follow.

I walked into Jenny’s room and all at once felt a sense of comfort, security, and familiarity; after all, this was a kindergarten classroom. There were bright colored curtains on the windows and a smile on her face. Jenny welcomed me with open arms and a big hug as I introduced myself to her for the first time.

Jenny invited me to sit at the kidney table, a shaped table that teachers use for instructional purposes. The chairs were little, but somehow fit us; we kindergarten teachers are accustomed to child sized furniture and use it as easily as other adults find it awkward.

Jenny had arranged a meeting with all of the other kindergarten team members. The purpose of this first meeting was to have the teachers listen to the nature of the research study and to ask any questions that they had at that time. I expected to give them some background information about myself and my own work with children over the course of my career. I also expected to have them sign the consent forms and schedule my visits to their classrooms.
What I did not expect was to find myself in the community of kindergarten teachers and feel accepted and welcomed in a way that was similar to becoming a member of a private organization. I was never part of a sorority; but somehow, within this group, I already felt that our common interest in teaching made us sisters in a different sense. When they discovered that I too was a kindergarten teacher, it was as if the barriers I thought might have existed, the blocks to my being part of the social structure of the kindergarten team, lessened. I had passed the initiation process and was quickly accepted into the team as an initial member.

It was Jenny who introduced me to the other kindergarten teachers and from their visible respect for her, their attention to her words and their physical posture at her table, I began to understand a bit about the social structure of this group. I was still a bit intimidated. Jenny was the team captain. That was clear from moment one.

Jenny allowed me to share my intentions as a researcher and she verbally supported my interests with her comments. She said to the group that she thought it was wonderful that they had someone who wanted to hear their stories, share their work, and give them a voice. “I can’t tell ya how wonderful I think it is that you are here with us now, in this place where we try to do our best every day, but it’s getting harder! We try to make it fun.”

She sat at the cut out part of the table, the place where “the teacher” sits during instruction. The other teachers sat around the table, attentive to her support and nodding in agreement. As soon as she said, “Well, I’m in with ya!” the others joined too.
Visits to Jenny’s Classroom

I arrived at Jenny’s classroom to spend a scheduled hour that lasted for three. It was the beginning of November, so the kindergarten children had been in school for two full months. Jenny had her routine and procedures grounded in place and it was evident from the moment I stepped into her room that while the children may have wondered about my presence, they understood what she expected.

I walked in and Jenny greeted me again with a hug. She led me over to that kidney-shaped table and had some things waiting for me. She gave me a copy of her plans for the day and told me she would be “kinda” busy most of the time, but if I had questions, to just ask. She told me that she liked for her children to come in and see her before they unpacked their bookbags. “I like greetin’ mine first. That’s just what I do. Some do it differently and that’s ok. This is just my way.”

As the children arrived, they came over to Jenny who was sitting at a table near the door. She greeted each one individually and used endearing terms for them. “Oh love-bug, come around here sweetie. Let’s see that folder.” I began to wonder if this was for a show, to impress me. How bold of me to think that this teacher would “perform” for me. As I got to know her over the next several months, I realized just how committed to children her whole life had been.

The children knew what to do. Jenny had the routines well in place with these kindergarteners. They came in to greet her and get their folders checked. A small line of children waited patiently at her table. After she finished with their folders, each child passed by the waiting line and went back into the hall to hang up their things in their tiny
lockers. Then they came back in the classroom and went to work, using materials at various locations around the room. Happy voices began to fill the once empty space. There seemed to be no confusion as to what the children were supposed to do. Having those routines grounded made for a smooth flow to the morning with very little interruptions of mistaken behaviors.

I sat there and watched. I took it all in. I began to write, take notes, scribble out comments that she said to children. Before I knew it, I had four pages completely filled and I had only been there for fifteen minutes.

One little boy walked over to me and plopped down onto the floor, holding his foot up to me. His boot was untied, but instead of asking me for help, he assumed I knew what a foot in the air signaled. I smiled and began to tie the shoe for him. As I did, I said, “Wow, look at these boots!” “Yep,” he replied with a big voice. “They’re new. You know how you know they’re new?” I felt as if there was a punch line on the horizon, so I played along. “How?” I inquired, knowing that the next comment was not a joke but factual information from a five year old. He turned his boot over and said assuredly, “Not a bit of dog poop on them.” I smiled as he jumped up and headed back into his routine.

As Jenny greeted the children, she checked their bookbags for notes, homework books, and whatever else a five year old found valuable to bring to school. She commented on the stuffed bear that one child jerked out. “Oh how nice. Isn’t that nice. It is! Make sure it stays safe in your bookbag, love bug, but I do like that.” Her manner of speaking with the children was noticeable. She took her time. She really stopped what she was doing and looked at that bear and that child. Her voice was low and calm and
sweet. She was not in a rush to hurry the child to put the bear away. This was a voice I would grow fond of hearing.

Jenny had children’s books spread across the brightly colored carpet that was in the middle of the room. As children finished working on morning papers that she asked them to do, they went to the rug and sat with friends sharing the books, pictures, and language time.

The talkative nature of this classroom made a sound that was familiar to me; not ME the researcher but ME the teacher. I began to feel an emotion of sadness, perhaps because my memories were coming to my mind and I missed teaching young children. There was also an emotion of confidence, because I knew this stuff. I understood kindergarten and I was assured that I could do this research project here. I felt an emotion of caution, however, as I knew I had to be careful not to assume anything, not to allow my own experiences and knowledge interfere but rather compliment and contribute to this project. I had to tell this teacher’s story. I quickly focused myself back on my job.

I also recognized the morning routine of this day. The children were greeting individually as they arrived at school. Jenny held them accountable for homework and the procedures of the “settling in” time. She spoke to each child and noticed them, making sure that their presence was noted. This was a warm welcoming start to the day.

Jenny got up from her table and walked over to her desk to get something. She paused for a brief minute to tell me that she had a special needs child in her class. She told me that he had been with her last year and that his needs were extreme. The
expectations for this child were low when he first came to her classroom. The parents basically wanted to have him spend time with other children. Jenny shared that as his first year with her progressed, they soon discovered that he could handle much of what the other children were asked to do.

“When he discovered this about himself, there was noooooo stopping him. He didn’t want to be different. He wanted to be like them (pointing to the children). Now this year his language is still very delayed and we use sign with him. He has a full time aid, but my expectations are high for him, and he knows it! He knows I won’t put up with stuff. He knows I want him to work and do well too. (Pointing him out to me) I treat him just like the others and he likes it. We have an understanding. But when you and I sit and talk, I need to share the extra work involved and my additional responsibilities. I’m not complaining, but it’s part of my story.”

As we continued to talk, Jenny hugged another boy that walked up to her. She then turned and talked to another child about the shirt she was wearing. “Hi there ____ , how are you? Oh my gosh. I love your shirt. Where in the world did your mother find that one?” Jenny continued that conversation as she signed something to her special needs boy and he replied back.

The morning settling time continued and Jenny went back to the table to check in with more children as they arrived. From the multitude of conversations that happened at the same time, it was easy to validate that greeting children each morning is a complex process in kindergarten. I remembered the intricacy of my own mornings with children as I watched. Jenny simultaneously gave hugs, checked folders, held meaningful conversations, assigned work, and maintained control. She used sign language, gave
formal directions to an adult aide, accounted for homework completion, and managed her time. She did not seem fazed and did not pause in her flow of activities when an unexpected parent volunteer appeared at her door. Jenny just continued checking in with children while she directed the mother to the volunteer table and the task directions for the day.

🌟

*I always enjoyed the start to my own day with my kindergarteners. No matter what had occurred in the morning, whether it was the rush of getting out the door, traffic on the highway, spilled coffee, or frustrating meetings, as soon as my children appeared at the door, I became their teacher and that was my focus for the rest of each day. I hugged each one, listened to their stories, marveled at their treasures, and basked in their excitement. This was a special time in my own classroom so it was easy for me to identify the positive energy that I was experiencing from the children as they interacted with their teacher in this classroom.*

This was the planned and observed start to the day in Jenny’s classroom. The children arrived and were individually greeted, noticed, and welcomed by their teacher. She took the time to talk with each child, noticing the important aspects of their being; their emotions, their belongings, and their needs. She managed all of this along with the inclusion of adult aides and volunteers that also needed her attention. Her voice was warm, calm, and low. She was direct and clear in her comments and expectations of behaviors. She made sure children knew she cared and understood.
One day during an observation of the morning routine, a little girl came in and did not have lunch money. She became visibly upset, with tears building in her blue eyes. Jenny, sitting at the table and looking into the child’s eyes, took her by the hand and explained, “Listen, you’re not in trouble. You’re not. I know you feel that way but you’re not in trouble. We just have to figure this out together. You step over here and look in the other pockets of your bookbag, love bug.” The small child seemed to take a deep breath, and sat on the floor to search for her money. When she found where her mother put it, Jenny said, “Well there ya go….see, everything is ok now. It is. It is just fine, love bug.”

It was the way in which Jenny spoke with children that captured my thoughts. On several occasions I heard Jenny apologize to children for interruptions in their day or ask if it was ok if she did certain things. “If it’s alright ----, I’m gonna move your chair over just a bit,” she said to one little girl as she moved the furniture to help with the instructional environment. After an outburst from her special needs child, Jenny looked at the children on the carpet and said, “Kids, I’m sorry for that interruption. I am. I hope we can get back to work now. You all ready?” When I asked Jenny why she said these things, spoke this way to children, she told me that she just thought kids needed to be shown respect. “They do have feelin’s. I think they need to know I respect that and that I care.”

She spoke with kindness but also with presence. She was in the moment. She was there, with each child, participating in the human conversation and connection. She did not show any sense that she had more important things to do. The child was the most important thing at that moment. The children were always the central part of her day.
With all of the other responsibilities and expectations that were laid at her door by others, Jenny focused first on the children.

The morning greeting time was observed on many occasions over several months. Jenny was always involved in many activities, moving around the room taking care of everything. She had one student who was practicing vowel/consonant labeling. She checked with him and saw that he had one letter in the wrong “letter house.” She said, “Ok, tell me the vowels buddy. Say them again. You have one over here in this house that needs to go over there. I’ll give you another minute to figure it out.” Jenny then moved a few steps away and picked something up from her desk while continuing to watch the child. He did not change the letters. Jenny said, “I can tell by your eyes you are looking in the wrong house. Look here. What’s this?” The child replied, “E.” “See,” Jenny said with excitement, “You knew that!” She pointed to the upper case E in the vowel spot. “You got all these right! That’s wonderful! You just missed that baby e. Great job! Ok, you can go do your paper now.”

As I listened to her talk with children, I felt a sense of emotion building inside me. I was watching her, but in a way, it seemed as if I was looking at myself, in another time and in another place. I always felt that my ability to form and maintain respectful and loving relationships with my kindergarten children was one of the strongest aspects to my teaching. I had not considered my own teaching coming into play in the process of data collection. But now as I sat and observed this teacher, I could “see” me. I felt as if I was transported in a sense to my own classroom. I did not remember how much I loved
teaching young children until I was in this place. I thought to myself that Jenny, or her classroom, is a reflection of my past, my practice, and my passion. How were we similar? In what ways were we different? I began to consider how my own past, present and future would fit into this research project. I also began to understand that reflexivity would become a strong element in my research. I was tied to kindergarten and I had to be transparent in my emotions, memories, and connection to the teaching of young children in this similar environment.

Kindergarten Documents

On other visits to Jenny’s room, I took note of the way in which she involved the children in various types of activities. She had them sit and do “paperwork”, the items that were required of her through district and curriculum mandates. She handled the multitude of assessments that were “heaped upon her” each year. She used the materials that the district spent millions on to assure higher test scores.

Since Jenny was the team leader, she collected the documents that the teachers felt would contribute to the research project. She had a pile of things waiting for me on one of my visits to her room. The pile was so large that she loaned me a big bookbag in which to carry them out to my car at the end of the day.

Language Arts and Math Indicators

The kindergarten team provided the language arts and math indicators, county documents that filled large binders. As we looked through the reams of paper together, Jenny explained that each document had a suggested school year calendar with the
numbered indicators, or outcomes, listed on each day of the week. The teachers were expected to follow that schedule of teaching so that each area would be adequately learned by all kindergarten children throughout the county wide system at relatively the same pace. Table 1 provides a breakdown of the county math indicators (curriculum/standards):

Table 1: County Math Indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit Title</th>
<th>Number of Indicators</th>
<th>Number of Required Assessments</th>
<th>Number of Days in Unit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who Is in School Today? Classroom Routines and Materials</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counting and Comparing</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What Comes Next: Patterns and Functions</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measuring and Comparing</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>3 (+ 2 optional work samples)</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make a Shape, Build a Block: 2-D and 3-D Geometry</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How Many Do You Have? Addition, Subtraction, and the Number System</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>5 (+ 3 optional work samples)</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sorting and Surveys: Data Analysis</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>3 (+ 1 optional work sample)</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>193</strong></td>
<td><strong>25</strong></td>
<td><strong>163</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Every kindergarten teacher within the team shared their exasperations with the inappropriateness of the scope of learning and the amount of assessments. Michelle was Jenny’s suitemate in the kindergarten wing. One afternoon we spent time talking about the expectations of the county. She was visibly frustrated as we talked. Michelle walked over to her cabinet and starting carting over mounds of paper products, folders, notebooks, binders, all filled with county requirements and mandates. She said, “How do they (pointing to no one, but presumably the county office) know my kids in here? Why
should I spend three days on numbers to 5 if my kids know it already? And why should I push them through concepts of money too soon or too fast? They (the county) just don’t get it! They don’t know these kids in here!”

Through conversations with the other teachers, those same sentiments were strongly supported by every member of the team. Jenny opened the math teaching manual and explained that each lesson was scripted and that the county wanted the teachers to follow the program explicitly. “Now, don’t get me wrong. They have provided us with a multitude of manipulatives and they are wonderful. They are. But this stuff in here? This is wrong."

Math Manual

The math manual was colorful and attractive. Lessons were clearly laid out for teachers to follow. Objectives were evident and necessary materials were listed. As I examined the document in more detail, I noticed the lesson format. The commercially written text specifically told the teacher what to say, word for word. It was like a script that any actor or actress could follow. Where did the teacher enter the learning process? It appeared that anyone could walk in and “teach” math by following the script set in place by someone who never met these children in that kindergarten program.

While the materials, the manipulatives, were developmentally appropriate for children to build mathematical concepts and understandings, the program did not account for individual differences, developmental processes, and teacher abilities. The stories that the teachers shared told that same story. My examination of the documents supported their story.
Social Studies Manual

Upon inspection of the social studies manual, I discovered the same type of system in place within the kindergarten program. Lessons were scripted and the teachers were trained during the summer to read and follow the curriculum. During a two day inservice, teachers discovered that all of their courses in theory, methodology, and practices during college could be replaced by a training session provided by their employer. For some teachers, this working educational system, county inservices, had replaced the valued and grounded degree for which they worked at least four years to complete. The document that I held could be read and followed by anyone at a fifth grade reading level.

I began to understand and feel their frustration and exasperation with the requirements. What was mandated by the system appeared to discredit the teachers in the process of education. Teaching, the art and science behind the profession, was not evident within these manuals for instruction. Pedagogy and theory were eliminated. Best practices were stripped from the lesson. Teachers, in a sense, were removed from teaching.

Lesson Plans

I requested lesson plans from the kindergarten teachers, only to discover that the principal in this building did not require formal plans to be written or submitted each week. Some of the teachers wrote informal plans that they shared with me. Every teacher had her own way of planning for instruction and scheduling the day.
The lack of formal requirements for planning seemed to be in opposition to the alternate documents set firmly by the county. With a mandated scope and sequence evident within the indicators, I expected to find plans with numbered indicators included each day. Jenny informed me that in other buildings within the county, teachers were instructed that they must list indicators, not only in plans, but also on the board each day. The principal at this school allowed his teachers to plan for themselves and told them that they were the professionals. One teacher said, “He trusts us to do what needs to be done.” They relished this professionalism and confidence from their building leader.

Jenny’s plans were the most formal of the team. She typed a schedule and instructional guide on her computer each weekend and listed times, events, and activities for each day. She also incorporated notes to herself about children, progress, and future ideas to be implemented. Jenny had a variety of volunteers, including her own mother, a former kindergarten teacher, who helped in her room each week. On her lesson plans, she included tasks for those helpers so that they were working with children on specific individualized areas.

Through examination of Jenny’s plans, and other schedules that teachers provided, I determined that the morning block was filled with curricular and academic instructional elements. All of the kindergarten teachers had their special classes, music, art, gym, and library in the afternoon. “Specials” lasted for 45 minutes each day and on two or three days each week, teachers had double specials and children were out of the classroom for 90 minutes total after lunch and recess. On the days with one special class, math was moved to the afternoon and literacy activities were extended in the morning.
Play centers were provided for approximately 30 minutes three (3) days each week. An example schedule is given in Table 2.

Table 2: Example Kindergarten Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8:30-9:00</td>
<td>Children arrive at school; due to bus schedules, arrival assumes thirty minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:00-9:30</td>
<td>Opening; helpers, music activities, sign language, word study (whole group)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:30-10:10</td>
<td>Phonemic Awareness Activities; Stories, whiteboard work, letter activities, sight word work (whole group)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:15</td>
<td>Outdoor Recess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:30-11:00</td>
<td>Weekly Sight Reader work (whole group)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:00-11:30</td>
<td>Deskwork (individual work)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:30-12:10</td>
<td>Math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:10-12:50</td>
<td>Lunch and Recess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:50-1:10</td>
<td>Water Break/Stories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:10-1:45</td>
<td>Gym (or other special)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:50-2:35</td>
<td>Music (or other special)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:35-3:10</td>
<td>Centers/ Play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:10-3:20</td>
<td>Prepare to dismiss</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other Observations

Jenny used some developmentally appropriate activities and practices interwoven throughout her day. After sitting and doing morning papers, the children came to the rug for the morning meeting. Again, she spoke with presence and respect. “Oh come closer for our class meeting. Oh this IS the best part. Let me get a good look atcha. Ahhh you are so nice looking, you are!” She had the children greet her as well as each other and the other adults in the room. They modeled that same kindness and respect that she showed each day.

On the days that I observed, Jenny started the day with a song. The children stood up and sang with the CD player. One song was called “The Friendly Place” and the
children sang loudly and happily. Jenny, of course, sang right along. She used sign as well, including the special needs child in the music and movement activity. The children were active and involved. They were also smiling and giggling.

Jenny also incorporated songs with curriculum content. On one occasion, she put on a song called “Old Mc Vowel” and the children jumped with joy! “See, Mrs. Pyles, I know they need this,” Jenny said to me from across the room. They sang with the music and practiced their short vowel sounds in the process. They also used sign language for each vowel letter. Jenny used motions with the song, helping to imprint the concept and sounds on their brains. It was active and engaging, and it was fun.

I connected myself to this experience. In my own kindergarten classroom, music was a consistent part of the day. I used songs as an instructional tool, providing rhyme, repetition and language experiences in which children became highly engaged. We would sing and dance, allowing for physical movement and brain development.

I also connected with Jenny’s use of sign language. I kept a sign language manual beside my rocking chair where we met for class meetings and morning greetings. Each day, we would learn a new sign and use it whenever we could during the day. These were practices grounded in child development knowledge and early childhood learning theory.

I was a bit surprised that Jenny addressed me as she sang with the children. It seemed to me that she wanted to make sure I understood that she knew what was
appropriate for children. I wondered if she was trying to prove a point. Perhaps she
noted this activity because it was appropriate – knowing that there might not be too many
other opportunities to exhibit those elements.

I also considered how she viewed herself in the teaching of young children.
From many of her comments and observations of her work, teaching seemed to be about
her. She stated that she knew “what these kids need.” But as she spoke to me in
interview situations and opened the door on her life, I wondered if she realized that she
was more teacher centered than child centered. Oh, it was clear she cared deeply about
children. You could see this in her actions, her commitment of time, and her language.
But as I uncovered her real story, I believed that she felt she was THE teacher and SHE
knew what the children needed.

On another visit later in the month, Jenny and the children were sitting together
on the colored carpet as I entered the door. Jenny smiled, waved, and continued with her
conversation. The children sat watching her, seemingly mesmerized by her voice. They
did not look at me or appear to notice her wave in my direction. As I sat down in my
usual spot, I heard her tell the children, “Well, since you have worked so hard today, we
are gonna get to do centers!”

The energy from the children radiated up through their faces. They were waiting
for those words. That was why they were so intent on listening and not bothered by my
presence in the room. Their smiles consumed the room.

Jenny discussed and reviewed the guidelines for centers and sent the children off
to begin. As she dismissed each one, she asked them, “What do ya have in mind to do
today?‖ This was a type of plan – do – review component, much like is seen in the High Scope model of early childhood programs. Each child explained their play plan to Jenny and then scurried off to a center area of the room.

This observation felt different. For the first time in months, the children become the focus of the room. Jenny presence faded into the back of the class as the children now directed the learning. The kindergarteners were busy, working, playing, discussing, negotiating, building, constructing, practicing, and learning. It was noisy, but not loud. That busy working noise was a happy sound in this kindergarten room. The children were different. They were in charge and they were involved.

As I watched them play, I suddenly became aware of Jenny. She had moved to the kidney-shaped table and pulled out what I knew to be her assessment clipboard. As she called the first name, I turned my head and only needed an instant to know who had been summoned from their play. The little girl dropped her head to her chest. She then looked at her friend, shrugged her shoulders, and slowly, lethargically, walked over and sat down with Jenny.

So play time, center time was important in Jenny’s classroom. The children waited with heightened anticipation as she informed them that they “earned” the right to play that day. I was concerned that play time was seen as a reward in the classroom, not only in the eyes of the teacher, but also in the minds of the children. I was encouraged when I saw her providing the time, but then that excitement lessened a bit as I learned she would use the time to assess. This seemed to be a mix of developmentally appropriate strategies with a pinch of academic accountability stirred in for good measure (pun intended). It was clear that recipe was unavoidable.
Jenny commented to me on one visit that she would not be in the classroom the following day. She informed me that the county provided substitute teachers on eleven days during the school year so that the classroom teachers could assess children on a one to one basis. Jenny’s assessment day was upon her. The days were spread out over the year in the following way: four (4) days during the first quarter, September through mid-November; three (3) days during the second quarter, mid-November through mid-January; two (2) days during the third quarter, mid-January through March; and two (2) days during the fourth quarter, April through mid-June.

Jenny also explained that while she appreciated the time that was provided to them to complete the immense number of assessments, she resented the fact that she was taken away from the classroom and the teaching. I learned that the substitute teachers were only required to have a high school diploma for day to day subbing. Jenny told me, “I just wanna be in there with my kids, ya know? I wanna teach, not do all dis other stuff that nobody cares about!” It was clear that the assessment component was an area of concern for Jenny.

Other developmentally appropriate events were observed during my time with Jenny. She included music and movement when she passed materials to children. She had them stand up on a tape circle that was on the carpet. Then she put on a march or some other kind of music and told the children in which direction to march, left or right. Then as they passed by her, they would pick up or turn in the white boards, or markers, or pom poms, whatever material they were using at that time. This simple way of handling materials enabled children to move, use muscles, and remain active. Jenny tried to
incorporate movement during the day. She showed that she understood that aspect to be important for children.

The Team

I observed that all six teachers worked together on many components of the teaching experience. Jenny was clear to tell me that each teacher was also an individual and no one felt pressured to do anything the same way. I observed this in action many times over the course of my visits.

The kindergarten teamed planned together to meet individual student’s needs with appropriate instruction. The teachers shared some responsibilities, but Jenny was the team leader and took on extra tasks. Jenny told me that she would get up at 4 A.M. on weekend mornings to work on school items. She told me that this allowed her to be finished in time to spend part of the afternoon with her husband. She also revealed that she arrived at school every morning by 6:30 A.M. Jenny commented that she needed that extra time to be prepared for meetings, for special needs children, and for the usual teaching expectations.

*When she told me about the time she committed to her work, I thought to myself that I could not compete. It crossed my mind that it was good that I resigned from teaching in 2005. I did not think I would be able to spend the time and commit my life in the manner in which Jenny seemed to do. I needed balance. I loved teaching, but I doubted that I was the caliber of commitment that I observed in this teacher.*
While she commented about the extra time she spent on schedules, data collection, and team related needs, Jenny seemed to relish this role. Some of the other kindergarten teachers alluded to the fact that Jenny was self driven to an extreme point. Other teachers clued me in that Jenny was an exception.

As I observed the team and listened to their conversations, I discovered that Jenny was her own entity. They informed me that she heaped pressures upon herself. The other team members did not “bother” Jenny. They let her do her thing and did not push issues with her. I observed that Jenny did not eat lunch with the team and they informed me that they accepted the social structure that was required to work effectively with Jenny. There was respect shown for all members of the team, and Jenny had earned admiration for her work with children.

I felt better about myself and my former teaching. The other kindergarten teachers made me realize that Jenny was not the requirement in teaching today. That was just the way Jenny exemplified her work. I felt relieved that I was not a slacker.

I also considered the conversations that seemed to happen between and amongst these educators. This team was a social group linked through work, with the elements of patterns of communication, influence, and coordination. There were assigned and negotiated roles with exhibited patterns of dominance. These teachers seemed to find a balance of task assignment as well as social relationships.
I remembered my own working groups and colleagues. There were years and situations when the grade level group in which I worked balanced the social structure well. Tasks were shared and respected was given. We seemed to work for the best of all children, not just the ones in our own room. Those years were enjoyable with little competition between teachers.

I also remembered years when cooperation was limited between colleagues. Some personalities fostered competition and did not participate in the sharing of ideas or tasks. The working relationship suffered and there was little social cohesiveness to those groups. Those were not my favorite years of teaching. An effective teaching team always provided a more comprehensive professional atmosphere and friendly working environment.

So did these kindergarten teachers exemplify teamwork in education? I supposed in a sense that they did. The team was able to draw necessary boundaries and negotiate important roles in order to work together in the education of their kindergarten students. They formed understandings of personality constraints and accepted the reality of the situation.

They also shared practical teaching ideas and tips. Jenny shared that the use of babysitting clips, colored paper clips on children’s work that was an idea from Nicole, one of the other kindergarten teachers. Michelle, Jenny’s suitemate, had introduced Jenny to music and activities to help relate content in a movement oriented manner. On one occasion, I observed Michelle bring new props that she purchased from the dollar store so that Jenny could utilize them with a specific song.
I wondered if teamwork, in the sense of the definition, meant more than what was portrayed in this place. Teamwork is defined as the cooperative and coordinated effort on the part of a group in the interests of a common cause. This was seen in the assembly of teachers; however, the definition of teamwork also includes the word “solidarity.” I considered that element to be lacking in the work of this team. There was a type of unity, but they were not united. While they worked without conflict, at least during the days that I observed, it was clear from the comments that there was not a sense of harmony among these teachers. They seemed to tolerate certain aspects of Jenny, both in her personality and her teaching style.

But, these teachers were able to share their environment and materials. Ideas were given but no one felt pressured to do anything they did not want to. Many times the teachers told me that they could do what they thought was best and that they respected each other’s individual styles. In these ways, teamwork was evident in this group.

Jenny and her suitmate, Michelle, used their negotiated team approach in their work with children. Several times in the fall, they sat and discussed children, grouping and re-grouping them based on their observations of skills and data from assessments. Then, three times each week, they split their children up into higher and lower groups. Jenny worked with the higher level in her classroom while Michelle took the lower group. They termed this time of day “Exceptional Experts” and the children seemed excited to change groups and classrooms for the thirty minute time period.

In Jenny’s classroom, the children sat on the floor and the teacher worked from the technology cart, using the Promethean Board for instructional purposes. They were
completing a Hanukkah paper, stretching words to write three sentences. As they worked, Jenny said, “Gosh, I’m so proud of ya. I am!”

The children worked with their papers on clipboards, watching and stretching words with Jenny. The teacher gave the children writing clues and hints. At one point, the children needed to write the word “happy.” Jenny thought out loud and said, “Hummm, I know I just used that word up here. Ah, here it is (pointing to the word in a former sentence). I’m just gonna copy that one cause I have it right here on my paper already.”

Later, Jenny addressed proper letter formation as they finished the paper. They needed to make a lower case ‘g’ in the word “good.” Jenny said, “Ok! Little g has his tail in the water, under the line! I’m gonna be checking to see who remembers that!” She looked around the group and exclaimed, “Ohhhh, I’m impressed! What great lower case “g’s” you made.”

After finishing their paper and sitting still for fifteen minutes, Jenny had them stand up and march around the circle to music as they returned their clipboards and papers. The children became confused as to which direction they were to march and some small arguments began to smolder around the circle. When Jenny realized the problem, she turned off the music and accepted fault for the problem. “I don’t mind admitting that I made a mistake, and I’m sorry. I was not clear in my directions to you. Now, let me try this again so we are ok.” She redirected them and the children successfully cleaned up the instructional materials.

The children from Michelle’s room departed to their class as Jenny’s students returned. Michelle and Jenny offered their thoughts as to the benefit of this grouping.
Jenny told me that Michelle worked well with the lower children and having them split into leveled groups enabled Jenny to push the higher students and enrich their learning.

Status groups in kindergarten classrooms were new to me. In my work teaching young children, my teammates and I had never considered grouping our children into levels, much as first grade teachers had done with reading groups for years. Perhaps this was due to the fact that we based our teaching pedagogy on developmental theories and appropriate practices. Perhaps we felt it was more important for a five year old to feel comfortable and confident in one educational setting with a trusted teacher with whom a quality relationship was formed. We thought that children needed stability and security and that fewer transitions would provide more educational time. There were differences in philosophies from my own teaching practices and those I observed with these teachers. I wondered if they made this choice, grouping children by ability levels, due to pressures to meet higher and increasing academic expectations.

Conversations and Interviews

Jenny and I found a time that we could sit and conduct a formal interview. We scheduled a time during her lunch and special time, 12:10 PM, when the children would be out of the room. When I arrived at the building, I walked into her room and Jenny was quietly talking with her suitemate, Michelle. They immediately stopped talking when I entered but then Jenny said, “Oh, it’s Jennifer. She can hear this stuff. She needs to hear it.” Jenny rolled her eyes and called me closer to where they were standing. She
continued to speak quietly, as if there was a conversation that we would share and in which no one else could be included. It was the sisterhood of kindergarten teachers, sharing secrets. It was also Jenny’s real story; the story of her feelings at that moment. The cover story was going to be shed.

Jenny apologized to me. She told me she would have to reschedule our interview time. It was apparent from her demeanor that she was a little frustrated. She had an angry expression on her face and she was holding herself with her arms as she began to explain what happened in her room that morning.

Earlier, Jenny was surprised by a visit from two parents. “Oh honey, I have a situation with some needy parents.” Michelle interjected that the parents were high maintenance. They continued to tell me the story of the morning, each one taking turns adding in the details.

Jenny told me that she was trying to help these parents allow their child to become more independent. “It isn’t working so well right now though. They came in this morning, unannounced, and they wanted to be right with their child, sitting next to her on the floor during circle time! Well, I was having no part of that! I wasn’t disrespectful, but I did explain that we couldn’t have that in our room. See, these people want canned curriculum. They don’t see all of the other stuff that we do in our jobs, so it was like they were here to inspect me. Now, these people are welcome in my room. You know that about me, Jennifer, but I just wished I had known they were coming in. Now they will be staying the rest of the day and the entire kindergarten team has to adjust our schedule. See we were going to do our movie day so we could do data input for report cards. Now with parents in the room, we are just a bit uncomfortable doing what we planned.”
While Jenny told her story, she continued to work around the room, setting up items that would be used in the afternoon. She was pulling out math materials and arranging items that she had not planned to use for a lesson that she had not intended to teach that day. Not only by her words, but also by her direct action and her abrupt speaking, I could tell that she was annoyed. I told her that I would be glad to reschedule our talk and that I understood completely.

I really did understand. Over the course of my own career, there were a few parents and several situations that caused me frustration and concern. I felt as if no matter how hard I tried, there were always some who just couldn’t be impressed. I took my work personally, so to be judged unfairly, at least in my opinion, was hurtful. Teaching for me was much more than a job. It was a personal passion and teaching had my heart. I thought that I knew how Jenny was feeling. We were connected but was I feeling a sense of bias? In our sisterhood, had I “sided” with the girls? There were issues to be considered in this situation.

I realized that the “real story” was not as attractive as her cover. I was curious as to her referring to parents, partners in the education of children, as “these people.” By using those words, Jenny, in a sense, put the parents in another camp. It seemed as if she viewed them as outsiders on that particular day and was bothered by their interest in the classroom. I wondered about her knowledge of the importance of families in the processes of education. I saw how she attempted to build relationships with children. I
was curious as to her relationships with adults, the parents and other teachers with whom she worked each day.

I also understood the frustrations of teaching in public schools. With increased standards and added curricular constraints, I too felt overwhelmed at times. Perhaps this was one of those days for Jenny. I was able to see the comradery of Michelle and Jenny. They were venting. I had vented at times in my own career. The teachers had planned to set aside some time to input data, record assessments, and stay on top of their requirements. By their own admission, they felt uncomfortable having parents know and see that they would show a movie instead of teach that afternoon.

The teachers were protecting their cover story. They were not letting the parents in on the real look of kindergarten. I considered what changes might happen, what the effects would be if families truly understood the complexity and burdened nature of teaching today. What if parents knew that teachers had to make time during the teaching day to stick numbers in a mandated chart? What if parents knew that many teaching hours were spent NOT teaching but assessing? What if parents knew that substitutes, who may not have a degree in education, had to be employed several days each quarter to cover classrooms and conduct the teaching component so that teachers could pull children to conduct the assessments? Did parents know how early Jenny came to school and how late she stayed? Were they aware that she spent countless hours by her own account working at home and that she spent several hours each Sunday in the classroom, preparing for their children?
I was excited to finally get time to sit with Jenny and listen to her share her thoughts, passions, and stories of teaching and life. We decided that after school would be the best time to talk. Jenny said there was less of a chance that we would be interrupted. “No promises,” she told me, but less of a chance.

We sat at her desk, she at the teacher’s position and me beside her. She asked me if it was ok if she ate her lunch while we talked. Jenny did not get a chance to eat that day because she was doing preparation for a meeting on her special needs child and then did assessments with children during her planning time. I told her I did not mind if she ate and we got settled at the desk.

I asked Jenny the first formal question: Tell me about your background in teaching. She leaned back in her chair and swallowed the bite in her mouth. She said, “Ok I think if you want to know about me you need to know about my family. I’m one of eleven children. I’m fourth oldest. I have seven brothers and three sisters so you know when I was growing up I was in charge of helping to clean at the house and also raising the kids.”

I did not have a chance to ask many more questions for the next half hour and Jenny’s lunch seemed to go untouched. She openly offered so much about her upbringing and background starting with her family. “There were eleven kids in eighteen years so there was always a baby around the house and so, um, what became interesting for me as a person, which does matter which is why what I do matters so much to me, maybe being around kids all the time, I just feel like that’s a natural place for me to be. You know, nothing surprises me. Parents come in here all da time and say ‘How do you listen to five people at one time?’ Well five is not much of anything when you’ve been
listening to so many people your whole life, and most of my family members are outgoing and articulate so…”

I began to understand her upbringing and how that contributed to the teacher she was today as she continued on with her story: “My family has been my best friends, so when I started to branch out on my own life it was kinda sad in some ways because I began to see that they were changing as they met their loved ones and then it became even more challenging as they each started raising their own families in different ways. So you know you soon learn, you get real stretched emotionally and your personality, ummmm becomes very encompassing because you realize they have the right to raise their kids the way they want to, and to pass judgment is highly hurtful and inappropriate. So my relationship with adults and parents in here, it just doesn’t bother me. I know there’s a lot of people who get real nervous when parents are in. I don’t think I’m like a non human being. I’ve got my parents who I know are high maintenance and I don’t feel comfortable when I have to confront them, but I’m not afraid to confront them. Ummm and I think they know, just like the kids, whether you are really just trying to be bossy or just trying to manage and to do things the right way. I have had to be accepting and open to a lot of things, so things don’t faze me. When parents want to come and conference with me and they have their way of doing things, see, I know that they know that I’m with them on that. See, you can pretend all you want. You can be professional and have your answers but I really want them to tell me what they want. And the bottom line is that they are the first set of people who are responsible for the lives of their kids. I just think of myself as a person who is trying to help create as many dreams as possible.”
Through her words and her practice, it was clear that Jenny knew the value of family in the education of young children. She included them in her room as helpers and seemed to form partnerships with them for the benefit of the children. Her whole life had been dedicated to kids. Teaching was just an extension of her life. Families were important to Jenny. This was not always evident in her actions and words.

What had her pre-service and in-service opportunities taught her? Was being part of a large family the basis for enough criteria for believing someone to be a quality educator? I considered the idea of being “born” a teacher. Using that as the qualifier for understanding families, children and teaching would have its limitations. If we required students to complete an accredited program in a higher education facility, then there was more that contributed to the creation of an effective teacher. Jenny did not talk openly about her pre-service training. She did not refer to in-service opportunities. I wondered if she considered those aspects in her development as a teacher. Teachers must be life-long learners.

Jenny continued to reveal more of her story: “I’ve learned, and maybe because I’m from this big family, that kids can be pretty independent. They don’t need all these bandaids. They don’t need all these smoltchy explanations! They get it! I know they get it, cause I helped raise six of them so you know this is just no big deal.” I again wondered if she truly thought this was the foundation for her knowledge of children and teaching; from those words, she did.
Jenny took a bite of her lunch, but continued to talk: “So I guess the big thing is that I have very high expectations for the kids that come in here, emotionally, socially, and academically. I expect them to act like a family and a team, and to be respectful cause that’s just the right thing to do.” Jenny said something in the next minute that provided more data for her story. “You know, I don’t say it often, but I heard this once. When ya die, God idn’t gonna ask you your I.Q. He’s gonna wanna know if you were nice to your neighbor. And that’s exactly where I’m comin from and that better be happenin in here. The rest is incidental.”

Jenny shared her insights on social and emotional aspects of teaching. It was clear to me that this was the first priority in her work with young children. “The thing is, if you have a very safe cooperative environment, I spend very little time disciplining and we get a lot done in here.”

She continued to explain that she works hard to get those aspects in place early. She used what she termed “legitimate awards” and gave those to children early in the school year to affect community, behavior, and respect. Her awards were given for: 1) I said something nice to my friend; 2) I used self-control; 3) I raised my hand to talk; 4) I was quiet in the hallway. She explained that she celebrated the children and they celebrated each other. “Now, they work hard for me. They’re not perfect, but as long as I know they’re tryin, it’s fine. It really is.”

I considered if she actually thought the children worked for her. This statement gave a picture of a highly didactic environment, one in which the teacher is the center of
the instruction. I had observed that for a majority of the day, the children were focused on Jenny and her teaching. While there were some “kid friendly” activities and Jenny spoke kindly to children, the teacher was the center of the learning. This was not congruent with developmentally appropriate practices, but reflective of how I had observed many kindergarten classrooms in public schools over the last five years. Children were not actively involved in the learning processes. Teaching was done to them.

After a pause, albeit brief, in her conversation, I interjected a question. Her comments about awards and community had me thinking about some other areas of child development. I was specifically interested in her familiarity with the research on using rewards and punishments in the social development of young children. I asked her on what theoretical background she placed her practices with children. Jenny looked at me for a minute, puzzled I think. Then she said, honestly as usual, “I’m not sure what you mean.” I began by saying that she obviously had knowledge of child development and teaching practices. I told her that she spoke of community and caring as well as social development. So I just wanted to understand on what theories she made these decisions for children.

Her answer was clear and direct. “Well, I don’t know all about dat stuff. I do what works. My experiences as a teacher make me do what I do. If it works, I do it again. If it dudn’t, I don’t!” I could tell from her tone that this was not an area in which I should probe. Perhaps she considered this question too “bookish” and not based in
practicality. Maybe she was uncomfortable, not knowing the answer. Jenny always had the answers. This time, she did not know what to say.

Jenny seemed to have formed a working theory of teaching. She had a degree. She took some master’s level courses. At some point, however, Jenny made a cross over from theoretical basis to experiential foundations. She seemed to forget, or at least overlook the explicit knowledge that she gained throughout her professional development. She now relied on her implicit knowledge, those things that she learned through life experience, habit, and experiential learning.

Jenny continued with the interview for the next thirty minutes. She offered the basic information about her background. She had been teaching for over twenty years. She received her undergraduate degree in elementary and special education. She did not complete her master’s degree due to family needs. At that time, Jenny’s mother-in-law needed to move in with her and her husband. “She lived with us for thirteen years and she and I were good friends. But I was music director at my church, and I was playing for all the services and I loved doin that. But I had to give it up to take care of her. So yea, that was hard. Umm, but, I’m not a bit sorry. And then she came to school and helped me every day. Having that help was so wonderful. It really was.”

It was apparent that family was a priority for Jenny. In her own words, it grounded her. I began to consider how her past experiences made her into the teacher, the person that she was in front of me and, perhaps, the person she would be in the future. All of her experiences brought her to this point in time. Experience alone, however, is not a firm foundation to position quality instruction and teaching of young children.
Her straight talking made me believe everything she said. I could see why she was the leader of the team. She was transparent, in her actions and in her story. With Jenny, there was no uncertainty. She gave it all up. She gave you the answer, no matter if that is what you wanted to hear or not. She was honest.

Honesty was evident in that she told her truth. I wondered, however, how open minded Jenny was after being so dominant in the conversation. I considered what teaching was to Jenny; a calling, a profession, a career, or a job. I thought I knew what her answer would be. Through the data, the observations and the conversations, I was beginning to uncover the story of Jenny and the teaching of kindergarten under the standards based movement and accountability model. Her answer would be simple. In Jenny’s mind, it was a calling to teach. She viewed herself as a “maker of dreams” and an indispensible part of the learning in kindergarten. In her heart, she felt that way. Teaching as a calling was a cover story.

In my analysis of her teaching, action, and words, teaching was a personal pedestal on which Jenny valued her own being. It had her life; HAD her life, not was her life. I considered all of the time she accounted for that was spent on teaching and non-teaching components. She notified me that she accepted all of the special needs children and that she spent considerable hours preparing for them as well as attending meetings with county officials. She requested the role of team leader and the added hours and responsibilities that were included with that honor.

I considered if this was an expected personality trait in Jenny’s family structure. She told me during a discussion that all of her brothers and sisters were well educated, outgoing, and articulate. Her mother had been a career kindergarten teacher within the
same county and was, according to Jenny, well loved and respected by the community. Jenny also told me that her older sister was in the process of completing her Ph.D. at the University of Tennessee. Self-motivation and high expectations seemed to be an aspect of being a member of Jenny’s family.

During an observation in December, Jenny pulled me aside and quietly asked if I could stay and talk some more with her. I was excited to stay and I was a little curious as to what she wanted to share. As the children bundled up and headed home in their bus lines and car rider lines, Jenny and I once again sat down for a chat.

Jenny began to disclose more about her team, and about the leadership. She told me that she came to this school when it was just built, six years prior. "It was neat and unusual here when we first got together. All of this talent? All of this power in this wing? It’s pretty neat. And when Matt interviewed me for the position, cause he made anyone interview that wanted to work in this building, I just said to him, you know I don’t things like everybody else. I’m just gonna be honest with ya. I cannot run my classroom probably like the county wants me to. I’ve gotta run it the way I wanna run it. And he was pretty loud and clear because he just said that he didn’t want anyone to be like anyone else. Just get the job done. And I’ll tell ya, he said that if anyone comes to his door with a question, he told me, ‘I’m gonna bring it to your door, so have your answers ready.’ And that’s it.”

Jenny continued to tell me that Matt allowed them do their job. He did not come in to the classrooms and tell them what to do. “He just wants the job done. And I gotta tell ya, I’m so thankful, cause otherwise, I think I would just have to quit. That may surprise you, but for me to be scripted and canned? That aint gonna work with me. It’s
not a power thing. I would resent the efficiency that I have here in this classroom being bogged down with a twenty-five thousand weight cause I gotta finish a freakin’ paper so I can plug it into the data on the computer on Friday?! I’ll tell you what, the assessments do bog ya down. There are more and more all da time. But I’ll save that story for another time.”

Through observations of Matt within the school and within the classrooms, it was clear that this principal was not just trying to get through the day without too much commotion. He was involved. I was invited to sit in with one of the kindergarten teachers on a session of what he termed “Kid Talks.” Matt held these meetings with each individual teacher once a quarter and invited the reading specialist to attend. I wondered why the guidance counselor was not involved to address social and emotional areas. It was clear that in this school, academics were the focus. During the meeting, whatever data the teachers had on each student was shared and discussed in order to create a plan of action and interventions for those who needed help.

Although this was focused on academics and positioned within data from standardized tests, the teacher’s input was also a component of evaluation. Matt was concerned about meeting standards and preparing children for future testing situations. He was also concerned about each child, as observed during the meeting. He wanted to know a little bit about each one, whether they were “on watch” or not. I was told by the kindergarten team that Matt had five children and that he treated the students in his building as if they were his own.

I was intrigued with the partnership and relationship that this teacher, and the others as I would later discover, had with their principal. “He gives us complete trust,”
one teacher told me. “He lets us do our job,” someone else said. This seemed to be a key component to this team and to the work that they were able to do for children each day. They did not feel watched or mandated. They told me that they were given professional freedoms and in turn they went “the extra mile” to do their best work. The researcher brain in me started to turn, but I quickly told myself….one study at the time.

Case Summary

I observed Jenny’s classroom from November through January. The observations always lasted longer than I expected. I wanted to collect sufficient data in order to reach saturation in telling Jenny’s story. I also enjoyed being in kindergarten. Each time I entered the classroom, I felt those same emotions, connecting my own teaching experiences to this setting. It became clearer to me that in this research time, my own experiences, my own story of teaching and working with young children would work into the data and into the narrative of these teachers. That was an aspect of this project that was unavoidable. It was also an aspect that added strength to the collection and analysis process.

Jenny was an emotionally attached teacher. She cared deeply for the children in her class and for their educational needs. She was a nurturer. It was in her genes and in her upbringing. Her family structure and responsibilities had helped to prepare her for this place and this moment in her career. She was a dedicated professional and goal oriented woman. She challenged herself and the children that she taught.

Jenny was frustrated with the expectations of the educational system. She commented on the time commitment that was required, not by the county, but in order to
complete. Jenny spent many hours beyond the school day as she prepared materials, recorded data, and planned for teaching. The time element became a strong thread in Jenny’s story. In the early morning, she began her day, answering emails and organizing items as the team leader. On the weekends, Jenny would, by her own admission, wake up by 5 A.M. so that she could dedicate several hours to work before her family was up and ready to share their time. Jenny arrived at school by 6 AM each day and was often the last one out the school door in the evenings. She commented that in the winter, she never saw daylight as she walked in before sunrise and left after sunset.
Chapter 5

Case Two – Nicole’s Story of Teaching, Success, and Achievement

“My high school guidance counselor told me I could do so much more than teach.”

Visits to Nicole’s Kindergarten Classroom

*A warm hug and friendly smile welcomed me as I stepped into Nicole’s kindergarten room for my first visit. This greeting did not surprise me as I felt a sense of kindness and caring when I first met Nicole. She was warm and friendly and at our initial meeting, she asked questions that showed her support of my work.*

*I arrived early in the morning and Nicole told me she was still getting ready, despite begin there since 7:00 A.M. She was very warm and mothering towards me as she led me over to where I could put my coat and bag. I felt at ease and relaxed. After all, this was another kindergarten room. This was friendly territory.*

Nicole told me that she was fine with me coming to observe and to stop in any time that I wanted. She said that her children were used to having people in the room, whether it was parent volunteers or other school workers. She explained that they would not be fazed by someone new.

As she worked organizing some papers on the table, Nicole told me that she had a mom coming in to help that morning. I asked her how often parents are in and she quickly responded, “Every morning and even a few afternoons each week. Those relationships are important.” I would later find out how committed her parents were to Nicole over the years.
Nicole’s suitemate, Susan, walked into the room from the pass way. She said hello and laughed with us about being nervous. Nicole chuckled and told us that she really was not nervous. She explained that she was comfortable and knew the importance of my study and the benefit to all teachers.

I was intrigued with the formality, albeit friendly nature of Nicole. She was a teacher in her manner and in her speaking. It seemed that she intended to keep this on more of a professional level, maintaining a comfortable situation, but minding her boundaries of practice and personal input. I wondered how much of her life story I would be able to uncover.

Susan stood there for a few minutes and talked with us about the children. She told me that she has some funny stories to tell about things the kids say. “Last week, I had one child come up to me and tell me that her mother said she needed the slime flu shot because she had so much gunk coming out of her nose.” The three of us laughed together, as if we were long-time friends sharing a common joke that only we would understand. I took note of the easy relationship between Susan and Nicole. It seemed that these teachers worked well as partners and a team. Relationships were important.

On one visit to Susan’s room, she took the time to sit with me and talk about her team. It seemed to be important to these teachers to get across the teamwork aspect of their efforts. Susan confided in me that she felt so lucky to share the suite with Nicole. “You see,” she quietly whispered, “Nicole lets me come over and celebrate my triumphs
with kids! She knows how important that is to me and she gives me that stage when I need it. I’m not sure I would feel comfortable doing that with just any teacher.”

Special bonds seemed to exist between suitemates and I wondered how those combinations of living arrangements had been made. Susan needed Nicole on certain levels of human desire. I did not see these two teachers vent, as I observed with Jenny and Michelle. From the observations that were made and the comments shared in conversation, Susan and Nicole had a comfortable working relationship that was affective and professional. There did not appear to be any tip-toeing between these two teachers. They were comfortable with each other.

As I watched Nicole interact with the children on the mornings I observed, I noticed the loving way she greeted them, while keeping the focus on the work. There were hugs and hellos to every child with pushes and encouragement to get busy. Nicole said, “I love the hugs. They are so nice. You have been here awhile, though. You need to come in and get busy.”

Music escaped from Susan’s room into Nicole’s, lifting the spirit of the setting, as I watched the children settle into their day. They sat around the floor, working with math counters, puzzles, and games. The children were able to choose these activities for themselves and worked with friends in pairs or three’s. It appeared to be a relaxing time for the children.

During this morning time, I watched Nicole, who was not showing signs of relaxation but was at ease with the children. She checked homework folders and bookbags. She went into the hall to hurry children along at their lockers and then came back into the room to manage the activities.
Nicole spoke with the parent volunteer, making sure she had her instructions, deemed “love notes”, for the day and making sure she felt welcome. It seemed as if they were friends. She was kind and mothering to the parent and then Nicole told me that her own daughter was the babysitter for this family. Community connections were becoming apparent.

She also talked with the children, getting down on their level and listening to every word. She seemed to be an active listener, looking directly at the child, and repeating back the important parts to make sure she got it right.

One little boy brought a paper over to Nicole. She sat down in the rocking chair and held the paper carefully. Nicole asked the boy to read it to her. Her voice was quiet and calm. She did not seem rushed, even though I noticed the clock ticking toward the announcements bell and pledge time. She was in the moment, interacting and connecting with him.

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*She took her time with each child and was present in her discussions with them. I thought about that word as I wrote it in my notes; present. I would need to reflect on that with Nicole. I thought to myself that I may need to reflect on it in my own teaching and work. What does it mean to be present? It was an observable act by Nicole and by Jenny. Would I see it from each of the kindergarten teachers?*

When time began to push Nicole, she looked over at me and said, “Watch this.” I was curious as to why she caught my attention. Did she want to prove something? Was this a moment to “show off?” I remembered that Jenny had also called my attention to
something that she did with her children. Did these teachers feel a need to provide evidence of their abilities? That could easily be confirmed through general observations of their classrooms. As I spent more time with Nicole, I began to understand that there was no need for her to “show off” her abilities. She wanted the children to show off. She was her kindergartener’s best advocate.

She turned off the lights and every child froze in place. Nicole began to sing a clean-up song and the children joined in while putting their things away. They gathered on the rug as Nicole corralled them with her arms like a western cowboy, all the while singing in her pleasant voice.

A few boys were taking a little extra time, meandering around the water fountain. Nicole said to the group, “By the time I count to 100 by 10’s I need everyone on the rug with us!” The children joined in as they counted up with the countdown. The boys quickly completed their business and joined the group on the floor. Nicole used these techniques as effective elements of classroom management with young children.

This was the focus of the methods used by Nicole in her classroom system. I noticed that her priority was to have each action become related to some curricular component. During one observation, as they needed to line up for lunch, Nicole said, “Now when Mrs. K calls your name, tell me a compound word and you may line up.”

The children began to raise their hands and vocalize the usual, “Ohh, Ohh’s” to be noticed. Nicole just put up one finger in the air and the room became silent. She then called on a little girl who was raising her hand quietly. “Mary? Tell us a compound word.” The girl replied, “Butterfly” and Nicole beamed! “Yes,” she said. Then she put one hand in the air as if grabbing an imaginary object. She pulled it down and said,
“Butter.” Then Nicole put her other hand up in the air, repeating her actions and said, “Fly! Butterfly!” This activity continued until each child had offered their idea and lined up for lunch.

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I noted in my journal that I would ask Nicole why she included this movement element as they listed compound words. Brain research has reported that a strong connection exists between physical education, movement, and increased cognition. I wanted to find out if Nicole understood that movement influences the brains of students. Did she derive this practice from explicit knowledge? What was the basis of this act in her teaching?

That same day, I spoke to Nicole about her use of physical movement as she reviewed compound words with the children. I asked her why she incorporated body motions into the lesson and to explain the basis of her thinking in that activity.

She looked at me for a long moment and said, “Gosh, I don’t know why. I guess I have always done that, you know, to get them moving and to feel the two parts of the word. Kids need to move!”

She walked away towards a group of children as she was finishing her sentence and so I was not able to probe into her thinking. I felt as if she attempted to escape the conversation as perhaps she did not “know why” she did things the way she did. This was an example of a working theory of knowledge. Nicole did not share any basis in child developmental knowledge linked to learning and cognition. She simply stated that “kids need to move” and that she had always “done that” in that way.
Nicole used many traditional kindergarten components in her schedule. On several occasions, I observed circle time, during which the children sang songs about the days of the week and months of the year. They positioned the correct date on the calendar and discussed the weather, recording data on the weather chart. Nicole sat in her big wooden rocking chair while the children sat on the bright carpet facing her with their legs “like a pretzel!”

During circle time, Nicole had the children read a morning message. This was a brief paragraph, written as a letter to the children, telling them about the upcoming day’s events. Nicole used this as a lesson in language and literacy. On one occasion, she called attention to punctuation and had the helper circle question marks, exclamation point, and periods.

Nicole led her children to answers and allowed them to respond correctly. On one visit, during the morning message Nicole pointed to the capitol letter at the beginning of a sentence and said, “I notice that there is an ummmmm..........” The children quickly filled in her thought with, “Capitol letter.” Nicole continued, “Yes, a capitol letter at the beginning of the sentence and an ummmmmm.........” The small voices rang out, “Period!” “Yes, a period at the end,” exclaimed Nicole.

During a separate observation, Nicole was introducing a big book to the group sitting attentively on the carpet. She read the title to them and then told them the author’s name. Nicole said, “Now the author is the person who ummmmm.....” The children yelled out, “Writes the story!” Nicole smiled and said, “Oh yes, the author writes the
story. And the illustrator ummmm…..” Again, the voices called out together, “Draws the pictures!” “Yes,” Nicole agreed, “The illustrator draws the pictures.”

Nicole allowed her children to exhibit their knowledge and feel confident in their answers. She was meeting standards and expectations. It was clear from documents that literary elements, such as author and illustrator, were part of the kindergarten requirements. Nicole incorporated the standards in a meaningful way, reviewing elements when connections would be concrete and significant for children.

Conversations and Interviews

Nicole invited me to come to her room early one morning so that we could sit and talk about her teaching and her life. She informed me that since she dropped her daughter off at high school at 7 AM, she would be to school shortly after and that I was welcome to come anytime. I noted that like Jenny, Nicole arrived to work well in advance of the required starting time. Committing extra hours to the job of teaching was a common theme with these teachers.

As I walked into the building early that morning, the office was dark and the halls were quiet. I peeked down the second grade hallway only to see closed doors and dark rooms. The first grade hallway had a few lights on, but it was the kindergarten wing that was full of life and light. As I entered the corridor, Jenny and Michelle were talking outside one room. They saw me approaching and Jenny said, “Well, there’s our girl! How are ya?” I stopped and shared casual conversation with them as we discussed the weather and our weekend activities.
Cathy and Crissi, the other kindergarten teachers in the building, were in the workroom and stepped out to say hello. As the five of us talked in the hall, we heard Nicole shout from her room, “Jennifer is here for ME today ladies! You can’t have her!” We laughed and I called out, “I’m on my way!”

Later at home, I reflected that being in that group, sharing stories of family and life, made me feel as if I was part of the team. It took my mind back to my own teaching and teamwork with other professionals in kindergarten classrooms. I always enjoyed those years when our team worked together, collaborated, cooperated, and felt a sense of solidarity. There were years when some of those elements of teamwork were strained by one or more teachers. But there were years when it just clicked and teamwork was defined in our actions. Positive professional relationships were important in my own story of teaching. It made my work easier and more enjoyable to share ideas, thoughts, and events with trusted colleagues.

As I entered Nicole’s room, she was busy putting things away in math bins and straightening up a table with art materials spread across it. We said our hellos and Nicole walked over to give me a hug. Again, this action did not surprise me, as Nicole always seemed to have a mothering nature with adults and children.

We sat down at a table across the room by the windows. Sunlight streamed in, filling the place with warmth in addition to that provided by this teacher. It just felt happy there. The bright colored curtains, the sunshine, and the smiling teacher made me feel comfortable and at ease. Children must feel those same emotions in this classroom.
Nicole sat down and leaned towards me across the table. Her manner and her dress were professional. I was anxious to discover more about her story. I began by asking, “So tell me about your background in teaching,” and Nicole started:

“I knew I wanted to be a teacher when I was in second grade because Mrs. Trice had the kind of job that I knew I wanted to have and ummm I would go back and help her in the summer. Then when I was in high school and it became time for career track, my guidance counselor said that I could do so much more than teach.”

I looked at Nancy and she must have read the surprise in my eyes. “Uh huh, true story,” she continued. “But I stuck to it and knew that was my goal. I knew that success is not measured by wealth or fame, but by significance. And teaching matters. So I went from New York, upstate, to ____ College, and got a good degree in early childhood. Now I chose ___ College because it was a private women’s college at that time and ummmm to everyone’s liking ummmm, actually I knew of another gal who had gone there, a friend, years before, so anyway it was a good fit for many reasons for me. So I graduated, umm, actually a semester early. I took some advanced classes and got a job right out of, in F County, right out of student teaching. I taught K and first grade and the position I got was at the school where I student taught. It just fit. Ok, so I was there for, oh I can’t even remember, many years. I also got my master’s degree in special ed and certification in educational administration. I thought I wanted to be a principal. That seemed to be the logical progression for me. But I loved teaching so much.”

I asked Nicole, “So then how long have you been teaching?”

She replied, “Ummm well, for almost twenty years now!” She smiled and seemed proud of her answer. My children are 17 and 14 and after I had children I stayed
home for a while and then came back and wanted to work just part time. When I came back, kindergarten leant itself to part time because it was half, just the morning, so I job shared with a dear friend of mine for five years and then went to two half days, and when kindergarten went full time, full day, so did I!”

It was pleasant to sit and talk with Nicole. She was very professional in her conversation. She seemed to think about her answers before she spoke which made me wonder if she carefully considered what she said in order to remain professional. Although she was friendly, she did not treat this talking time as a conversation between friends.

I then asked, “Ok, well, thinking back over your career, can you think of some high points?”

Nicole paused and caught her words in her mouth for a moment. Then she began, “I think there is an ebb and flow in one’s career. The enthusiasm and wide eyed wonder in new teachers is ummm exciting but with it come the angst of paperwork, parent conferences, curriculum, using that as a bible instead of a guide, so first year teaching was wonderful because of the wide eyed wonderment. Ummmm but when one becomes more relaxed and confident and you have more in your pocket to pull from, the less important are the teaching guides. You have created your files and ummm so that’s a great time in teaching. I think that came about year five ummmm when there weren’t the added pressures of children. See I taught for 8 years before I was even married so it was my life. It was my life and you could really put everything into it.”

“I think another exciting time is ummm as I said when you’re relaxed enough and you can walk in and it’s not all about what’s in the plan book but what’s here to draw
from. To do what you know is right as opposed to what is written down by a curriculum specialist who may not have been in your classroom to see what really happens. I think curriculum is written to the nth degree and as new teachers we think that the only way to get from A to Z is through the curriculum, that is it is linear. But as seasoned teachers, I think we know that we have to get from A to Z but there are different paths to get there.”

Nicole shyly said to me, “I do have one very special memory, but I don’t want it to sound egotistical.”

I encouraged her to continue.

“Well a couple of years ago, I was honored by parents and staff for being Washington Post’s Agnes Myers Teacher of the Year for F County. But I truly credit the paperwork that parents and teachers did to honor me with that and that really was a highlight because it was a celebration of ALL teachers not just me and ummm, but that was a highlight. It keeps me humble, because do these kids know? No. Do they care? No. It’s….the reward doesn’t’ come from that or the paycheck, you know that. Its’ the achievement of a skill that is attained or the light bulb that goes off, or the hug that you get in the morning, ummm, from a five year old that is the affirmation.”

“Now I think I’m driven. Having children of my own make me a better teacher. I see the expectations that they want, that they need. They are bright children and yet they still have goals and I want THEIR teachers to shoot for the stars for my own children. I know that my task as a teacher is not to satisfy the children and make it all fun and games, but to satisfy the parents, because I think the parents in this community also have the same aspirations that I do. I am a parent in this community. I have high expectations
because that means they have a leg up for tracking that is inevitable for college and for career.”

I asked Nicole, “Tell me how you consider families in your work.”

“I think we are partners in this gig. When I assign homework it is not to put an extra 20 minutes on a parent’s schedule. It is my way of communicating to parents what is happening in the school, so they can have a dialog with their child at home, so there is a link between school and home. Parents truly are the first educator and I let them know that. At parent conferences, although we sit across the table, is more of a dialogue than a monologue. We learn a lot about kids from the parents. I think parent respect me because even if a child is gifted I still will give them goals ummm to work on as they walk away from conferences. I am very candid. I don’t sugar coat a lot of stuff, and parent appreciate that. I treat their children as if they are my own, giving three warnings, time out, heads down, and I think because I treat the children that way, there is a trust, a leaned expectation. For example, when we cross group, I would be more hesitant to push, push, push other teacher’s children because I haven’t developed that relationship of ‘I love you and that’s why I want you to do this’ --- what you would do with your own child. So that’s why I like having my own students to push, push, push.

With Nicole, I understood when she was finished with her answers. She spoke and then she stopped and smiled at me. There was give and take in this conversation, and Nicole remained professional at all times. She did not talk about her upbringing or her personal life. She stuck to the story and kept the boundaries of her position clearly marked. It was not that she was closed or cold in her personality. She stayed inside the
margins of the negotiated format of our work together. I respected her for that as well as for her work with children.

When she answered the question, I moved on. “So can you recall a time when things were difficult for you in your teaching?”

She paused and caught her breath. Nicole leaned back in her chair. I could tell from the puzzled look on her face that she was not sure what to say. I wondered if she wanted to stay in her professional role, maintaining her boarders of the consummate expert. Perhaps it was uncomfortable for her to admit or discuss a time that might have caused her trouble. I repeated the question to her and then she spoke, very softly.

“I remember a certain day, just one day specifically. It was a first year teacher mistake. I can’t believe --- I’m ---- I do, I do think about this. Ummm there was a child who would continually laugh at children, and I would reprimand him; ‘We don’t do this, we don’t do that.’ I wasn’t a mother yet or a seasoned teacher. Well he did something wrong and I laughed at him.” Nicole looked down, still showing the disappointment through all the years that had passed. “He cried and I immediately --- gosh. That was so long ago and I remember that. I was embarrassed – for him. I just wished I could have rewound that and taken it back, even after all these years. I told him I was sorry and I hugged him. I don’t think it scarred him as much as it affected me to know that you don’t bully kids. And whether that was just immaturity on my part, not having children of my own – that was a terrible teacher mistake that I will always remember.”

I had nudged over that barrier of her maintained professionalism. Nicole was showing some personal emotion as she recounted this story. I commented, “It stuck with
you.” She quietly responded, “It has, and I can, I can still feel that emotion that went with it. And I think about, you know, character counts education wasn’t big back then. So bullying wasn’t a word that came forth. Trustworthiness, citizenship, caring. Those are things that we teach now. Those are the ways we run our classrooms….”

I was not surprised that Nicole brought us back to that door. She allowed a glimpse into her emotions and her person, but she quickly refocused the camera back on the work at hand. She was finished with that question and that was clear as she leaned forward, looked directly and me and smiled as if to say, “What’s next?”

I continued our conversation by asking, “So you talk about character counts and caring. Tell me about your philosophy of teaching and working with young children in your classroom.” I was hoping to make her more comfortable with a more work related question, but hoped that she would still allow me to peek over that wall.

She did not hesitate in her reply. “I expect of myself and my students to be and do all we can be, while treating all with the kindness and respect that we deserve from others. I guess, simply put – I think I can, I think I can, I think I can. I feel that addresses the academic and social dynamics that take place in this classroom every day.”

Nicole continued with her story. “As their teacher, I have the profound task of being a mentor and a role model, ummm, to my students. It is important that I demonstrate the same level of effort and excellence and enthusiasm that I expect of my students. I have high academic expectations, but in fun ways. I break down challenging skills into smaller steps to ensure success along the way. In Kindergarten, there is a place for rote learning and memorization in the content areas, and, once there is a firm base, for
instance with ummm phonics or math facts – then children must be challenged to use skills to a ummmmm a higher level.”

“Being caring and respectful, trustworthy….that is a priority in my classroom. That has always been of utmost importance to me. These are --- ummm – personal qualities that I have and model --- as well as qualities I teach and expect in my classroom. See, the goals that I have for my classes are always curriculum based. The essential curriculum and standards drive my lesson planning and instruction. I am a very goal oriented person and, certainly --- that personal characteristic influences the way I approach teaching, and ummmmmm, how I interact with students.”

“For instance, DIBELS fits my style. See there is a very structured timeline for gathering data into the hand held Palm. It is in my, ummmm, nature to follow this progression – introduce skills, teach, evaluate, and reteach. I thrive on structured organization – as do my students! Clarity and consistency is the key to success in our classroom!”

I was exhausted. If I had not been sitting there, present in the conversation, I would have thought it was all scripted and rehearsed for my benefit. Nicole’s story included many components of academic achievement, for herself and for her kindergarteners. I wondered as to the type of student she must have been through her years. I thought back to the comment made by her high school guidance counselor, “You can do so much more than teach.” Perhaps she made teaching more than teaching. I discovered through conversations during observations that Nicole had been awarded many honors during the course of her teaching career. She had been nominated for the
county Chamber of Commerce excellence in teaching award for two consecutive years. She was a finalist for the Charles E. Tressler Distinguished Teaching Award as well as the Disney’s American Teacher Award. Could it be that in her accolades and decorations, Nicole had found a platform to promote herself and be “more than a teacher”? I wondered why this was an important part to her story.

Was teaching a calling, a passion, a career, or a job? This same question crept up during my time with Jenny. Of course these teachers cared about children. In their manner and in their speaking, they showed great ability to be present and connected with children. Their rooms showed attention to child centered arrangements and activities. They spent countless and un-required hours planning to teach, preparing the environment and materials, and recording necessary data. They put time and effort into their work.

The question of legitimacy came to my mind. Kindergarten teachers are often portrayed and depicted as cute, kind, sweet ladies who have an immense amount of patience. Did these teachers feel legitimate in their profession? Did they add hours to their work day and weight to their workload to enhance their standing, their validity within the public school structure? I wondered if Nicole’s awards and honors provided her with a sense of value, outward notability, for the work she loved. Perhaps the rewards of hugs, glowing “light bulbs”, and achieved student skills was not enough. Isn’t it human nature to want to be noticed, by peers, friends, those in power? Identity and legitimacy are in part given to us by others.

I also considered that perhaps those of us in ECE have brought this on ourselves. Have we “asked for” the pushdown as we have stood our ground and demanded to be
noticed? Early childhood education is in the spotlight as the effects of quality experiences have received greater recognition in the last decade. I considered that perhaps that focus has shifted away from developmentally appropriate instruction to more a more academic structure due to the information about the crucial and sensitive periods during the early childhood phase. Perhaps the message was not delivered appropriately or perhaps the information become misguided in the process of implementation.

“So what are the important aspects of your teaching and working with young children?” I tried to clarify the question. “What are important elements of the work you do in here each day?”

Nicole replied, “You mean curricular areas?”

Again, this response did not surprise me. Curriculum was the focus for Nicole and I tried to put assumptions away as I listened to her reply.

“Any element that is important to you in your teaching,” I affirmed.

“Ummmm, probably something that sets me apart from the others is the writing. I emphasize the listening, speaking connection and I do that with stretching of sounds, umm, expecting flowing thoughts, obviously not perfect mechanics in kindergarten but other teachers are sometimes in awe of what my kids can produce in writing.”

Nicole stopped speaking. She had answered that question and was ready to move on. I connected this style of conversation with her comments about her teaching style. She had a plan. Nicole set goals with this interview and followed a preset progression. If
she felt it necessary to expand upon an area, she would continue. If not, the question was answered and I knew it was time to move on.

The room seemed to become brighter as children were starting to arrive. I suggested to Nicole that we sit and talk another time that was convenient with her schedule. She smiled and said, “That will be great,” as she stood up and accepted a hug from outstretched arms. I smiled as those same arms then reached towards me. “Oh a hug for me too,” I asked? “We’re all friends,” the child replied.

Other Visits to Nicole’s Classroom

I was able to observe Nicole on many occasions and was always comfortable in her classroom. She formed relationships with children and connected to them on a high level. They showed great love for their teacher and greeted her during the day with hugs, hellos, and high-fives! The children worked together in following procedures and working on their activities. There was a gentle routine to the day that was infiltrated with academics and high standards but surrounded with love and affection. Expectations were high, but goals were achievable. This was the nature of developmentally appropriate practices in Nicole’s classroom.

During one observational time, Nicole walked past me and commented that things in her room were different now than they were years ago. I made a note in my journal to discuss this thought with her as I thought it was an area that we should discuss. That very afternoon, we sat down at the end of the day to reflect upon her teaching.

“You said that things are different now than they used to be. Could you talk about that?” I asked.
“Oh yea. Well, when I started this gig, the day was just half day and there were thematic units, ummm units based on children’s interests. For example, Mexico was the ethnic unit and in September we learned about safety. October, arachnids. November, family. In December, we had a great toy unit! January was Mexico, February was friendship. March was castles and characters and with that we had a feast so our reading stories were about fictional castles and characters. Our feast had a huge knights of the round table. We had chicken legs and ate with our hands. We had learned that they didn’t use utensils. So it was fun and those were memories created. Yes, we still had listening, speaking, reading, writing, math. But it was entrenched into that unit for that month. Our centers changed each month. Our bulletin boards changed each month based on those units. When I would ask children at conferences what was their favorite part of school, what are some special memories, it would be the feast. It would be the fiesta with the piñatas. And now when we ask children, you know what is their favorite part of school, the answer is centers.”

I probed deeper and asked about centers in Nicole’s room. Centers were eight different areas of the room related to curriculum components but based in playful activity. In Nicole’s room the centers were writing, blocks, home living, community, computer, math, science, art, puzzles and school center. The children were able to work in these centers for about twenty-five minutes three or four days a week.

On many occasions, the teachers commented on the amount of assessments that were required within kindergarten now. Nicole informed me that she regularly gave up planning time to test her students. She followed them to art class and pulled one at the
time out into the hallway to test them on phonemic segmentation, math concepts, and literacy elements.

Nicole informed me that on the previous Tuesday, they had a movie day with their principal’s blessing. During this time, they pulled children and assessed. “I don’t want to say it’s optimum teaching, but if we think assessing is part of teaching and its diagnosis and we adjust instruction based on the outcomes of that testing, then it is very important.” There was that professional, Nicole. She seemed to spin things to sound as if they were the correct thing to do, even if she believed that they were not. She might have been a good politician!

Imagine a time when five year olds are taking tests during their music class. Imagine a setting where kindergarten children are pressured to perform well and miss gym class to show their abilities on standardized tests. Consider the fact that teachers must take time from the regular school day to show a movie to children during which they pull individual students to complete assessments. If you walk into this primary building, where teachers try to do their best for kids every day, you don’t have to imagine these images. Reality is as described and translates over to many other early childhood classrooms.

These teachers, just like Nicole, use their “planning” time to do expected assessments with children. They try to save as much of their teaching time as possible for instructional purposes, but in so doing, must relinquish their own professional blocks to complete requirements. I was informed that the kindergarten children in this county have 32 math assessments during the year, as well as a multitude of literacy checks for
data that must be collected to provide accountability and numbers on which to base decisions about teaching, instructional practices and student placements.

Although the teachers in the kindergarten team told me about their allowed professionalism, the trust that is given to them by the principal, and the freedom they have to teach the “right way”, these assessments showed the perpetuating mistrust in education that persists today. These teachers are experts, but must prove their abilities and sound professional decisions though data collection measures. Several of the team informed me that the data “comes out pretty much the way we expect. If you know your children, the data just tells you what you already know,” Nicole stated one day as she sat at a computer after school, typing in numbers into spreadsheets for “someone” to see.

Michelle, Jenny’s suitemate, confirmed those thoughts as she shared the Kindergarten unit guides for math and literacy as well as the “year at a glance” document. On the latter, the county provided a school year layout with numbered indicators as to what every kindergarten teacher should be teaching each day. Michelle commented with frustration in her voice, “How the heck do they know what my kids know? How do I follow their mandates and not bore some kids while killing others with too high of expectations?” There was dissatisfaction in the team when we discussed the amount of paperwork and documents that were part of their everyday work. They told me that some of these materials just became bookends and paperweights.

Michelle also informed me that the county spent thousands of dollars per classroom on their new math program, *Investigations*. She shared with me the materials and manipulatives that were ordered for every kindergarten class in the county. Michelle believed that the materials were wonderful and that providing hands on items was crucial
to developing math skills; however, the teachers did not agree with the philosophy of the program or the scripted lessons that were provided.

I wondered how much waste there was in these classrooms, and possibly in every American classroom around the nation. School districts buy into commercial based programs that guarantee increasing test scores. They pay millions of dollars to purchase such materials and put them in classrooms, often with training paid to those same companies to prepare teachers to utilize their product.

These teachers used the manipulatives, but were given the freedom to pick and choose what they used from the manuals and workbooks. They employed their professional judgment to do what was right for their children and provide appropriate instruction and practices. If administration would include teachers on decisions about what is needed in their room to enhance instruction and boost children’s abilities, they may be able to save thousands of dollars per room which could be reserved for areas and practices proven to aid learning, such as reduced class size.

It seemed that the assessment piece, along with the scripted materials, was a common theme of contention for these teachers. Nicole, the professional, never complained as if I was her friend. She did not vent or show any frustration. She just did her job and jumped through the hoops. She completed the assessments and recorded her findings. She utilized the materials that were provided and followed the plan from the country. Nicole also used her experience and her knowledge to do it in a way that worked for her students. She said, “You can get from A to Z on many different paths – as many paths as you have children. There is no one set way.” This statement gave me another peek into Nicole’s philosophy of teaching. She differentiated instruction. She
used appropriate strategies while balancing what was expected or required. I considered that this may be the frustration of all kindergarten teachers in today’s educational environment.

Case Summary

Nicole was a professional in her mannerisms and in her work with children. During the four months that I observed her, Nicole never griped or complained. She didn’t share too many secrets. In a sense, Nicole provided only her cover story. She was careful to give facts without giving opinions. This provided a balance to the openness of Jenny’s story.

Nicole was warm and friendly with everyone. She hugged the children and greeted adults as friends. Every time I observed in her classroom, she always appeared happy and pleasant, with a smile and a positive attitude.

I hoped that I could probe deeper into her real story, and gather more information about her life, her dreams, her past, and her goals. Within a few interactions, I discovered that Nicole would be my surface data. She would only supply the professional information and she would always maintain the boundaries of our roles as researcher and participant. I considered what else I could have done to allow her to open up her story. As I reviewed my notes and our conversations, I felt as if that was the story of Nicole. She was the happy, positive kindergarten teacher who pushed her students to achieve and loved them in the process.
Chapter 6

Case Three – Crissi’s Story of Challenge, Teaching, and Life Events

“The loss of a child really affected me as a teacher.”

The “New” Teacher

Crissi and I met at the initial teacher’s meeting in Jenny’s room when I introduced the research study and the aspects of my work. She sat quietly at the table and did not say a word during that first gathering. I noticed her smile but I was aware of her youth. Crissi sat attentively at Jenny’s table and nodded at appropriate times. She appeared to be positive about the research, but she also seemed to have some apprehensions. I knew I needed to speak with her privately and I wanted to put her at ease.

As the meeting concluded, I walked out into the hallway where Crissi was waiting for me. She asked me to come into her room for a minute and I gladly agreed. I knew this was a chance to form an initial bond of communication and trust that would be vital in uncovering her story.

Crissi told me that she was very willing to participate in the research, but that she wanted me to know that she was a little nervous about being observed. She went on to tell me that she was the newest teacher in the kindergarten team and that she felt other teachers offered stronger examples of teaching.

I asked Crissi if we could sit for a minute and she agreed. I explained to her that this research was not evaluative in nature. In an attempt to connect, I informed her that I also became nervous when people observed my teaching at the beginning of my career. We shared some common feelings and situations that seemed to strengthen our primary ties. As we discussed the process of the study and she realized that we would do some
talking (interviews) as well as observations, she seemed to release some of her tensions. As I left Crissi’s room, she thanked me for reducing her fears and nervousness.

Visits to Crissi’s Room

I was excited to finally have the chance to begin observing in Crissi’s room. As I drove to the building on the initial observation day, my heart and thoughts raced as I prepared to enter another classroom – the new teacher’s room. I was also concerned that Crissi might still feel some apprehension about my presence during the day and how that emotion might affect her teaching and her style. I questioned myself and my abilities to make her feel comfortable with me and make myself seem invisible to her. Crissi was the novice in the group. She was the youngest in both age and years of service. I remembered my first few years of teaching and the excitement linked with insecurity as to my abilities and wondered if Crissi, or all beginning teachers, have those same emotions. A fleeting thought passed through my mind that at some point it would be an interesting idea to research novice teacher’s emotions during the course of the first professional year. I am sure that all teachers remember those initial days and weeks of teaching and the intense feelings that were attached. I pulled back and reminded myself that this research contained those emotional aspects with these kindergarten teachers and might lead me in that direction.

I walked into Crissi’s room prior to the children arriving. She greeted me with a professional but friendly handshake and I sensed her granting of respect in her actions towards me. I wondered if she realized how much I already respected the work that she
did with children and how excited I was to see her teaching style and her teaching story come to life. We chatted for a few minutes about the cold winter weather as she led me over to a table where I could set up my materials for the day. Her son Matt, who attended kindergarten in Nicole’s classroom, was playing with puzzles on the floor and a student teacher was also present in the classroom, preparing materials by the group meeting area on the floor. I felt comfortable. Again, I was in another kindergarten room with a different teacher. This place had the same secure feeling as all the others. I wondered if that was the nature of the kindergarten environment or the nature of the teachers of kindergarten. This would be a question to consider in my work.

Crissi was busy at the table near the door of her classroom, putting tape on a turkey picture. She explained to me that when the children arrived each morning, they had a warm up to do at their seats. Crissi told me that she likes for them to settle into their seats for a few minutes when they first arrive. On this particular day, the children had a Thanksgiving paper to color. Crissi smiled and said, “It’s not an academic activity today, as you can see!”

I thought about Crissi’s statement. In my own teaching of kindergarten, I experienced the struggle between activities considered academic and those that were considered non-academic. In my mind and in best practices, I knew that play experiences were developmentally appropriate and could be planned to address academic components. However, when administrators or visitors walked into my room, I felt I must explain how such activities related to standards and academic requirements.
I wondered, though if Crissi truly believed that this coloring paper was “inappropriate” for the children or if it was just not academically based. Providing children with the time to color was a method to address the developmental domain of small motor control and skill development. This activity allowed children to practice proper grip, refine small motor development, and work arm muscles in the gross motor domain. It also allowed for social and emotional development as the kindergarten children were able to enter the room in a relaxed nature, sit and talk with others, and color a seasonally related picture. There was not a right or wrong way to accomplish this task. The children were aware that there was no test or assessment they would be required to complete the assignment. They were in charge of the colors they used and the method in which they worked. There was an element of freedom in this simple chore and as I watched, I noticed smiles and friendly conversations around the room.

Another teacher walked into the room and Crissi greeted her with a “hello!” They began talking quietly together about a student who was sick. The classroom aide joined in the conversation. They shared their thoughts and ideas about the sick child and agreed upon a plan for his make-up work to be completed.

During the adult’s conversation, the children began to walk into the room. Two girls walked in and hugged Crissi as she was talking with the other adults. She hugged them back but did not interrupt her conversation. The girls then walked over to their seats and began coloring the paper as they smiled and shared conversation between themselves.
The children continued to gallop, walk, run, and skip into the classroom for the next thirty minutes. Several of them handed Crissi an envelope as she reminded the others that it was picture day and they should double check their bookbags for money from families. Crissi collected more envelopes, homework books, papers, and hugs from the children as they arrived for kindergarten that day. The children followed what appeared to be routine as they went to their seats and colored their papers accompanied by quiet conversation and interactions.

The student teacher was preparing something at the group meeting rug at the front of the room. Although I did not focus on her for the purposes of this research, I noted that this presence in the room added another complexity to the job of teaching and to Crissi’s day. Crissi walked over and checked with the student teacher, asking if she was prepared and if she needed any help. She then allowed the student teacher to continue her preparations.

Crissi then walked over to the door of the room and greeted a mother who was staying to volunteer. Crissi gave her a warm getting and a hug, followed by specific directions about what she was to do at the volunteer table. On this day, the mother was to cut out turkey feathers and help complete a decorative board to be used for their Thanksgiving activities.

Another adult entered the classroom and asked Crissi how her coursework was coming along in her graduate program. Crissi looked at me and smiled as she walked over to the questioning teacher who I later discovered was the librarian. It seemed that Crissi wanted to speak privately to the woman, possibly since this was a personal question. During their brief conversation, Crissi continued to give hugs, collect papers,
and scan the room as the children were working. She gave a reminder to the whole group by saying, “Friends, don’t forget, I need your folders from your bookbags and library books. We go to the library this afternoon.”

Crissi laid her items down on the table near the door as two older children walked in and give her a hug. I thought to myself that they were probably former students as she told them to work hard and have a good day. She seemed to connect to her students in a way that prevailed for years, as older students stopped in to say hello.

The morning bell rang and the announcements came on the speaker overhead. Crissi told the children to begin to clean up for the morning and head to the carpet. The student teacher walked over to Crissi and asked if she should go ahead and start the morning meeting. Crissi responded, “Yea, that’s good,” as she sorted the various items she had collected.

The student teacher began to take roll as Crissi walked over to where I was sitting. She leaned down and quietly said, “I’m having her do the morning meeting today so that I can pull students to do DIBELS. I need this extra time. She is technically finished with her teaching hours, but I want to use her so I can catch up with my assessments.” Crissi calls a girl over to the table and begins the testing.

There is no explanation of the task and I wondered if the children are so accustomed to this type of event that it has become part of their school experience. Have assessments, and more specifically standardized testing situations, become ingrained within the daily requirements to an extent where children know them as part of teaching
and part of the educational experience. I wondered to myself if this is teaching? Do teachers now consider assessment and testing as teaching time?

It was clear throughout my observations that teachers were burdened with numerous accountability measures but given professional freedom to use standards and manuals as guides for their instruction. Each teacher commented on the trust the principal showed to them in allowing their individual styles to come into the teaching experience and the educational structure of each classroom. I think, however, that there were still limitations to that freedom in that these “trusted” kindergarten teachers must still prove their work. They must conduct the same assessments during the same time frame. They must input data into the county-wide computer data collection system. The county has hired data specialists to evaluate the incoming numbers and make decisions about curriculum and effectiveness based on that structure. Is that professional freedom? My thoughts raced as I considered the limitations and time constraints that the multitude of tests placed upon the teachers as well as the children themselves.

Crissi continued to pull students during the morning meeting time. As she worked with each child, she used a palm to record data immediately filtering it to her database and on to the county. The teachers were each given a palm to use for that purpose and they told me that it does save transfer time. Technology in education is not only about helping students to achieve more. It has greatly facilitated in the accountability processing situation and the immense amount of data that is collected and recorded for tens of thousands of students in this one county system.
As I watched Crissi give the assessment to one specific child, I noticed that she was careful to check and assure that the child understood the pictures they were using. She turned to one page in the test booklet and said each picture to the boy, having him repeat after her. When she came to one particular picture, she said, “Rowboat,” and the boy repeated, “Rowboat.” As the test began, the little boy came to that picture and named it boat. Then, when he was asked, “What sound does rowboat begin with?” he said, “r” instead of making the sound of r. Crissi repeated, “What sound?” He paused and repeated, “r”. She continued on to the other pictures. She said, “What sound does bike begin with?” The little boy stretched the word bike slowly and then answered, “K.”

I continued to watch Crissi assess children while the student teacher taught during the morning routine of kindergarten. She was kind and caring in her demeanor with the children as they came in to start their day. It seemed that her persona changed during the testing situation. She only said what was scripted with the test and continued to push through with each child so she could proceed to the next. That being said, it was not in her nature to act in that manner. It was the nature of the assessment situation that caused the change in behavior. As I left her classroom later that morning, she was finishing with one child. She told me that the next time I came would be different and that I would be able to see her teach. I told her that I looked forward to that but understood her requirements for this day.
Conversations and Interviews

Crissi asked if we could meet in her room early in the morning prior to the start of the school day. When we discussed a time, Crissi informed me that she arrived at school as early as 6:30 AM, so it was up to me what time I wanted to come to talk. We decided to meet at 7:00 the next day.

When I drove up to the school that morning, the sun was just coming up over the building and the parking lot was quiet and empty – except for three cars. In my mind, I said to myself that the cars belonged to these kindergarten teachers. In reality, I was correct.

I walked into Crissi’s room to find her busily preparing her technology for the day. Crissi’s room, like all of the kindergarten classrooms, was fully equipped with a Promethean Board and computer technology to enhance instruction. Crissi stopped what she was doing to walk over towards me and lead me to a table where we would sit and talk.

Crissi’s son, Matt, was also in the classroom when I arrived. Matt was a kindergarten student in Nicole’s classroom. Crissi did not live in the district area, but as a benefit of her teaching, she was permitted to bring her children to her school, providing the transportation each day. Matt sat at the table with us and ate his breakfast as we began to talk.

I began by reassuring Crissi that I wanted her to feel comfortable and share as much as she could about her teaching, her life and her story. The first question was the same as in all the other interviews: Tell me about your background in teaching.
“Ok, ummm I guess I’ll give you my background in why I started in teaching. In third grade I had a wonderful third grade teacher, so I think that is what really sealed the deal with me.

Crissi stopped there, so I probed deeper and asked her about her upbringing. She continued, “I grew up in Damascus, however I came from a crazy family. So I’m the oldest of 6 kids I was adopted when I was three months from an Indian orphanage. My dad is Dutch. My mom is the only one from the states in our family. I have a sister who is three months younger than I am, also from India but from another part, adopted at a different time. She came speaking Marathi. And then Jacob, Bobby, Danny and Terri are my brothers, they are from Korea. They have a slew of disabilities: ADHD, Klienfelter’s, two of them are now diagnosed with bipolar, FAS, CT, the list goes on. So all the children were adopted. I was the only one in the family without an IEP. My sister even had learning disabilities. She went through special education, so being the oldest, I have always kinda helped out, played school with them, so it kinda led me into this career.

Crissi spoke quickly and directly about her family. She appeared to have these details scripted, as if she had to explain her family situation in other contexts and to other people in her experiences. She also spoke with pride about her siblings. She appeared to be proud of her family and her life. Like Jenny and Nicole, Crissi related family to her work and her position in life.

I asked Crissi about her education and her certification. “I was thinking of special ed. I graduated from Frostburg. I took a couple of grad courses during undergrad that were special education, but I just stopped.”
“What was your certification?” I inquired.

“Early childhood and Elementary, Pre K through 6th grade. Now my graduate classes are in reading; however, I am happy where I am and I don’t want to become a reading specialist. I basically went into that program so I could help these kids in K in my reading groups. I will be done the beginning of the summer. I like the k kids”

“So you don’t want to be a reading specialist?” I asked.

“I like teaching everything. I love this age group,” Crissi continued. “Ummm I don’t know. I like working with the kids. If I were to become a reading specialist I don’t.. I don’t know…I really don’t want to help diagnose kids, you know, within the whole school. I think this setting would be a little different because it’s, you know, primary kids but I don’t know. Maybe that’s because of my inexperience. I really don’t feel comfortable with the older kids because I really haven’t worked with them that much. Everyone kinda has their nitch. This way (working in kindergarten) you really get to know the children, which is so nice and you can form that nice relationship. Our reading specialist, Helen, I don’t know if you have had the chance to get to meet her, but she is just amazing. And she has a connection with all the kids, even kids she doesn’t work with – she knows them all! She is an exception.”

“So how long have you taught?” I continued.

“I would say like 5 years. I have kinda gone back and forth with it because I started at the end of a year. I started in March, and then I taught for a year, and then I went on maternity leave for a year and a half, came back as a long term sub – because it was the end of a year – taught for another year, ended up going on maternity leave for like – six months this time, and then came back.”
“All in K?” I questioned.

“Uh huh. My first position was in Charlotte, North Carolina. I, kinda, after Frostburg, I got out the map and closed my eyes and picked North Carolina. I said ‘Charlotte is a pretty name...I think I’ll move there!’ And then while I was there, I got pregnant. My boyfriend and I were dating at the time. We were together since 96’, and then I graduated in 01’. Then we were gonna have him go down there. We were kinda in between with what to do -- have him move down there or come here. But I always said that when I got pregnant, I want to come here, be near family."

Crissi paused and helped Matt with his orange juice. She looked back to me as if she was waiting for a new question. I continued: “So thinking over your career, the last five years, do you recall some great times, some positive memories that really stand out for you?”

“Ummm, I’d have to say the majority have been a highlight. I have really enjoyed my career so far. I’ve had great classes. Umm, I have had wonderful teams and wonderful administration. This school is wonder—I mean it’s amazing! We have six on our team total, and we fit so nicely together. We help one another out. Ummm, Cathy and I have been together forever – since my whole career practically. So she has really been there to help me out. And it’s nice that we share this suite together...ummm...it’s very comfortable.”

“And what does that do for you as a teacher, that teamwork, comfort?” I probed.

“I think it’s like we are one big family, and ummm it’s so nice to be able to depend on them, for needs here, and for needs at home. And I’d say that extends throughout the whole school, though. It’s not just our team. It’s the entire school.”
I questioned, “Do you see each other outside of school?”

Crissi answered, “We try to, ummm, it’s so crazy with our schedule and with kids.”

“Ok,” I said as Crissi finished her sentence. “So have there been times, days, when things were difficult? When teaching was a struggle?”

“Ummm yea….ummmm, I’d say the second year. After coming off of maternity leave with Megan, that next year. That was hard with family life….I was going through a really bad separation and, ummmm, having two and trying to juggle that. But then, ummm”

There was a long, quiet pause from Crissi and it appeared that she was composing her thoughts before she continued.

“The biggest, hardest thing with teaching was last year.” Again, there was a long silence. “I don’t know if you heard, with ummm the little boy…one of my students, a little boy was murdered by his father.” Instantly, tears glistened in Crissi’s eyes. She apologized, wiped her eyes and tried to continue.

“Last spring, a father in our community shot and killed his three children, his wife, and himself. I had the kindergartener. I was close to the family. The mother was supposed to watch my daughter, Megan, this year. So….well….that was really hard. It is still hard for me to talk about.”

Crissi stood up from the table and walked over to get a tissue. Matt gave her a little squeeze around the legs as she passed by him. When she returned to the table, she again apologized and looked to me for the next question. I wanted to explore this with her, so I asked, “So, how did that, that event, affect your teaching?”
“It affected me personally…ummm, but teaching? I had a wonderful class last year. I have a great class this year, but I enjoyed them from day one. You just have those years, you know a special class --everyone just got along so well --it was just a great, great class…ummm and the kids did really well with it. I don’t think teaching wise…I mean…I think I was able to…I could teach. I couldn’t let the kids see that things were bothering me. We put on that face, that mask. It was personal….and I had the whole school’s support so….”

Crissi’s words trailed off as her thoughts appeared to do as well. I quietly added, “That must have been really hard…”

“Yea, and I think with this situation, the hardest thing…and still is - is …you know cancer is one thing. But the way this happened…..sudden. And I knew the family and I don’t know…if I get started, I’ll start crying and it won’t shut off so…”

I read her words and knew that this was a sign to change the subject. The emotion was raw. Crissi’s emotions were still fresh eight months after the event. It was getting close to the start of the day and the hallway began to bounce with noise of children arriving in the building. Crissi and I agreed that we would continue our conversation another time and scheduled another meeting the following week.

I was sorry to leave the conversation at such a personally revealing point. I knew I found a unique story with Crissi and that her experiences, although new, were deep and emotional. I had never lost a child during my teaching. Relating to that experience would be difficult if not impossible for me. I could sympathize, but I had nothing to base
my emotions on as I considered that event. My friend had lost a kindergarten student to cancer several years prior to my research. I listened to her cry for many weeks and never once considered this as part of her future teaching story. Even now, she often speaks about that child and her memories of their relationship. It was huge. It affected her greatly. But I never lost a child.

As I wrote that word, lost, I reconsidered its meaning. Crissi didn’t lose a child.
The child died. He was killed in a horrific incident. It was national news in the spring of 2009 and the little town was exposed with all of the realness and rawness of life and loss. This family became part of current events. Their lives were uncovered with all of their hidden family secrets shared with the world. Crissi knew them. She didn’t know OF them….she knew them. She connected to this family. Crissi had initiated, developed, and nurtured a relationship with them. They were part of her life and they were part of her story. Everything we do, everything that happens prepares us for what comes in life. I wondered how she was prepared for that. I also wondered how this played into the story of the continuation of her life and of her teaching. Her emotions were real.

Classroom Observations

I arrived mid-morning for another visit to Crissi’s classroom. As I walked through the door, the children were sitting on the floor. Specific spots on a color blocked carpet marked their places and the children seemed to stay within their personal space. Crissi was standing at the front of the carpet near the board and a child was standing with
The children were singing the days of the week song and accompanying it with sign language.

Crissi and the children continued with various activities. The counted the days of the week as well as the number of days they had been in school. They counted by ones to 82 (the number of school days) and then they counted by 10’s and 1’s. The child who was standing with Crissi was the helper and he had some difficulty with the place value counting. Crissi said, “That’s ok, Andrew. We’ll give you some thinking time.” Crissi’s voice was clear, calm and kind. Somewhere on the carpet, a child sneezed and, without straying from her attention to Andrew, she said, “Bless you!” She exhibited a caring nature with the group and they continued to attend to the tasks.

The helper added a tile onto the calendar to mark the date, January 11, 2010 and then called for the meteorologist to come up to help with the weather graph. Another boy stood up and walked to the front of the carpet, carefully tiptoeing over classmates. Crissi shook his hand when he got up to her and said, “Thank you for giving us the forecast, Mr. Meteorologist!” The new helper walked over to the window and then returned to the group. He placed a sunshine picture on the weather graph and then gave the official report of, “The weather is sunny and cold,” as he stood with his shoulders back as if he were a soldier at attention.

Crissi thanked the boys for their help and sent them back to their carpet spots. She then directed the children’s attention to the morning message written on the board. “Ok, everyone, let’s read our morning message and see what it tells us!” The children read along with Crissi:
Today, do you remember how a good writer writes a story? Mr. Pritts said, “Tell me about your weekend.” Here is the story, Animals. Father Bear asked, “Are you ready to see my pet?” For math, can you help my dog Penny measure?

Crissi called several children up to circle specific sight words on which the group had been working that week. They included: ready, my, for, can, here. Then the children were asked to find a comma, quotation marks, a question mark, and a period. Individual children were allowed to come to the board and circle each item.

It was clear that this was a typical circle time of kindergarten practice. Crissi included various mathematical activities as she drew the children into daily routines. They sang songs, added to the calendar and discussed the weather. Children were given responsibilities and assumed leadership roles within the meeting time.

When this activity was concluded, Crissi informed the children that they were going to complete their writing assessment for Mr. Pritts, the principal. As she gave each one a paper, she said, “You need to tell Mr. Pritts about your weekend.” One small voice called out, “What’s a weekend?” Crissi explained, “A weekend? It was the two days before this one. The two days when you were not at school. Saturday and Sunday. Can you remember what you did on those days?” The child quietly answered, “I hope so.”

I smiled to myself as the children slowly walked back to their desks. The little voice inquiring about the definition of a weekend confirmed my thoughts. I had wondered for a brief second, if they would understand that time element – weekend. The small voice validated my theory.
On this visit, like the first to Crissi’s room, she was conducting an assessment. The children were directed as to what they should write and some did not even understand the concept of “weekend” and may have had difficulty in remembering past events. In my mind, this activity was not a valid example of the children’s writing abilities. It would better show their skills if they were allowed to make their own decision as to the topic of their writing.

I thought back to my own kindergarten classroom and the writing that my students did every day. We scheduled thirty minutes every morning for kid writing and by January, every child was producing readable material with details, writing mechanics, and sight word vocabulary. They also included story elements, such as beginning, middle, end, problem, and solution. The kindergarten children in our program were given the freedom of choice as they drew their pictures and wrote their story and that ownership promoted writing and ultimately improved skills. It was a developmentally appropriate practice and any piece of writing could be used as an assessment in an authentic style. It was also grounded in research based pedagogy on writing with young children.

I questioned the validity of this writing assessment in Crissi’s room and also knew in my mind that every kindergarten teacher was completing the same requirement in the other rooms down the hall. We teach assessment in teacher preparation courses. Authentic assessment is a widely covered topic in evaluation of children’s learning. Yet, in each of these kindergarten classrooms, many unauthentic measurements were being used to judge and review the teaching and the learning.
When we discussed assessments, these teachers had informed me several times that they, “Just get them done.” It was evident that they pick a day and agree that they will all do the writing assessment to “get it out of the way” each quarter. School officials look at the results and make data driven decisions regarding curriculum, materials, and budget. Teachers look at those same instruments as a nuisance and an interruption to real teaching experiences. One kindergarten teacher, upon espousing the toils of assessment with five year olds, told me that an official at the county level informed them that “Assessment IS teaching.”

Crissi tried to regroup. She called the children back to the carpet and had them sit down. “Ok,” she said, “tell me something you did over the weekend. What did you do on Saturday or Sunday at home with your family?” Several children raised their hands and began sharing stories of cartoons, games, and visits to restaurants. Crissi then had the children talk with a neighbor about the things they did over the weekend. It appeared to be a type of think, pair, share activity that enhanced the children’s discussions and recall of weekend events.

One little boy whined, “I don’t know,” and began crying. “I can’t see either, my glasses are dirty.” Crissi told him that she would clean his glasses while he talked with his friend about his weekend. He continued to cry with his head in his knees. Crissi cleaned his glasses for him and then tried to calm his emotions. She sat with the two boys on the floor and facilitated their discussion of their weekend activities. All the while, the tears continued to flow from the child. He hid his face in his knees and participated minimally in the conversation. When Crissi sent the children to their desks
to write, he persisted in his cries and complaints. Crissi told him that he had to do the story for Mr. Pritts and that she couldn’t help him anymore.

Crissi walked over to me and informed me that she hesitated doing this sample since I was coming in to visit, but that this was kindergarten and this was what they were doing. She informed me that with snow days, they were behind in their assessment schedule and she felt pressure to get it completed today, as did the other kindergarten team members. I tried to reassure her that I understood, and in a sense I did.

Crissi set a timer and told the children to start their work. Amidst the ticking of the classroom gatekeeper, small sobs were still heard from the little boy. Crissi reminded the writers that they had ten minutes to color and when the timer went off, they were to start their writing. She then said, “You will have twenty minutes to write about your weekend, but for now, work on the picture.” Stronger sobs rang through the room.

Conversations

Crissi and I sat together on several occasions to continue with interview questions and to allow Crissi to discuss her teaching after observations were completed. She was always open with her thoughts, but still exhibited some nervousness in the process. I was concerned that this might limit how open she was with her life and the details of her teaching story. I hoped that our growing connection would allow her to feel comfortable and cause her to open the pages to her narrative.
As we sat down to talk one afternoon as the children were leaving, I asked Crissi to discuss what areas of teaching and working with young children that she considered to be most important. She paused for only a brief moment and then started opening up:

“I think… I tell parents the first day, to me honestly, with kindergarten.. I think the academics are strong. It’s obviously important, it is. But I think they need to learn to love school. I think then need that and it is important that first year, because if they start off with a negative attitude, it will continue, and get worse.”

“So how do you do that in here?” I inquired. “How do you foster a love of school?”

Crissi nodded her head as I posed that question. She replied, “I think I try to make it fun. Make learning through games and stuff. Ummm have different things that they enjoy and that they feel confident with and that they can be successful with. It’s hard and you can’t always do that, you know. Especially with those that are really struggling. I talk with them and I ask them, ‘Did you have a good day? Are you having fun?’”

“And what are the responses?” I probe.

“Ummm usually good,” Crissi responds.

“So are there other areas you consider important in teaching kindergarten?” I tried to dig deeper into Crissi’s answer to discover more about her teaching. She looked at me and said, “I’m not sure what else to tell you.” There seemed to be an opening for me to probe into the question so I asked, “Tell me about your relationships with children and families.”
“Umm I am pretty close to all of them, certainly some more than others, ummm but for the most part, and they are--it’s this age--they all love one another, and they all love you, so….this age is really fun with that. You can’t do anything wrong with kindergarten. You can’t in their eyes…and thank goodness, especially with the math. I can’t go any higher because I can’t do that math,” Crissi laughs as she finished her thought.

I continue to probe further into her teaching pedagogy. I ask, “Well, then talk about your philosophy of teaching and working with young children in kindergarten.”

“You know,” Crissi began and then she paused. “I try to…make learning fun…make them feel successful with learning…I guess that would be it. So kinda short and to the point I guess.”

_Crissi looked at me and smiled. I tried to allow for some wait time, as a teacher with a student. I thought that if I just paused and gave her a few seconds more, she might elaborate on her philosophy. She did not continue. The pause became a little awkward and I could tell she was ready to move on as she sat back in her chair and picked up some papers that were in front of her. In my mind, it was as if Crissi was the student and she wanted to make sure she gave a correct answer without including too much information. I also sensed that I should just ask another question so I decided to continue._

“Ok, well, Crissi, tell me about how things in kindergarten have changed since you started teaching. What changes have your experienced in your five years?” I looked
at Crissi as she brought her finger up to her lips and tapped, much like a child would do as they tried to think of an answer.

“Well,” she began, “I can actually start when I student taught. I taught with Cathy, she was my mentor teacher…ummm but with that, we did units, and it was also half day, so that was a huge change-- ummm going from half days and then moving to Charlotte and doing full days. Now in Charlotte we still did units, but when I got back after Michael was born, we still had a full year of units. And then that’s when we switched it and they said, no more. But coming here and teaching full day was very different in the way that we have set up the program here, and—ummmm, it’s just so much more academic now.”

“When you say unit,” I inquire, “can you describe that?”

“Ummm, well, like doing a unit on the five senses or a Thanksgiving unit.” Crissi replied. “And I think we taught academics that way. In fact in some regards, I think it was stronger. Because I think they had more fun with the units and got more out of them. And the fun parts, even last year, we did this whole beach unit. I did it the end of last year, and had them do an whole beach party, where they got to bring sea cases, suntan lotion, set up hotels, went outside and got beach balls and they played. They miss that stuff now.”

“So how do you consider play in the educational processes of children,” I posed.

“Oh I think its very important. I think they need to learn those social skills, especially now when everyone is plugged into something. They don’t have those social skills and they don’t have the families at home spending quality time with them the way
we used to. I’m not blaming anyone. I have a busy schedule too. It’s just part of society. So I really think kids need to spend time in play and spend time socializing with one another. And it’s good for the kid watches, and parents, especially this age group, want to know how their child is socially in the room, and I have found it harder to answer that question now, because we don’t focus as much on that. It’s more of the academic piece, and less time for play. So I think that is one huge change that I’ve seen. I don’t have much input on social and emotional development anymore. And the times that they do centers, and play, I don’t have time to do the kid watches, because I’m assessing. There’s so much expected. Even outside, there are times I sit down on the sidewalk and pull kids for running records…you know…letter and sounds. I don’t even watch them play out there. And you know, it’s funny because if you sit and ask the kids what is their favorite part of kindergarten, they will tell you center time. They live for that play part of the week. It really tells you something, how important that is in their lives and in their learning. But we just feel so much pressure to get in all of the academics and assessments, so play falls away.”

“So has that assessment piece changed for you?” I asked.

“I think the way we do them has changed, but the amount, in my 5 years, hasn’t,” Crissi informed me. “It was a lot from the beginning…DIBELS helped, because there is 125 pages of phonics stuff that they had to go through, and DIBELS took out a lot of it.”

“So how many assessments do you do a year?”

“Ummm I can tell ya.” Crissi reached for some papers that she had in a bookbag beside her on the floor. “Now the different ones--there are some that you redo and redo,
several times a year. In math we’ve got (counting in her head) 32 here. That’s just the math. And then…let’s see, so then we have writing samples in language arts, four-- one for each term. And then we have running records, at least one for each term. So then, nine here, plus dibels. And then summer screening. I wish I could get them all to pass them, and then I could stop assessing and focus on teaching instead. I feel like I am doing more assessing than teaching. But a big wig in the county told us that assessing IS teaching. She has told us that in our trainings.”

I knew that my mouth dropped open when Crissi shared that piece of her story. She too nodded in what I deemed agreement with the shocking nature of the statement. One of the county officials, a school leader, a professional educator informed the teachers that “assessment is teaching.” I wondered about the impact of someone in that position making such a claim without backing or research to prove that point. What about the young teachers, the ones who are trying to survive their first or second year? What about the teachers who try to do what the principal or school official wants them to do? Where was the professional debate on the issue?

I also considered the disconnect between the administrator and the research in early childhood education, including assessment with young children. Did the accountability focus with the academic focus discount the work of early childhood professionals and their insights on assessment? Was that statement made in effort to defend the necessity of assessment overload or did that person actually believe it?
“So now let’s talk about the kids,” I said. “How have they changed in the five years that you have been teaching?”

Crissi nodded and said, “Even in 5 years of teaching, I can see a decline in…well…respect. The kids have changed socially, and we aren’t doing the social part and the play as much. The scary thing is it starts here. The expectations are a lot. I think it’s good to push kids, but I think we are stressing them out. I have a child here on migraine medication-- she has migraines in kindergarten. There are a ton on anxiety meds. I think that’s so wrong and we contribute to it here. We are pushing too soon. I think our increasing expectations are contributing to that problem in society. It is wrong.

Additional Observations

The children were once again sitting on the color blocked rug as I entered the classroom to observe. I walked in the positioned myself in the usual place, close enough to hear their words without intruding. One little girl waved a small hello to me as I passed by. I sneaked a wave back and smiled to her.

Some of the children were sharing details about their writing that they had just completed. They did not read their work, but just talked about their ideas. Crissi was sitting in her teacher chair at the front of the group and smiling as each speaker chattered about their work. Crissi would comment with, “good job” or “great job with your
writing” as they finished and stepped over friends to get back to their personal block on the rug.

Without warning, Crissi said, “Ok, we are going to shift gears and move onto our sight word story!” She walked over to the technology cart where the document camera was positioned. Crissi said, “Ok, friends, tell me what sight word we are working on. What is this one?”

Most of the group responded with, “To” with loud voices.

“Great!” Crissi told them. “And where would it go on our world wall?”

“Under the T,” They answered back.

“Yes, that is correct, under the T!” Crissi affirmed their response and hung up the word card under the T on the word wall. She continued and did the same type of activity with another sight word, like. Then she said, “Well, my story this week is about animals. Touch your head if you like animals.” It seemed as if everyone in her class quickly put their hands on their heads as if hurrying showed their enthusiasm for animals.

Crissi walked the children through the story by having them look at and talk about the pictures on each page. This picture walked allowed the children to bring in vocabulary and context clues that would help in the reading process. They named the animal that they found on each page and small discussions followed about the likes and favorites, what animals do, and how they sound. The group of five year olds brought a multitude of information to the process of the picture walk. They seemed to have a wide knowledge of animals.
“OK, now we are going to read the story,” Crissi told the group. She turned the pages back to the beginning and reminded them to stay with her finger so that they could read together. The “story” was framed around the sight word vocabulary. Each page contained a simple sentence with “I like to ____.” For example, on the page with the horse, the text read, “I like to run.” There was a picture of a horse running.

As the children began to read the book with Crissi, they began to offer extra information and tell more about the animal. Crissi stopped them and covered the book. “I am glad that you know so much about animals. Now please stay with my finger so we can read this together.”

As the group continued to read the sight word book, another lady, Mrs. Thompson, walked into the room. She was a building volunteer who I often saw during my visits to the kindergarten wing. Crissi stopped her work with the group and walked over to Mrs. Thompson. She quietly gave directions to the volunteer and then returned to the now noisy gathering on the floor in front of her.

“Ok, I need your attention again. Look back up at the screen and the story.” Crissi calmed the children and went on with the story while Mrs. Thompson began to pull one child at the time to go in the hall. I later learned from Crissi that the children were reviewing number recognition skills with Mrs. Thompson.

As soon as Crissi turned to the next page in the book, an announcement came over the speaker in the room. The voice told the room that it was time for DEAR (Drop Everything And Read) and to get a book and sit to read for fifteen minutes. I visible saw Crissi sigh, as her shoulders dropped. The children automatically stood up and headed
for the book boxes around the room. They selected books and talked during the process. Crissi worked to get them positioned around the room to participate in this silent reading time.

For the next fifteen minutes, I watched as children rolled on the carpet and made faces to friends across the room. Some were looking at their chosen books, but others were staring at things only they imagined. One child closed his eyes and appeared to fall asleep. Fifteen minutes can be a long time when five year olds are involved. I thought to myself that this block was too long for the children, especially since they had been sitting prior to this school wide event.

I remembered the add on’s that were part of teaching in a public school. We would have unannounced visitors, assemblies, and fire drills. Parents would stop by and former students dropped in for a hug or to deliver a birthday treat. I recalled that some of my former colleagues would become very frustrated with the interruptions and the complaints would roll down the hall like a tidal wave of anger.

But teaching is about human relationships. Those type of breaks in routine had lasting benefits and teachable themes for young children. I thought to myself that even with the length of this DEAR time in Crissi’s room, there was a learning moment; a time to sit with a book and take a break from the rigors of Kindergarten. I thought then, how oxymoronic that statement seemed – the rigorous kindergarten.

As DEAR time drew to a close, with a sigh of relief from many kindergartners in the room, Crissi told them to put their books away and walk back to the rug. As they
began to gather with her, she asked them to stand up and “sing the vowel song since you’ve done such a good job.” She started the music and the children’s voices were lifted as the room resonated with the tones of five year olds.

They sang just one song and then Crissi asked them to sit down on their color block. She began to give them the directions for independent work time. Several papers that they were expected to complete were shown with an explanation on how to do each one. Crissi also included a writing task with the independent papers. On a lined paper, the children were directed to write five sentences about things that they liked to do.

As I watched the writing begin, I noticed one little girl sitting near me. She started her first sentence with “I like to...” and then filled in the missing element at the end. She repeated this same exercise four more times. Watching her fill in the ending word, I noticed how well she sounded out words and attempted spelling. I wondered how much she may be able to write, to produce, if constraints were lifted. What might this emergent writer show if given the freedom of choice in her topic. Did she feel stifled in this task? Did she just work to finish? Was this fostering a love of learning? Was this fun?

I recalled that Crissi told me she wanted the learning to be fun and for the children to enjoy their time in kindergarten. I wondered how Crissi arrived at planning this work for the children and if she considered something else. Was this an agreed task between the kindergarten teachers? Did it address learning indicators?
I found the answers to those questions. Crissi walked over and expressed her reasoning in the independent work for that day. The writing task was chosen to reinforce the sight word vocabulary of that week. She told me she thought that this was an adequate way to have the children write, spell, and read those words repeatedly. I was informed that the team had developed many ideas for sight word work and this was one of the agreed items.

As the others worked at their seats, Crissi called six children over to a kidney shaped table at which she was seated. They slowly found their way to her and sat down. Crissi passed out small books to the children, each one like the other. I watched the children sit back in their chairs, lay their heads on the table, or turn to look around at other happenings in the classroom. Crissi called their attention to the book cover by asking them to look at the picture and decide what the story might be about for that day.

As they began to discuss their predictions, a child came into the room. He was late to school, so Crissi had to stop and give directions to him regarding the independent work that the children were doing at their seats. This took a few minutes away from the seated group, who I observed were sitting backward in their chairs, laying across the table, out of their seats, and talking with each other.

As Crissi refocused the children at the kidney table, a mother walked through the door. She waved at Crissi and picked up a paper sitting at the door. Crissi said hello to the visitor and explained that the directions for tasks of the day were on the sheet she was holding.
Crissi took a big breath and I watched her release it slowly. I could sense her frustration with the interruptions of her group. This was a reading group, much like I had conducted in my first grade classrooms. I had the opportunity to observe reading groups in several classrooms and much like Crissi’s, there were always multiple interruptions and a lack of focus to the kindergarten reading table. This was not a judgment of the teacher’s abilities, but perhaps a statement as to the developmentally inappropriateness of the activity.

As I noted Crissi’s behaviors, two girls walked up to her and asked a question about their independent work. Crissi quickly gave an answer and looked back to her group. I looked around the room and watched the children who were at their desks. Two boys were crawling under a table. One boy was stacking crayons on top of pencils. A group of four girls were chatting at another table. There was a child waiting for at the bathroom door while another was inside. One boy was at the water fountain. If Crissi noticed the time off task of the other children, she said nothing. I wondered if she was unaware or if she was uncomfortable in correcting with me observing in the classroom. Either way, the children were not involved in meaningful learning activities at those moments.

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I remembered those frustrating times during my own teaching. There were days when things just did not go as planned or when the children, or my teaching, seemed to be “off”. I could always feel my level of stress and anxiety building as the learning waivered or as the plan toppled. As a new teacher, I would try to plow through, and it
felt much like a bulldozer with a ten foot high snow bank. It was moveable, but at what
cost and what wear on the components (the children and myself).

As my abilities improved and my understanding of the teaching and learning of
young children grew, I learned to rework the plan. I discovered how to change the
learning environment so that what broke down in process could be remolded for positive
learning to occur. I wondered if that was something I was taught in my teacher
preparation courses. I knew it was not. How do we teach those aspects of teaching?
How to we prepare students to be flexible and changeable according to the diversity of
their students day to day, week to week, and year to year. If teaching is a science, we
should be able to do just that. Learning situations and teaching plans should be
replicated in future uses. Pre-service teachers should be instituted with the formulas of
working in the classroom with children.

The problem in that argument is that children are never replicated. From day to
day, year to year, people change. Groups of students vary in levels of ability, family
support, health issues, and social competence. How, then, would it be possible to
prepare a future teacher for every possible combination of personalities and
capabilities? Is that something that the teacher education program overlooks or is that a
working knowledge, gained through years of service and experience with the multitude of
challenges? It appears to me that it is the latter.

If experience is the best teacher, then preservice students must be exposed to the
teaching practices and applications of theory on a more consistent and recurring level.
The practicum experiences that are currently in place in most institutes of higher
education may not provide the necessary familiarity to develop needed skills. More field
hours and early contact with quality in-service teachers would provide future educators with the tools that higher education classroom are unable to offer.

Case Summary

The time that I spent with Crissi provided the novice teacher’s view of the condition of teaching in kindergarten under standards based design. Her stories, while containing some common threads with the other teachers, shared the beginning teacher’s understanding of the complexity of working with young children in the public kindergarten classroom today. Crissi balanced the data with her newness and with her seemingly innocent vision of teaching.

Although new to the profession, Crissi’s stories were deep with meaning and context. She had maneuvered through changes in her location, from another state and then another building. She managed through major changes in her own life during her upbringing and over her brief working era. She had worked with a variety of children and noticed changes in the curriculum. She had lived through the sudden and shocking death of a child and his family. She was full of many stories that other could not tell.

Crissi’s life story also brought a different context to the data. As an adopted child from an Indian orphanage, her family structure contained other adoptees, all with special needs and life-long issues. Crissi discussed her daily life as a single mother and the difficulties that placed on her work in the classroom. This was a different tale from the other two cases.

Crissi was the new teacher. She appeared that way in her confidence, mannerisms, and practices. During the data collection process, I was unable to determine if my presence caused her to alter her teaching. In my mind, it did. She was nervous
with an observer and I believe that I affected her ability to show her true teaching nature. This came from her stage of development as a teacher and offered complexity to the data.

Although Crissi was new, she shared the same frustrations in her work as did the most veteran teachers in the kindergarten team. The time that she devoted to her classroom and her work was growing each year. Crissi shared her aggravation with the assessment component of her teaching. She felt that play was lacking and the children’s social skills were suffering. As we discussed appropriate practices, Crissi shared her schedule of the day, where most activities were teacher directed and whole group centered. There were very few developmentally appropriate plans in the day.

Crissi also shared the same feelings of trust and accomplishment as the other team members. She discussed the faith that the principal showed them. She appreciated the freedom in teaching that the team shared. Crissi developed close relationships with her team members and filled her role as the quiet new teacher who followed the leaders. Within the social structure of the team, Crissi knew her position. She listened to the others and did what was expected. If she did have an opinion about curriculum or teaching, I did not see Crissi voice it. She followed the others and felt that was her position in this diverse and accomplished group. Crissi was the new teacher, wise with stories and ideas about her teaching in the academic era of kindergarten.
Chapter 7
Answering the Research Questions

This multiple case study focused on the following research question: What are the stories told by kindergarten teachers working in the era when accountability and academic achievement are the focus? In addition to the main question, two supplementary areas were also addressed: 1) How do teachers deliver developmentally appropriate instruction and make learning meaningful and engaging in kindergarten classrooms today; and 2) How do teachers consider play in the educational processes of kindergarten children under the standards based design?

Since this was an exploratory multiple case study written in a narrative stance, the lives of teachers were shared in story format, presenting the data in the triangulation design of observations, interviews and document analysis. The data was streamed together to create a cohesive and congruent piece that tells a good story while retaining the truth of the teachers. Analysis was embedded within each teacher’s story and reflexivity became a crucial component in the data collection process.

As I began this study, I was surprised to uncover so much information about the participants’ lives, families, histories and teaching. The main research question was answered in a multitude of ways with details and complexities that were not anticipated. Each teacher shared their unique narrative of their life experiences and teaching with common threads that tied the yarns together.

Among the three cases, several areas of concern and complexity were shared within the context of each interview, discussion, and observation. Analysis of documents
supported their narrative expressions. In this chapter, I will attempt to answer the research question by making meaning from the teachers’ stories.

Stories

As I watched and listened to the tales within the kindergarten wing, two separate stories began to emerge from each teacher. At times, I observed only the cover story, the parts and pieces that the teachers wanted outsiders to know and about which they were very protective. Although they expressed frustration with the number and focus of assessment based teaching, they did not tell their true story to those outside the kindergarten wing. They were careful to keep movie day a secret, as they expected that parents may not approve of this use of time. Perhaps they felt that they would look less professional if parents knew that the children were grouped together to spend learning time watching a movie as the teachers attempted to catch up with assessments and the recording and reporting of data.

Nicole was very guarded during the course of this study, making sure to maintain the professional boundaries and cover story as she worked with children during observational times and spoke with me about her work. She did not share frustrations, even as she discussed the assessment piece. She simply explained how she managed her responsibilities and seemed proud of the fact that she used her planning time efficiently in the process of data collection. Nicole seemed confident and assured, but it was difficult to really get under the surface and find her true story. I often wondered why she protected herself to such a degree. Although she appeared comfortable, perhaps she did not feel at ease to open up and share her truth. Nicole’s story was truly a cover story
which appeared to be positive and competent, but also seemed to be personally empty as she sustained the defenses of her story.

Crissi also shielded her story but showed cracks in her resistance as she shared some emotional aspects of her life. She was the middle ground, the story that told the professional part mixed with the personal components. She maintained boundaries and showed great respect to me and the project. Crissi was a good student and wanted to give the right answers and do the right thing. In uncovering her story, I came to know the history of her life and her family and the effects that had on her career. She also shared the difficult time of the murder of one of her kindergarten students. Crissi’s story contained harsh truths that Nicole and Jenny did not experience. In the telling of her life, Crissi imparted her real story; the story of a human being coping with difficult life experiences and wonderful teaching moments.

Jenny was an open book. She shared everything openly and easily. As I reflected on her observations and our conversations, I felt that I knew her the best. She let me in. She broke down her walls and let her story out. While maintaining a cover story with parents, she revealed her true story with me. With expressions of frustrations over expectations, accountability, and time, Jenny allowed me to form an interpretation of the lives of these kindergarten teachers. The others hinted at these story elements, but Jenny reinforced the tale. She shared stories of her past, present and future in a way that contributed to the research in a highly effective manner. In her story, I reflected upon working theories of knowledge, emotions in teaching, presence in the teaching moments, and connection to my own history and teaching. Her story told about a teacher, a character, who had a great commitment to children and their learning. That same story
contained elements of teacher centered thinking on Jenny’s part, moving away from best practices in the education of young children.

This study focused on the main research question: What are the stories told by kindergarten teachers working in the age of accountability and academic achievement? From uncovering their tales, these teachers shared cover stories of professionalism and education. They shared their work, their commitment, and their achievements. It became clear that they guarded their true stories and those hidden pieces truly told the tale of the enormous weight and complexity of teaching kindergarten.

The Real Story – Assessment and Guilt

A significant discovery was found as these teachers chronicled their work with young children in the kindergarten classrooms. Within the accountability and academic model of education, these teachers of young children were weighed down by an increasingly heavy burden of assessment. The assessments were unauthentic in nature and at odds with developmentally appropriate assessments. This topic was always at the forefront of their work, their planning, and their conversations. It occupied much of the daily schedule and was the focus of the teaching each day. That element was found in the data of each teacher on every visit to their classrooms.

Assessment was the most salient theme expressed by the teachers. Each story included an element of frustration regarding the immense assessment component that was required in their teaching of young children. Throughout the interviews and the observations, Jenny, Nicole, and Crissi each noted that the county considered assessment to be a crucial piece of the teaching process and necessary for accountability of both their
teaching and the children’s learning. Each teacher also told the story of the changes over time in the amount and type of assessment that was part of the kindergarten year.

Through data collection involving interviews, conversations, observations, and the analysis of documents related to the assessment piece, the story of assessment driven teaching and planning became visible. All three teachers considered assessment in their planning for instruction and preparation of the schedule. When play time was provided, the teachers used that time to continue to pull children away from the activities to complete evaluative tasks. Developmentally appropriate practices were evident but overshadowed by the immense cloud of testing and accountability. Teaching time was reduced and, in turn, the learning opportunities of children decreased.

Jenny shared the fact that substitute teachers, some of whom were not certified teachers in the state, had to be scheduled for eleven days during the course of the school year so that the kindergarten teachers were provided time to conduct required standardized assessments. She expressed the feeling of frustration over the lost instructional time as teachers were removed from the teaching environment and placed in the assessment mode.

These eleven days were not the only time lost from teaching. Those days were ones that the county employed substitute teachers in the process of time management for accountability purposes; however, the kindergarten teachers were observed conducting whole group and individual assessments on multiple visits to the school. In fact, as I reviewed the observational data, some assessment task was included during every visit to each teacher’s classroom. While it was appropriate to constantly assess children in authentic ways in order to provide meaningful learning opportunities, formal assessment
pieces were not congruent with developmentally appropriate practices and child
development knowledge.

I was informed by the three teachers that the number of assessments had increased
greatly over the last six years. Crissi counted the required math assessments and found
that they must complete thirty-two (32) separate tasks during the school year. She was
surprised by the number of separate assessments as she had never totaled them prior to
our meeting.

In the area of language arts, I learned through other conversations with and
observations of the teachers, that they compiled one (1) prompted writing sample each
quarter for a total of four (4). These were collected and used in compilation of data on
sight word usage, elements of composition, and concepts about print.

The reading assessments had also increased. As I worked with Nicole, I observed
the use of her planning time in the completion of running records. She followed her
children to music class and pulled one child at the time out of music to conduct the
assessment. She informed me that she utilized her planning time in this manner several
times a week, which reduced her opportunities for preparation for teaching. There were
three (3) required running records each quarter for a total of twelve (12) for each child.
The average number of children in the kindergarten classes was 25; therefore, each
teacher was required to complete approximately three hundred (300) running records
during the school year. For these kindergarten classes, approximately 1800 running
records and their paper documents were collected and recorded from September through
mid-June.
The kindergarten teachers also used the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) as a literacy assessment. This assessment tool is intended for use in grades K-6 and measures five areas in literacy as defined by the National Reading Panel. Those areas include: (1) Phonemic Awareness measured by initial sound fluency and phoneme segmentation; (2) Alphabetic Principle measured by nonsense word fluency; (3) Accuracy and Fluency measured by oral reading fluency; (4) Vocabulary measured by word use fluency; and (5) Comprehension measured by retell fluency.

The kindergarten teachers administered sections of the DIBLES assessment piece throughout the school year according to their own schedule and allowances of time in the day. Each teacher had a palm pilot to record and send data immediately to the county offices. I observed each teacher using their palm on almost every visit, an exhibition of the pressure and prolific nature of the assessment component in the kindergarten program.

Jenny sat with me one morning and shared additional pieces that were required of the teachers in the content areas of language arts and math as well as the report card and additional evaluative tools (see Appendix D). As she spoke, the frustration in her voice was evident as she explained how the assessments were scheduled and how they were forced to report the data. She scribbled notes (see Appendix D) as she explained the reporting procedures. It was clear from her explanation that this was a part of her job that she resented.

The kindergarten teachers administered a “speed test” to five year old children at the beginning of the school year. This test included elements of letter recognition, initial sounds, vowel consonant sort, rhyming as well as many other literacy areas. Jenny
explained that every teacher waited as long as they could to give the first round to their
children in September. There were several reasons for the delay: 1) they wanted the
children to have enough time to adjust to school and the expectations of kindergarten; 2)
they needed some time to “train” the children to take the tests; and 3) if a child scored in
the marginal area, they were required to retest them every three to four weeks on each
section of the assessment until Term II (January) regardless if they passed it at any point
in that time frame. If a child scored in the bottom range, the requirement of reassessment
increased to every two weeks until Term III, regardless of future score outcomes. This
data was sent directly to the curriculum coordinator, deemed “Dr. Know” by the
kindergarten teachers, as soon as it was collected. Jenny informed me that if they were
late in re-administering the assessment, they received notification from the county office
as well as from their building principal.

This showed the story of constant evaluation and reassessment of children in the
accountability model of teaching. As I spoke with other teachers in the team, they
reiterated Jenny’s thoughts and affirmed that they had to wait well into September to
begin that assessment piece because they wanted to try to get as many children above
marginal as possible.

We must consider how this story looks in schools within the county with a higher
level of at-risk children from lower socio-economic backgrounds. It is interesting to
consider how much unauthentic assessing is occurring in those classrooms where
children need an increased focus on learning in environments where they feel safe and
unthreatened. The focus on accountability is taking teachers away from what they were
educated to do – teach.
It is also crucial to note that this description of a required assessment piece was just one of multiple tests the kindergarten teachers had to complete at scheduled times during the kindergarten year. The teachers administered DIBLES, a fluency test, the speed assessment, and running records, all at numerous times throughout the school year. During the research study, the assessments were never used to effect the instruction or the program for the children.

There was a sub-plot within this significant story. These teachers were feeling strong emotions about their work. To them, teaching was more than a job; it was a calling, and something for which they had great passion. The teachers talked about anxiety and frustration with the accountability requirement. Guilt is another strong emotion that is central to the work of teaching (Hargreaves, 1994). Teachers are always thinking how they could be doing a more effective job or how they could improve the experiences for children.

Persecutory guilt emanates when a person does something that is wrong or forbidden. It also appears when someone fails to do what is expected of them (Hargreaves, 1994). This emotion leads teachers to cover what is required, rather than find new innovative ways to teach that may be more interesting or engaging for children. This guilt is placed upon them by the mandates of the county and encourages compliance with aspects of their work even if it is in opposition to their philosophies and beliefs. Persecutory guilt inhibits the teachers from doing what they think is best for kindergarten children. It prevents them from teaching in appropriate and meaningful, connected ways for fear of prejudicing the assessment scores by which they are judged (Hargreaves, 1994).
In the stories of these teachers, persecutory guilt was felt due to the accountability demands and the administrative control over their work. The teachers were prevented from teaching in appropriate ways, or by methods they believed were best for young learners. Instead, they were mandated to conform to a testing curriculum replacing the educational one. If they were to challenge authority with constructive criticism, suggesting innovative ideas with valid grounding in research, they would feel that this would be seen as incompetence or insubordination (Hargreaves, 1994).

The data collected illustrated a story with a strong academic focus in the kindergarten classrooms. Based on the observations, interviews, and document analysis, the representation of teaching was centered in the academic accountability model. While some developmentally appropriate activities were observed, this was not the model for teaching and learning in the classrooms.

The main focus of the kindergarten day was in the language arts curriculum. This was evidenced through observations of the activities in the classroom as well as the daily schedule and teacher plans. In the morning, children spent two hours and forty-five minutes on literacy and language activities. These tasks were mostly whole group instruction (1:45) with some individual and small group tasks (1:00, first 30 minutes of the day; 30 minutes, deskwork/small groups).

In addition to the time spent on language arts curriculum, the teachers planned for and stressed in their activities the necessity for such tasks. They worked with sight words, simple reading books, vocabulary groups, phonemic awareness, and skill groups.

On several observational visits, I observed the children in transition from their regular classroom teacher to another kindergarten class. This model was denoted as
“Vocab Groups” by the teachers. Each teacher was responsible for a separate task or skill associated with literacy. During this group time, children rotated between every other classroom and each teacher taught the same skill six (6) times. When the rotation was complete, teachers developed a new skill component and vocab groups began again. I was informed that during the spring, as children became more literate, vocab group time would be discontinued.

I observed formal reading groups in two of the cases, Nicole’s and Crissi’s classrooms. In those settings, children were grouped by ability and met with the teacher in a small group to engage in guided reading activities, once reserved for first grade classrooms. During guided reading, children were observed to be disengaged from the group and the activity. A formal time on task analysis was not conducted, but through observational notes, it was clear that children were off task or interrupted approximately eighty percent (80%) of the lesson.

In Jenny’s room, children met on a one to one basis with the teacher or a volunteer to develop reading skills. During this meeting, children worked on sight word books, letter formation, or literacy skills. While still concentrating on reading and literacy, the lessons in Jenny’s room were more differentiated and child focused. One on one attention was given to the children while reading skills were developed.

In all three cases, the math program was used as the expected mathematics format. As seen in the data, the teachers were not fond of the program and felt that it stifled their teaching as well as the children’s learning. The scripted lessons were not developmentally appropriate or child centered. While the manipulatives were colorful, useful, and appropriate, the lesson formats and individual math journals were bland and
failed to engage the children in constructive learning models. Math was scheduled in the afternoon in each case and usually lasted for forty-five (45) minutes.

The teachers used math in appropriate ways during the kindergarten day. During observations, math concepts were introduced and reinforced through morning meeting activities such as calendar math, counting games, graphing opportunities, and patterning activities. In those ways, the teachers told a story of attempting to make math meaningful in the lives of the kindergarten children.

There was another emotional aspect to their story. Depressive guilt appears when individuals feel as if they have been ignored or betrayed. It also arises when a person fails to protect the people or beliefs that are the basis of their internal philosophies (Hargreaves, 1994). It is difficult to admit such failure, and for these teachers, it hard for them to disclose that they have neglected appropriate teaching and best practices for young children in place of required testing and academic focus. These teachers found themselves locked into “guilt traps” that are socially located within the motivation of teachers’ work. According to Hargreaves (1994), the traps include commitment to care, the open-ended nature of the job, the pressures of accountability, and the persona of perfectionism.

Jenny had a momentous aspect of care in her work. She was committed to children in a highly significant way. Her words and her actions, her endearing names and attention to needs showed just how much she truly cared for her kindergarten students. Such commitment to care is strong among elementary school teachers (Hargreaves, 1994). When Jenny stated that she was there to help create as many dreams as possible, she was portraying herself as a rescuer or a savior of sorts. She was revealing the
preeminence of the care orientation in teaching. Nicole shared a glimpse of this as well when she talked about her emotions in dealing with a bully in her classroom. She reflected upon her feelings of sadness and concern at her actions. Crissi was deeply impacted by the tragic death of her student the previous year as she continued to show grief at the loss. She gave hugs to former students who appeared at her door each day.

The principles of love and warmth were at the foundations of what Jenny and the other teachers viewed important in their work with young children. For Jenny, it appeared at a higher level of importance as Nicole and Crissi stressed the cognitive and instructional goals.

As evidenced in their stories, the three teachers involved in the study committed a great deal of time to their work. They arrived at school well before they were required to be there and stayed late into the evening. Jenny even commented that in the winter, she did not see the daylight as she came into school before dawn and left after dusk. Jenny also shared how much time she spent at home on the weekends preparing things for the upcoming week with children. She informed me that she arose by 5:00AM to work for a few hours on Saturday and Sunday, saving the rest of the weekend for her family. These data showed that the participants fell into the guilt trap of the open-endedness of the job.

In this second guilt trap, the work is never done. Teachers take home bags of papers, books, materials -- even wagons filled with bags and materials to continue their work at home. According to Hargreaves (1994), the heavy bags that teachers carry are symbols of guilt. There is no clear definition of the teacher’s role in the classroom, and with no agreed knowledge base or standards of teaching, there is no gauge of commitment (Hargreaves, 1994). Teachers cannot define the boundaries of the work and
teaching crosses into every aspect of their lives. It is not a job. Teaching is not just what they do; it is who they are. In those aspects, teaching becomes a calling to which individuals can be highly dedicated.

The accountability and intensification are the main sources of persecutory guilt (Hargreaves, 1994). As the expectations of students and teachers have increased dramatically over the years, teachers have to attend to more challenges and dimensions of the work that they do with young children. As evidenced through the stories of these participants, teachers are filling out data forms, recording scores in technological devices, attending meetings with parents and faculty, working with a controlled reporting system, and manipulating an extensive and academically based curriculum. They are including more children with special needs and differentiating their instruction to meet those unique needs. They are working under growing stringency and pressure to perform, with the discussion of merit pay hanging in the air. This intensification causes a sense of loss for the teachers in their ability to provide appropriate learning experiences and levels of care for the five year old children. Nias (1989) uses the term bereavement to describe the intense emotional reaction within teachers as accountability becomes a major source of depressive guilt.

The final guilt trap, persona of perfection, was directly linked with the teachers’ stories in this current study. The pressure to be great, to work harder than expected, was visible within the cases. The teachers often commented to me during observations in seeking validation for their practices. If they felt there were better practices, they did not confide or share their doubts about how they were teaching. Within this group, there was pressure to measure up.
On one visit to Crissi’s room, she commented that she did not like being observed after my visits to Jenny’s room. She reflected that Jenny was the high standard and that they all tried to measure up to the expectations of the group and of themselves. There was a fear from Crissi of not living up to expectations. Nicole shared all of her awards and accolades in what I interpreted as justification of her work and padding her persona of perfection. Jenny pushed herself well beyond the expectations and requirements.

Each teacher commented about their commitment and loyalty to their principal and how they would do anything for him. His methods of leadership seemed to create an intense level of devotion from the teachers to him, to the children, and to the community within the building. This aspect also contributed to the teachers’ need to maintain a persona of perfection to please the principal.

In their collaborative climate, these teachers revealed their stories and allowed me to view their lives. They were safe and among friends, which allowed them to share troubles and support each other. But in other situations where the collegiality may not be as cooperative, where doubts and flaws cannot be shared among the professionals, the trap of the persona of perfection is even more intense (Hargreaves, 1994). Hargreaves writes:

The process of perfectionism is central to the determination and delineation of teacher guilt…(this quality) is itself an imperfection…the emotional dynamics of perfectionism are also structured by the intensifying pressures of the workplace; by singular models of expertise which preclude sharing and the inadequacies it might expose…for fear of betraying private shortcomings…might prejudice opportunities and rewards in the workplace…in the long run, (the guilt trap of persona of perfection) merely generates more perverse consequences and problems in the form of burnout, cynicism or exit from the profession (p. 152).

The teachers in this current study exhibited a highly significant link to this guilt trap in their work with young children under the accountability based model.
The Other Story – Autonomy and Control

As I listened to the stories of each teacher within this study, I heard repeatedly that they believed they had total autonomy in their classrooms. Through interviews and conversations, each teacher informed me that the principal told them that he trusted them. He didn’t require lesson plans each week. He never expected for daily outcomes to be written on the board. The teachers heard this principal tell them that he did not care how they got to Z, just get the job done.

Each teacher informed me on multiple occasions that they felt extremely lucky to work for their principal. They valued his trust in their abilities and the fact that they felt they could teach the way they wanted to teach. They touted that other buildings were not shown such professionalism and that they were hand-picked by this principal, making them feel particularly special. The teachers explained that the principal had children of his own and that he understood their lives, their families, their pressures, and their stress as they balanced the weights of working in the primary building with their pressures of daily life.

The teachers also advised me that they worked well as a team, sharing ideas but not forcing anyone to conform to a way of delivering instruction. They revealed that there was no pressure upon any member of the group to teach like another. During an observation, Jenny shared that she had the children come into the classroom to see her first before they unpacked their bookbags and started their work. She said, “That’s just what I do. Some do it differently and that’s ok. This is just my way.” Each teacher was uniquely different in their interactions with children and in their teaching styles.
The real story was the false sense of autonomy that these teachers believed they possessed. Each teacher held fast to the idea that they had complete control over their classrooms, their teaching, and their practice. They often discussed their power within their team and the freedom that the principal gave them; however, though they were told by the principal that they could teach in any way they wanted, their teaching behavior was constrained by multiple variables including mandated assessments, predetermined student outcomes, and scripted curricula. Their inability to articulate an explicit rationale that argued for the power of developmentally appropriate practice and play reduced their autonomy even further.

Given the number and focus of the accountability aspect of their work with young children, the teachers were controlled by the testing emphasis, methods, and reporting design. Every time the assessment piece was mentioned in conversations, interviews, or during observations, the teachers negatively reflected upon the consuming concentration of that facet of their work and the required scheduling and reporting of the data to the county officials. During a conversation with Jenny, she said,

“…to bog that (efficiency) down with 25 thousand ton weight cause I gotta finish a freakin piece of paper so I can plug it in on Friday afternoon. But we have a grade book and we have weekly assessments that have to go in there. I’m assessing all da time.”

Nicole mentioned:

“Another way that kindergarten has changed over the years is the amount of assessing, so that we set aside blocks of time or coverage is provided for us so that we can do the assessments. I give up my planning time and sit outside specials. I did this yesterday. I sat outside doubles (two consecutive specials) and pulled children and assessed. On Tuesday, we had a movie with our principal’s blessing and pulled and assessed children. I don’t want to say it’s optimum teaching, but if we think assessing is part of teaching and it’s diagnosis and we adjust instruction based on the outcomes of that testing it is very important. But it’s the data keeping and the input on the grid that takes time.
Crissi shared:

I don’t have time to do the kid watches, because I’m assessing. There’s so much expected, even outside, there are times I sit down on the sidewalk and pull kids for running records.

In their own words, the teachers exposed the lack of control that they were “given” over their teaching and instruction of young children. The mandated assessments and regulated curricula ruled them and the power over their teaching belonged to others outside their classrooms. The fact that they needed to maintain a cover story, and hide what they were doing from others was a symptom of the lack of autonomy that they truly had over their work. While without intentional malice, the principal led them to believe that they were autonomous while the truth was exhibited in the reality of the accountability constraints and limitations. Coupled with the pre-determined student outcomes and the scripted curricula adopted by the county, the power over teaching was taken from the professionals in the classroom and positioned among the administrative officials who required those components during the kindergarten day.

Summary

The teachers presented two stories. Their cover story protected their professionalism, their principles and their practices. They guarded their need for secret movie days and defended the inappropriate teaching methods as necessity of design. The fact that they felt they needed to hide what they were doing from others was a strong indicator that they did not truly feel the autonomy that they claimed they had in their classrooms. These actions relate directly to the persona of perfection and the depressive guilt presented earlier in the chapter.
These actions also exposed their true story. The teachers were not able to teach in the ways they believed were the most appropriate or meaningful for children. They were forced to teach in ways that would measure up by the assessment standards. Each teacher reflected fondly and with passion about the nature of kindergarten prior to the accountability model. They shared memories of integrated units and child centered instruction. They disclosed with enthusiasm the “castles and kings’ unit and the feast that the children were involved in at the conclusion of the unit. Michelle recalled that as those children grew and were in high school, they would come visit and reminisce with excitement those activities and themes from their kindergarten memories. Michelle said, “That what learning should be all about. Kids aren’t going to remember the assessment you gave them over and over. They aren’t going to thank you for that.” Through their own words, the teachers allowed me to glimpse into their real stories: stories of heavy assessment burdens, guilt, scripted teaching, and lack of autonomy or control over their teaching practices. These were the powerful stories that were found in this study.
Chapter 8
Conclusions and Implications

The purpose of this chapter is to summarize and conclude the recent study. This chapter consists of five main parts: (1) Discussion of Findings; (2) Experiences as a Researcher; (3) Strengths and Limitations; (4) Implications for Practice; and (5) Suggestions for Future Research.

Discussion of Findings

The purpose of this study was to share the stories of kindergarten teachers as they work in an era of academic achievement and accountability focus. I sought to uncover teachers’ accounts of their lives, their thoughts, and their teaching as they work with kindergarten children every day. In working with these teachers, I also attempted to discover how they considered developmentally appropriate practices in their standards based instruction and assessment driven teaching. Additionally, this study aimed to ascertain how kindergarten teachers consider play in the educative processes of five and six year old children. The analysis of the data in chapter seven provided the answers to the research questions. The findings are summarized below.

What are the stories told by kindergarten teachers working in an era of academic achievement and accountability?

Story One – The Burden of Assessment and the Attachment of Guilt

Throughout this current study, several significant stories were uncovered. The first and most significant was the story of the heavy burden of assessment and
accountability that these teachers faced every day when they worked with young children in the kindergarten classrooms. The assessments were unauthentic in nature and at odds with developmentally appropriate practices. This topic was always at the forefront of their work, their planning, and their conversations. It occupied much of the daily schedule and was the focus of the teaching each day. This element was found in the data of each teacher on every visit to their classrooms and showed the story of constant evaluation and reassessment of children in the accountability model of teaching.

Teachers were consistently removed from the teaching experience and placed in the evaluative mode. At times, non-certified substitute teachers were positioned with children in the classroom while the professional teachers were separated, often in other areas of the building, to conduct one on one assessments. The teachers shared their frustrations as to this aspect of their work and commented on the increased number and focus of the tests with kindergarten children.

This assessment affliction prevented the teachers from engaging children in ways that the teachers believed would be more appropriate and meaningful. The constant assessment and reassessment of children forced these early childhood educators to train children for testing practices and prepare them for “test worthy” material while preventing the exploration and use of best practices in the teaching of young learners. The assessments were unauthentic in nature and provided little information that teachers used in daily teaching experiences.

The teachers talked about anxiety and frustration with the accountability requirement. They shared strong emotions about their work. To them, teaching was more than a job; it was a calling, and something for which they had great passion. Guilt
was a salient sentiment that was attached to the work of these teachers. Guilt is another strong emotion that is central to the work of teaching (Hargreaves, 1994). The teachers were always thinking how they could be doing a more effective job or how they could improve the experiences for children.

Persecutory guilt emanates when a person does something that is wrong or forbidden or when someone fails to do what is expected of them. (Hargreaves, 1994). This emotion lead the teachers in this study to cover what was required, rather than utilize developmentally appropriate methods or innovative ways to teach that may be more interesting or engaging for children. This guilt was placed upon them by the mandates of the county administration and encouraged compliance with aspects of their work even if it was in opposition to their philosophies and beliefs. Persecutory guilt inhibited the teachers from doing what they thought was best for kindergarten children. It prevented them from teaching in appropriate and meaningful, connected ways for fear of prejudicing the assessment scores by which they would be judged (Hargreaves, 1994). Instead, they were mandated to conform to a testing curriculum replacing the educational one.

There was another significant emotional aspect to the stories of the teachers in these kindergarten classrooms. Depressive guilt appears when individuals feel as if they have been ignored or betrayed. It also arises when a person fails to protect the people or beliefs that are the basis of their internal philosophies (Hargreaves, 1994). It was difficult for the teachers in this study to admit such failure. It was hard for them to disclose that they had neglected appropriate teaching and best practices for young children in place of required testing and academic focus. Perhaps this was the reason for Jenny and Nicole to
seek validation for their work. Jenny noted aloud methods that were more developmentally appropriate. Nicole looked to her awards and acclaims as justification of her practices; however, these teachers found themselves locked into “guilt traps” that were socially located within the motivation of their work. According to Hargreaves (1994), the traps include commitment to care, the open-ended nature of the job, the pressures of accountability, and the persona of perfectionism. Each teacher exhibited elements of the traps of guilt in their work with young children and Jenny showed the strongest sense of this guilt.

Story Two – The False Sense of Autonomy and the Cover Story of Teaching

The second and equally significant finding that appeared in the stories of the teachers was the false sense of autonomy that they believed they possessed. Each teacher held fast to the idea that they had complete control over their classrooms. They believed they could teach the way they wanted and that they had total power over their work with children each day. They often discussed the clout within their team and the fact that they were hand selected for their positions. They consistently noted the freedom that the principal gave them; however, though they were told by the principal that they could teach in any way they wanted, in reality their teaching behavior was constrained by multiple variables including mandated assessments, predetermined student outcomes, and scripted curricula.

Given the focus of the accountability aspect of their work with young children, the teachers were controlled by the testing emphasis, methods, and reporting design. Every time the assessment piece was mentioned in conversations, interviews, or during
observations, the teachers negatively reflected upon the consuming concentration of that facet of their work and the required scheduling and reporting of the data to the county officials. The testing structure of their work controlled them and their teaching. They were immensely loyal to their principal and believed he relinquished power over their work and placed the control directly in their hands. He may have even believed he entrusted them with their own professional knowledge; however, the power over the teaching belonged to the tests. The assessments and those who required them as evidence of effective teaching, ruled the classroom.

The teachers themselves exposed the lack of control that they had over their teaching and instruction of young children. The fact that they needed to maintain a cover story, and hide what they were doing from others was a symptom of the lack of autonomy that they truly had over their work. They did not want people to be aware of their movie days. They were uncomfortable in sharing the hidden parts that were necessary to survive in the assessment flood. In addition, these early childhood professionals were unable to articulate a rationale for developmentally appropriate practices or the uses of play in the educational processes of children which reduced their independence even more. The teachers maintained their cover story and in so doing, showed that they did not have true autonomy over their teaching.

The principal made them believe that they were autonomous. It was evident that he had faith in their abilities as he did not mandate submission of lesson plans or listing of daily outcomes. They spoke of him with extreme devotion, as if they would fall on a sword for him. In a sense, they did; they sacrificed their beliefs, their ties to best practices for children and surrendered to the assessment driven teaching model that was
given to them. The true story was exhibited in the reality of the accountability constraints and limitations. Coupled with the pre-determined student outcomes and the scripted curricula adopted by the county, the power over teaching was positioned among the administrative officials who required those components during the kindergarten day.

Story Three – The Personal Stories of the Teachers

The stories shared by these teachers varied in personal ways as each one’s life history contributed to the teacher that they had become. It appeared that family background, life events, teaching experiences, personality traits, as well as pre-service and in-service education contributed to the development of these teachers. In general, each teacher shared different stories of life events and personal goals that brought them to the point in their careers at which this study occurred.

Jenny: Jenny based her story on her family. During the initial formal interview, she stated, “So I think if you want to know about me, you first need to know about my family.” In her story, family seemed to be the nucleus of everything in Jenny’s life. From her upbringing, to her choice of career, to her education and work with children, family stories and experiences appeared to infiltrate Jenny’s tales. Family seemed to be a major focus of her life.

There was, however, another side of that appearance. Jenny showed and shared frustration with the families with whom she worked in the kindergarten year. She involved them in the classroom, but maintained the role of “the teacher” at all times, assuming command of her environment and her work. She did not show a partnership attitude with the families, but shared that fact that she felt she understood their needs:
“So my relationship with adults and parents in here, it just doesn’t bother me. I know there’s a lot of people who get real nervous when parents are in. I don’t think I’m like a non human being. I’ve got my parents who I know are high maintenance and I don’t feel comfortable when I have to confront them, but I’m not afraid to confront them. Ummm and I think they know, just like the kids, whether you are really just trying to be bossy or just trying to manage and to do things the right way.”

Jenny’s statement shared much of her personality as a teacher. In her classroom, there was only one way; “the right way” which happened to be Jenny’s way. She exhibited the story of a highly teacher centered schedule, with work experiences and activities focused mainly on Jenny in front of the group. I observed that for a majority of the day, the children were focused on Jenny and her teaching. While there were some “kid friendly” activities and Jenny spoke kindly to children, the teacher was the center of the learning. This was not congruent with developmentally appropriate practices, but reflective of how these kindergarten classrooms in this public school were structured. Children were not actively involved in the learning processes. Teaching was done to them.

One part of Jenny’s story that stood out during the course of observations was her presence with children. She focused on them, their needs and their conversations, as she worked in the classroom each day. There was nothing more important than that child at that moment. With a busy schedule and increased expectations, Jenny maintained a commitment to children that was real and personal. The words she chose, the emotions she expressed, and the time she took to listen and interact with the children was remarkable. This was a unique theme in Jenny’s tale.

In certain domains, Jenny reached high levels that were noted. She was warm and caring in her personal connections with the children. She spoke with respect and
consideration in her conversations with them. She assured their comfort and reduced their worries. In the comforting domain, Jenny attained a high level.

Jenny had full power in her classroom. In the domain of control, she also reached a high level. This did not always translate into effective teaching of young children, but in effective management of them. She consistently held the control of the environment, the activities, and the events. Children were not involved in choices of lessons or ideas. They did not have any ownership within the classroom community. This may have been in part due to the large number of children in her room. Jenny had twenty-six (26) kindergarteners enrolled in her class during the course of this study. This large number may have contributed to her power level in the domain of control; however, from Jenny’s story, she exhibited aspects of control throughout her work, words, and teaching.

Jenny possessed elements of strength in her work. She was caring and committed to her job. Jenny spent many hours preparing to teach and organizing the environment. Her commitment to children was evidenced through that component.

Jenny spoke with compassion and respect to her children. This was noted throughout the observational notes. She made eye contact with children, positioned herself at their level, and responded with connectedness to their problems, issues, and thoughts.

Nicole: Nicole exhibited a different story than Jenny. She did not share as much of her life events, but focused more on her education and teaching experiences as she discussed her tale of teaching kindergarten. I was constantly intrigued with the formality, albeit friendly nature of Nicole. She was a teacher in her manner and in her speaking. She kept
her comments and stories on more of a professional level, maintaining a comfortable situation, but minding her boundaries of practice and personal input.

Nicole’s story was filled with accomplishments and awards. This may have been the undercurrent theme of her narrative; the push from her guidance counselor that she “could do so much more than just teach” was shared early in the relationship; the award from the county as teacher of the year was the special memory of teaching that Nicole reflected on during our formal interview; the fact that she described herself as a very goal oriented person shed light on her style of teaching and the expectations of her students that were observed in the classroom. She seemed to thrive on teaching based on the essential curriculum and standards enacted by the county and stated that the goals in her classroom were always curriculum based.

Nicole’s view of families in her work with young children varied from Jenny’s. In her own words, Nicole said, “We are partners in this gig.” Those words were also supported by the use of and relationships with parents as they volunteered in the classroom on a daily basis. She spoke to them as equals and shared a personal connection with them each time I observed an interaction. While staying true to her professionalism, Nicole created comfortable bonds that seemed to allow parents to feel welcome and useful in the classroom.

In the domain of comfort, Nicole’s teaching exhibited a high level. She was caring and kind in her words and conversations with children. She spoke with a softness and respectfulness that children responded to with reciprocation.
Crissi: Crissi’s story was as unique as the other cases. In her own words, her background of life experiences and her family structure impacted the choices she made in her life. She was an adopted child, brought to the United States from India. As the family grew with other adopted children, Crissi began to determine that she wanted to pursue teaching as a career. Family was an undercurrent theme in this study, much like Jenny’s, but in a non-traditional format. Her own children were part of the story as her son was present during interviews and early morning conversations. Family was an influence on Crissi’s story.

Crissi also included families in the structure of the kindergarten day. She involved parents and helpers in the classroom and seemed to understand the impact of family partnerships on the lives of children. The interactions with parents that were observed were friendly as Crissi maintained walls of professionalism with words of kindness and polite conversation. This was a common theme played out in each case.

Crissi was the newest and youngest teacher in the kindergarten wing. This aspect of her story exhibited differences as observations were conducted and interviews were completed. Crissi wanted to be correct in her teaching and in her answers. At the time of the data collection, she was a graduate student studying reading as a specialty. It seemed as if she felt she was in that same student role as we worked together. She showed great respect towards me in a way that was different than the more seasoned teachers.

A story of loss was a unique part of Crissi. She experienced the death, the murder, of a five year old student during the short time of her career. This affected her a year later as she reflected about it during an interview. Tears came to Crissi’s eyes as she spoke of the events and the effect on her teaching. While the loss impacted the entire
community, Crissi was directly influenced by the death. This was a unique part of her story and directly related to the emotions that are involved in teaching. Emotional loss was part of Crissi’s story.

Social Constructivism

The tenets of social constructivism and the ideas of child development theories were unclear in these teachers’ stories. The grounded assumptions of Vygotsky (1978) did not appear to factor into the planning or teaching of young children in these kindergarten classrooms. According to his widely accepted theories in the educational community about the teaching of children, a constructivist teacher creates a context for learning in which students can become engaged in interesting activities that encourage and facilitate learning. The teacher does not simply stand by, however, and watch children explore and discover; nor does the teacher become the focus of the instructional time. Instead, the teacher may often guide students as they approach problems, may encourage them to work in groups to think about issues and questions, and support them with encouragement and advice as they tackle problems, adventures, and challenges that are rooted in real life situations that are both interesting to the students and satisfying in terms of the result of their work. Teachers thus facilitate cognitive growth and learning as do peers and other members of the child's community (Vygotsky, 1978).

In these three cases, instruction was teacher centered. There was limited time for social interaction. Other than answering questions in group settings and infrequent play time, children were focused on the teacher and the activities that were planned. During observations, Vygotsky’s ideas of scaffolding and social construction were absent.
Instead, children were focused on academic instruction based in teacher directed practices.

The question may be posed as to the effectiveness of this type of teaching. Were these teachers successful? In the area of meeting goals and being effective in curriculum coverage, the answer would be yes. These children were learning the material presented to them and meeting standards. They were performing well on the assessments and showing that the teachers were accountable for their learning.

However, if the question is posed as to the effectiveness of this type of learning, the answer would be dissimilar. While children were meeting goals and accomplishing required tasks, they were not learning in the most effective and meaningful manner promoted and grounded in child development knowledge and instructional practices that work best for young children. Their learning, while appropriate for a specific moment or task, may never prove to be appropriate for life-long learning or effective in the growth and development of children.

**Story Four – The Complexity of Kindergarten**

Teaching in these kindergarten classrooms was a complex process. Through observational data, it was evident that as teachers worked with young children in the daily routine of kindergarten, there was a complexity to the interactions, practices, and events that was not always obvious to those outside the educational environment.

Teachers developed and maintained relationships with young children that were built in trust and nurtured through mutual respect. The teachers listened and spoke with children in meaningful ways; the children seemed to know that these teachers were truly
listening and reacting with appropriate responses. The teachers also held effective relationships with families and other adults in the school community.

The teachers successfully managed data collection and reporting with current technology. Technology was also incorporated in teaching activities. Through observations, the kindergarten teachers were observed managing the schedule with unexpected interruptions from family, administrators, and children. The routines were well established and the day flowed smoothly from one event to another. Even with various developmental levels and abilities, the teachers planned for appropriate instruction with each child.

Planning for instruction was a complex process. Teachers utilized the essential curriculum and standards developed by the county to plan for instruction in their classrooms. They also managed to incorporate the necessary assessment tools within that instructional plan and adjust the schedule according to needs of the children. The kindergarten teachers employed the tools that were available through the county as well as many materials that they developed for their classrooms.

Teachers were attentive to the needs of children. They were aware of joys and tears of some children as they attended to the worries and concerns of others. The complexity of human involvement was visible within the context of the early childhood setting.

The Complex Framework of Teaching Kindergarten

As a framework for decision making for high quality kindergarten programs, there are many dimensions to be considered (Heroman & Copple, 2006); (1) Implementing
curriculum in the kindergarten year, (2) Knowing the children, (3) Building a classroom community, (4) Establishing a structure for the classroom, (5) Guiding children’s learning, (6) Assessing children’s learning, and (7) Building a partnership with families. These are also considered the framework for developmentally appropriate practices (Copple, 2009). In reviewing the cases in these stories of teachers, it is important to analyze their model with this framework.

In the implementation of curriculum, teachers must apply their core understandings of child development, content standards, and teaching strategies to the myriad of decisions they make every day as the do their work in kindergarten. It is important to help ensure that curriculum is implemented in ways that foster children’s success as learners. The framework model addresses those specific areas (Heroman, 2006).

Quality kindergarten teachers know their children developmentally, individually and culturally (Heroman, 2006). If they understand development, they know the typical physical, cognitive, social, and emotional characteristics of children at this specific age. This ensures that teachers have reasonable expectations for children, what they are able to do and what they are capable of accomplishing.

Jenny, Nicole, and Crissi seemed to have general developmental knowledge of their kindergarten children. They were aware of physical needs, cognitive experiences, and language capabilities. They commented on their inability to provide more child friendly activities due the pressure of assessments. The decision that more teacher centered instruction would promote more focused learning was not grounded in their knowledge of child development.
Quality kindergarten teachers know their children individually as they recognize that each child comes with unique abilities, needs, experiences, interests, temperament and background knowledge (Heroman, 2006). In each of these teachers’ classrooms, the population of children was approximately twenty-five (25). With the mounting pressures and number of assessment pieces, teachers had a difficult task to know each child as an individual. As evidenced through the observations, parent volunteers and aides worked one-on-one with children on various activities and tasks; however, the teachers were generally observed in whole group situations with limited small group instructional practices. With the large number of children in one classroom, the opportunities to know them as individuals were restricted by expectations of academic teaching and the extreme allotment of assessment time. I believe they tried to know the children. Their authentic conversations and personal connections were evidence of their attempts. It was a difficult task given the circumstances.

Kindergarten teachers must know their children culturally and be sensitive to multiple perspectives as decisions are made about children’s development and learning. The nature of the teaching in these cases, based on standards and “same day, same way” pedagogy of the curriculum, confirmed that the teachers struggled to be culturally sensitive. There was limited consideration in the curriculum to allow the teachers to be responsive in the structure of the day and the assessment of the learning. Teachers commented on the “freedom” that the principal allowed, but noted the high accountability pressure with the increasing assessment factor. They were still slaves to the scores. There was limited flexibility in the adaption of the curriculum to meet the needs of each
child and the group as a whole. Curriculum was set and the calendar of events and learning was expected.

The most valuable tool and teaching strategy that a kindergarten teacher has is his or her ability to form relationships with the children and build a classroom community. It is through that positive, personal relationship the teachers can guide learning and behavior of young children (Heroman, 2006). According to Lilian Katz, the teacher should make relationships the first priority (cited in Kantrowitz & Wingert, 1989).

The first priority in these kindergarten classrooms was dictated to these teachers. Assessment was always the topic of conversation and drove the practices, activities, and interactions with the children. Each teacher, Jenny, Nicole, and Crissi, built relationships on some level with each child. The limited time with each individual child detracted from quality personal relationships in these classrooms.

Jenny was the most highly engaged with children in terms of authentic conversations and engagement. That was evident throughout the observational data collection piece. Nicole also shared an adequate level of quality engagement with children, but those conversations revolved to a higher degree around an essential curriculum component instead of what was meaningful to the child. Crissi seemed to be mostly focused on her agenda for the day as her interactions with children were positive, but short and disengaged from authentic listening and conversation. The variations in authentic conversation were notable.

Children arrive in kindergarten with various backgrounds of experiences and activities. By creating a community within the classroom, teachers establish a place where all children can function successfully. Through community building, teachers base
decisions knowing that children learn best in the context of social relationships and that they need to feel accepted and respected in the group.

By welcoming children into the room each morning, these teachers each displayed elements of community building within their teaching pedagogy. This initial interaction of the day was important for children to feel noticed and safe. Much as with authentic conversation, there were varied levels of community building aspects among the cases.

Jenny and Nicole demonstrated high levels of community aspects within their classrooms. Their authentic conversations added to that aspect of their work as they warmly greeted children as they entered the classroom environment each day. Specific characteristics were noted about each child and engaging conversations occurred.

Crissi’s morning was focused around her preparation of the environment and learning activities as well as in conversations with other adults in the room. As evidenced in the observations, she spoke to children when they came to her with an issue. Her answers were brief and pointed.

The structure of the classroom and the schedule has a powerful impact on how children learn (Heroman, 2006). This includes the arrangement of the physical environment and the organization of the daily activities. Quality kindergarten teachers are responsive to children’s needs as they plan for instruction and prepare the classroom. These classrooms look different from preschool or elementary grade classrooms in their complexity, levels of responsibility that children assume, the use of symbolic representations, and the reflection of children’s growing abilities and skills (Barbour & Seefeldt, 1993).
According to the literature, kindergarten classrooms will be different as teachers consider the space furnishings and materials. The environments will be reshaped as children’s new interest and needs emerge (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998; Dodge, Colker, & Heroman, 2002). All kindergarten classrooms must have certain elements, regardless of their resources: personal spaces for children to store work and belongings; a place for group meetings; a variety of working spaces, including learning centers; quiet places; storage and organizational spaces; and places for children’s work to be displayed.

In the classrooms of Jenny, Nicole, and Crissi, children did not have their own personal space for their things. Coats, bookbags, and items from home were stored in little lockers in the hallway to which children had limited access. Each classroom had a large group meeting area and a variety of working spaces; however, most activities were teacher directed and academically focused in those spaces. Children did not have access to quiet places, except when working at their individual desks. The rooms were organized with adequate storage options, but limited places to respectfully display student work.

Guiding children in their learning takes places all day across all dimensions of development. An effective kindergarten teacher motivates children, builds on their prior knowledge and strengths, and supports their learning using a variety of strategies to increase skills, knowledge, and understanding (Heroman, 2006).

In the cases presented in this study, teachers struggled to motivate children in most of the activities. The teacher centered academically focused tasks showed little relevance and meaning in the lives of the children. The priority of instruction was based in cognitive growth and academic learning with limited regard to other developmental
domains. The dichotomy of academic model versus developmental model was evident within these teachers’ stories.

Assessment and instruction are tandem events in a kindergarten classroom. Teachers assess continually to make careful intentional decisions about the children’s learning. NAEYC defines assessment as “a systematic procedure for obtaining information from observations, interviews, portfolios, projects, tests, and other sources that can be used to make judgments about children’s kills, dispositions, health or other characteristics” (2003, p.27).

In kindergarten, the major assessment tool is teachers’ observations of children. Observation provides information needed to build relationships with individual children and enable those children to be successful learners (McAfee, Leong, & Bodrova, 2004). In the cases reflected in this research project, the teachers were not able to allot time for authentic observations of children’s activities and learning. Crissi mentioned in her interview that there was no time to watch kids anymore. This valuable and universally accepted approach to assessment in early childhood was not evident in these classrooms.

In today’s climate of accountability and academic achievement, assessment seems to be at the center of everyone’s attention in the school setting. These teachers, Jenny, Nicole, and Crissi, commented regularly on the pressures they felt to conduct, complete, record and send data from standardized assessments. This seemed to be the main idea of their stories. Children and their learning were at the heart of each teacher. Teaching was a calling to each of them, and they viewed their work as more than a job; however, in the situational context of these kindergarten classrooms, assessment, not children, seemed to be the priority. These teachers told a story of accountability oppression. Their hands
were tied to the requirements from their administration, whose hands may also have been
tied to national trends and policy. None the less, if professionals are prohibited from
performing their work appropriately and in the manner noted by best practices, what has
their work become?

Experiences as a Researcher

As I reflected over the course of this project, from its initial planning stages to its
development through its implementation and to its completion, I realized the growth of
my understanding of research and the ways in which the researcher learns and develops
through the process. Even as I began to collect data, I did not contemplate the answers,
the stories and the learning that I would experience as I uncovered the complexities of
teaching kindergarten under the standards based design.

I did not expect my own experiences to connect with the stories of these
participants. As I observed them with children, I began to recognize and value the aspect
of my own knowledge and connections to teaching kindergarten and how that would
strengthen the study. I also discovered that in sharing pieces of my story, I was opening
myself up, showing my vulnerability as I reflected upon my past. I employed ideas from
autoethnography and reflexive ethnography methods of writing qualitative research,
allowing for the incorporation of my personal experience into evocative portrayals of the
teachers’ stories (e.g. Ellis, 2004; Ellis & Berger, 2003; Tillmann-Healy & Kiesinger,
2001). Researcher self-reflection was particularly important and useful as I had personal
experience with the topic at hand (Farnsworth, 1996).
My personal stories and reactions served as an honest revelation of how I arrived at my interpretations of the teachers’ stories, allowing readers to judge for themselves how my personal experiences influenced my interpretation and presentation of others’ experiences (Gilbert, 2001). Revealing aspects of my personal experience also served as an additional source of data in this attempt to better understand the teaching experience. This was a difficult component as I felt that it might weaken the study; however, as I continued with the collection of observations, I noted that my experiences were related to those of the participants in this study. It was impossible to separate my teaching, feelings, and memories from this research setting.

I was impressed with the participants and the work that they accomplished during the study. They were open and honest, sharing as much as they were able about their careers, their lives, and their contextual situations. They allowed me to be part of their team, offering me complete access to them and their classrooms over the course of the research.

On a more humanistic level, they made me personally part of their team. They included me on personal conversations, meetings with the principal, morning bagel time, and shared emails that related to school functions. I now wish that I could have completed a more through and holistic yearlong ethnography with the teachers so that I would have been able to become part of the social structure and “live” their lives. In that way, I would have been able to share a more complex and holistic story of the teaching of kindergarten under the academic based design.
Strengths and Limitations

The strengths and limitations of this study should be noted and discussed. First, the multiple sources of data that contributed to the analyses strengthen this research project. Through a multitude of observations of each case, various interviews and conversations, and document analysis, I was able to formulate my assertions and answer the research questions.

This present study was conducted in a naturalistic setting, adding to the strength of the research. Direct observations of the kindergarten classrooms provided contextual data as real life and real time events were observed and recorded. The participants were seen in the natural context of the teaching situation as they interacted with the children, the materials, and the curriculum.

An exploration of three different cases offered insight into the various stories of teaching that were present in the research setting. I was able to listen to, observe, and interpret the unique stories of each teacher as they shared their lives, their teaching, their thoughts, and their work. While each story was different, common themes were visible within the words and observations of the participants.

The major contribution that this study makes to the existing literature should be considered a strength. The study offers significant information to the field by sharing the heavy encumbrance assessment places on teachers and the impact of that aspect on their work with young children. This burden has a negative influence on their ability to teach in the ways they believe are best for kindergarten students. The unauthentic nature of the assessments is also noted in this study and must be considered by the field as detrimental to the education of children in kindergarten classrooms.
A second significant contribution to the field of education is the impact of emotions and the feelings of guilt that these teachers had in relation to their work with children each day. Both persecutory and depressive guilt were evident in these teachers’ stories as the focus on testing removed them from their work of teaching children. This guilt was placed upon them by the mandates of the county and encourages compliance with aspects of their work even if it is in opposition to their philosophies and beliefs. Persecutory guilt inhibits the teachers from doing what they think is best for kindergarten children. It prevents them from teaching in appropriate and meaningful ways for fear of prejudicing the assessment scores by which they are judged.

The sense of autonomy that teachers believe they possess is another significant contribution to the field of teaching. In today’s climate of accountability and assessment, teachers may have a false sense of power as they make decisions about teaching young children. The power belongs to the mandates that are placed upon them; scripted curricula, testing practices, and predetermined outcomes. In this current social setting, teachers were unable to teach in ways that are grounded in best practices and were forced to cover their story, protect their philosophies, and hide their abilities. This discovery is a significant finding and contribution to the field.

A final strength of this study is the description it offers as to the complexity of teaching kindergarten in the United States through the telling of teachers’ stories. By the examination and exploration of their stories, I was able to share the humanness that is teaching. I also used a narrative format in the writing of the research, allowing the reader to hear the participants’ voices, feel their emotions, and connect vicariously into the teaching context that was described.
One of the limitations of this study was in the sample of participants. While I began the study working with six (6) kindergarten teachers, I decided to narrow the focus of the writing to three (3) in order to share the holistic picture of teaching kindergarten without reiteration of data and stories. In doing so, I also limited the number of teacher stories from which assertions could be derived.

Another limitation of the sample of participants was that they were all from the same school building. This does not permit any generalizations to be made from the data. The case study does not represent a sample and the goal is to expand and generalize theories, not enumerate frequencies (Yin, 2004). It is important to note that this study derived data from a small population of kindergarten teachers and, therefore, offered modest empirically based conclusions but will encourage future research into early childhood educational topics. The findings do not attempt to make a broad statement about the overall practices of kindergarten teachers, but explored what is potentially prevalent in the way teachers work with young children in the public school kindergarten today.

Another limitation of this study was in the collection of data over the course of four months and the constraints of the teachers’ time to converse and add to the conversational data in explanation of events. Perhaps an examination over an entire school year, working and “living” with the kindergarten teachers from September through June would reveal deeper insights into the true complexity of teaching kindergarten under the standards based design. For example, I may have uncovered the changes in the teaching story and style as participants moved from the initial days of kindergarten
through the implementation of the essential curriculum and standards as well as the assessment procedures.

Implications for Practice

The results from this study have several implications for practice in early childhood education and in teacher education programs. First, the variation of teachers’ stories shown in the study, suggests that those different backgrounds and beliefs influence the teacher that is standing in the classroom. From their own words, each teacher believed that their methods were informed in part by their education, but more so by their experiences.

If teacher education programs examine this finding, it may be evident that quality early pre-teaching experiences under the guidance of carefully selected mentors are crucial and supplementary to the classroom theoretical understandings of pre-service teachers. It would appear that experience may be the lasting teacher.

In early childhood developmental theory, it is highly suggested that teachers make experiences meaningful and connected for children so that a higher level of learning occurs. Perhaps this same philosophy should be applied to teacher education courses. If more field experiences were included with class work, then perhaps more quality working theories of teaching would be related to the classroom.

It may then, be suggested that implications for teacher education practice may be immense from this aspect of this study. If future early childhood teachers were instructed in the methods of child developmental understanding and those theories were related in a real life way, then perhaps those best practices would influence teaching in early
childhood classrooms and counter against the academic and didactic models that are marked in kindergarten today.

Another implication would be the heightened awareness of early childhood teachers about the inappropriate models of instruction that may be prevalent in kindergarten. Teachers in these kindergarten classrooms are buying into the academic focus as they work through the pressures from their administrations to raise literacy and math scores on tests of standards of learning. These early childhood teachers have been pulled away from and in essence forgotten how children learn best. The skill oriented, teacher centered classrooms have become the norm and integrated meaningful learning is not observable.

Early childhood teachers need to understand their roles in the learning processes of children. Teacher education programs, in conjunction with quality field experiences and mentors, can develop teacher candidates who see how developmentally appropriate methods of instruction can still lead to positive learning outcomes and higher test scores. Early childhood teachers should also be informed through play practices which can be utilized to provide appropriate learning opportunities in which children are able to achieve standards and meet or exceed expectations.

Another implication for practice would be in the area of play as an educative tool to teach standards and meet expectations in high accountability models. If pre-service teachers had exposure to play pedagogy and practices in coursework and in classrooms where standards were the focus of the instructional plan, they would begin to form an understanding of how play works in the learning of children. Teacher awareness of the values and uses of play may be lacking from teacher preparation courses.
Suggestions for Future Research

This present study points to the need for further research in the field of early childhood education. First, a broader study, surveying a larger number of participants in more diverse settings, may provide data of the prevalence of teaching styles of kindergarten teachers in the United States under the standards based design. It is possible that such an examination would show how the academic model of instruction has changed the manner in which young children are learning throughout the country. It may also show how the beliefs of teachers may have changed under the pressures of the accountability movement and high stakes testing era. Teacher may have been forced away from what they know is best practice and has assimilated to the accountability model.

Second, there would a huge benefit for teacher educators to understand how and why teachers move from a theoretical understanding to a more working theory of teaching. A study of teacher beliefs about why they chose the lessons, activities, and materials for their classrooms may show how the influence of administration pressures and requirements overpower the professional knowledge base of child development and learning theory experts. This information may help improve teacher preparation programs as they help to develop knowledgeable teachers grounded in best practices for future early childhood classrooms.

Third, an important study might examine how early childhood teachers come to understand developmentally appropriate practices and the uses of play in the educative processes of children. An examination of coursework within programs throughout the United States may show if and how ECE programs include aspects of DAP or courses
devoted to play theory and pedagogy. It would also benefit the field to discover how
ECE teacher educators instruct students on theories of play as a teaching tool and inform
pre-service teachers about its uses in the classroom to create meaningful and connected
learning opportunities under standards based academically oriented curricula.

Another area for study would be the effects of the prevalent assessment structures
and high stakes testing on quality learning opportunities for young children. In these
classrooms, teachers used instructional time to assess children and document data.
Teaching and learning time was obviously reduced as a result of that requirement. It
would benefit the field to determine how this assessment piece permeates the teaching
day and to what degree that component limits authentic learning opportunities for young
children.

The field of early childhood education must also determine what qualities a
kindergarten teacher must possess in be effective in all areas of teaching young children.
It is important for the educational community to be cohesive in the question regarding the
relationship between teachers’ qualifications and classroom quality and child outcomes
(Early, Bryant, Pianta, Clifford, Bruchinal, Ritchie, et.al, 2006). Teachers of young
children should possess a BA degree with specialized training in early childhood at a
minimum (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2001). The question linking teacher preparation
and outcomes is simply framed. One problem with research on this issue is the fact that
there is no standardized, but rather tied to state by state requirements. This variation in
teacher preparation is a challenge to studies that assume a college degree provides similar
education and experiences (Takanishi & Bogard, 2007).
In my professional opinion, a kindergarten teacher must possess a variety of characteristics in order to prove effecting in the teaching of young children. Each quality must be grounded in child development knowledge and best practices for early childhood education that are grounded in research. Kindergarten teachers are complex beings with highly developed teaching skills linked with human qualities. They must be committed to children and able to plan curriculum to promote the full development of each child. Kindergarten teachers must listen thoughtfully to children, extend children’s language about ideas and feelings, and ask questions that encourage insights and promote and value creative divergent responses from children.

In kindergarten, teachers must regularly assess children’s interests, needs, and skills which will enable more continuous, flexible and realistic planning. The teacher must design the environment as another teacher, with experiences that provide successful daily experiences for children at every developmental level, incorporating positive interactions, encouragement, and praise. Kindergarten teachers must promote a positive self-image by helping children succeed in activities. Increasing self-esteem is an important part of the teaching task. Kindergarten teachers must utilize a variety of instructional approaches that are suited to kindergarteners’ range of interests, needs, and abilities. The activities must also be meaningful and engaging with a level of choice and control given to the children. In addition, kindergarten teachers must understand authentic assessment and use methods of collection that are appropriate to the developmental levels and experiences of the children.

The connection of the family in the lives of children is a critical component to the successful in kindergarten classroom. Teachers of young children must be able to form
positive relationships with children and their families and draw upon the knowledge base parents possess about their child. Most importantly, this community sense must be transferred to the classroom environment as the kindergarten teacher builds a caring community of children and learners. The reciprocal, respectful relationships that are built and nurtured will provide a comfortable and trusting environment and greatly benefit the academic achievement of all children.

Finally, the kindergarten teacher must become an advocate for early childhood programming, teaching, and especially for young children. They must own their professionalism and education in order to debate policies and issues that are in contrast to best practices and developmental theory. While being the kind, sweet teacher is a warm affective characteristic in kindergarten, it is more important to advocate for the benefit of children and promote the knowledge base and expertise that is present in early childhood education.

Conclusion

How do concerned educators and policy makers stem the rising tide of the academic credentialing in early childhood programs and the massive assessment focus of accountability? How do kindergarten teachers find a balance of developmentally appropriate teaching practices that are bound to academic components? Testifying before the National Education Goals Panel, a kindergarten teacher moved the assembled governors with her words:

“I am a kindergarten teacher and I have the best job in the whole world. My kids and I love each other…but I am pressured to be everything to everybody; I am caught
between developmental and disciplinary approaches to pedagogy and curriculum and I am tossed about between play and formal instruction. How am I supposed to keep the hopes of my families and children alive when my own dreams for the possibilities of kindergarten are so diminished?”

We must become rooted in the desire to reconcile the pressures on kindergarten today. With our knowledge of child development, best pedagogical practices, and brain research we have the tools to formulate kindergartens that promote developmental academic practices and align conflicting ideas correlated with high stakes testing pressures. As the public recognizes the importance of the early learning years, they have turned to kindergarten teachers to deliver the goods; early readers and academically prepared young children. It remains a challenge for these educators to meet those expectations without compromising their knowledge of child development and developmentally appropriate practices.

The literature specifies the talents and skills required of teachers, including the need to know children culturally, to be sensitive to diversity and regard it as a strength. Teachers must also know child development, curriculum content, classroom management, varied approaches to teaching and pedagogy, and guidance in all aspects of the learning process for young children.

There are many challenges facing the field of early childhood education in this era of academic concentration and accountability. The prevalence of assessment based teaching and planning is a significant area of concern for early childhood educators and
teacher preparation programs to consider. Expectations of young children have increased. That is clearly shown through the data in this study. The reduction of developmentally appropriate teaching and learning and the absence of play opportunities are two additional major issues facing the early childhood community today. The questions that arise from this small, yet significant research project should be considered in future research and in the practices of early childhood teachers and teacher educators.
References


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APPENDIX A

Informed Consent
Informed Consent Form for Social Science Research
The Pennsylvania State University

Title of Project: Stories from Kindergarten: An Exploratory Study of the Teaching of Young Children in Public School Kindergartens in the Standards Based Educational Structure

Principal Investigator: Jennifer L. (Chestnut) Pyles
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Advisor: James E. Johnson
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814 865-2230

1. Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this research is to... This study is a description of teaching at the kindergarten level in public schools today. It will explore and describe the complex world of teaching young children in the kindergarten setting. It will share the stories of the teachers, their beliefs, their philosophies, their experiences, and the work that they do each day and in sharing those stories describe how those professionals provide quality instruction for kindergarten children.

2. Procedures to be followed: You will be asked to...
You will be asked to meet with me, Jennifer Pyles, to participate in ongoing observations and interviews that will be voice recorded. During our conversations, you will be asked questions to help me gain insight into your work, your classroom, and your teaching story. You will also be asked to allow me to observe your classroom a few times so that your teaching is exhibited in the authentic environment. You will be asked to allow me to photograph the physical environment in order to show your teaching in this manner (no children or adults will be in the pictures). These photographs and voice recordings will be stored in a secure lock box in my home office and may be used in future research, publications, or conference presentations. I will be the only person to have access to these items. After observations are completed, you will be asked to meet again to discuss the observations and answer some questions related to your
teaching. Finally, you will be asked to allow me, Jennifer Pyles, to examine any documents that you have in your room that relate to or guide your teaching. These may include the curriculum, teaching manuals, or children’s work samples (without names).

3. **Benefits:** The benefits to you include...
By participating in this study, you will be able to examine your teaching and participate in a different type of professional development. You will be able to share your story of teaching and be part of the research community that is working to better the education for young children.

The benefits to society include...

This study will share with the world the complexities of kindergarten teaching in the public school structure. It will contribute to the field by exploring best practices of current teachers and showcasing the quality of early childhood educational programs. By sharing how teaching looks today in kindergarten, this study will help to guide teacher educators as they modify and improve the programs for future teachers.

4. **Duration/Time:**
This study will begin in late October 2009 and go through March 2010. You will be asked to participate in several interviews. You will also be asked to allow me, Jennifer Pyles, to observe your classroom at various times over the course of a few months. Other interviews will then be scheduled. Although the timeline is through March, it is possible that it will not take that long to complete data collection.

5. **Statement of Confidentiality:**
Your participation in this research is confidential. The data will be stored and secured at my house in a locked file. In the event of a publication or presentation resulting from the research, no personally identifiable information will be shared. Code names will be used in place of your actual name so that complete confidentiality is maintained. Your identification and the data collected during this study will only be shared with my advisor, Dr. James Johnson and committee members, Dr. James Nolan, Dr. Rick Fiene, and Dr. Kimberly Powell.

6. **Right to Ask Questions:**
Please contact Jennifer Pyles at 301 371-8529 with questions, complaints or concerns about this research.

7. **Payment for participation:**
A gift certificate of $25.00 will be awarded to each participant upon completion of data collection, sometime around January 2010.
8. **Voluntary Participation:**

Your decision to be in this research is voluntary. You can stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. Refusal to take part in or withdrawing from this study will involve no penalty or loss of benefits you would receive otherwise.

You must be 18 years of age or older to consent to take part in this research study. If you agree to take part in this research study and the information outlined above, please sign your name and indicate the date below.

You will be given a copy of this consent form for your records.

Regarding the use of recordings in future research:

a. _____ I do not give permission for my recordings to be archived for use in the following way: future research, publications, or conference presentations). I understand the recordings will be destroyed on December 30, 2010.

b. _____ I give permission for my recordings to be archived for use in the following way: future research publications, or conference presentations).

_____________________________________________  ______________________
Participant Signature                               Date

_____________________________________________  ______________________
Person Obtaining Consent                            Date
APPENDIX B

Interview Questions
Interview Questions for Kindergarten Teachers

Jennifer (Chestnut) Pyles

Section One: Research Question One

What are the stories that are told by kindergarten teachers, working in an era when accountability and academic achievement are the focus?

1. Tell me about your background in teaching.
   a. How/why did you become a teacher?
   b. Where/what grade/age did you start teaching?
   c. How long have you taught?
   d. How long have you worked with kindergarten children?
   e. In what area is your certification/degree?

2. What are some of the high points of your career?
   a. What special memories do you have?
   b. What makes them so memorable?
   c. Is there a time you remember when you felt everything worked well in your teaching?
   d. What made your teaching work so well at that time?
   e. What were the influences that made things work so well during this period?

3. Can you tell me some of the difficult situations that you remember in your career?
   a. Was there a time or situation when your teaching or your work was a struggle for you?
   b. What were the influences that contributed to this difficult period?
   c. What makes them so memorable

4. Why did you become a teacher?

5. What is your philosophy of teaching young children?

6. In your experience, what are the important aspects of teaching young children?

Section Two: Research Question Two

How do teachers deliver developmentally appropriate instruction and make learning meaningful and engaging in kindergarten classrooms today?

7. What are some of the changes you have experienced in the kindergarten program?
   a. Time in school?
   b. Curriculum?
   c. Expectation?
   d. Philosophy?
   e. Children?
8. What is your viewpoint on Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP)?
   a. How do you engage children in learning experiences?
   b. Are you able to consider developmental differences? How?

9. What is your viewpoint on the standards based movement?
   a. Describe how standards are included in your teaching
   b. How do you feel your standards meet children’s needs both developmentally and academically?
   c. What changes, if any, would you make to improve the standards?

10. How do you feel DAP and standards merge?

11. Describe a typical day in your kindergarten classroom.
    a. What is your schedule?
    b. What types of experiences do children have in your room?

12. What types of assessments do you do with children?
    a. What is required?
    b. What is your choice?

13. How much freedom in planning for instruction do you have?
    a. Time and schedule?
    b. Curriculum requirements?
    c. Materials?

14. If you could design your day, what would you do?
    a. Schedule?
    b. Curriculum
    c. Grouping of children?
    d. Materials?

Section Three: Research Question Three

How do teachers consider play in the educational processes of kindergarten children under the standards based design?

15. What is your perspective on play in the educational processes of children?
   a.

16. Do you have play in your classroom?
   • If so, what does it look like?
   • How much time do children have to be involved in play?
   • Is the play child initiated?
   • How is play viewed by your administration?
   • How is play viewed by other teachers?
   • How is play viewed by parents
APPENDIX C

Transcriptions of Interviews

Jenny
Nicole
Crissi
Interview with Jenny (November 11, 2009, 12:10 PM)

Me – Tell me about your background in teaching…how long you’ve been teaching…..

J – Ok I think if you want to know about me you need to know about my family. I’m one of 11 kids and I’m 4th oldest, I have 7 sisters and three brothers so you know when I was growing up I was in charge of helping to clean at the house and also raising the kids.

M – Did you grow up in this area?

J – No I grew up in New Jersey in the northwest corner of the state in the Poconos, and uh, there were 11 kids and 18 years so there was always a baby around the house, and so, um, what became more interesting for me as a person, which does matter which is why what I do matters so much to me, maybe being around kids all the time, I just feel like that’s a natural place for me to be, nothing surprises me and sometimes parents come in here and say “how do you listen to five people at one time” and well five is not much of anything when you’ve been listening to so many people your whole life and most of my family members are outgoing and articulate and they are all professionals, they’ve all graduated, and the hardest thing in my life is, actually there were my best friends, so when I started to branch out on my own life it was kinda sad in some ways because I began to see that they were changing as they met their love ones and then it became even more challenging as they each started raising their own families in different ways, so you know you soon learn, you get real stretched emotionally, and your personality ummm becomes very encompassing because you realize they have the right to raise their kids the way they want to and to pass judgement is highly hurtful and inappropriate so my relationship with adults and parents in here, it just doesn’t bother me I know there’s a lot of people who get real nervous when parents are in here, I don’t think I’m like a non-human being, I’ve got my parents who I know are high maintenance and I don’t feel comfortable when I have to confront them, but I’m not afraid to confront them. Ummm and I think they know, just like kids, ummm whether you are really just trying to be bossy or just trying to manage and do things the right way. I think having so many people and inlaws and having all of that constantly my family is about 80 some now – they still are my best friends to this day and that is what is really amazing, so anyway, with all that said—

M – I saw the pictures of your family up there

J – yea that is my daughter and son, and they are best friends. So I’ll quit talking about my family,

M – No please share what you like…

J – This whole second generation, they’re even more diverse than I am, and no matter what is going on in the family, they have come to grips with the same kind of thing I had to come to grips with so I know it’s a real sort of phenomenon, that I have had to be accepting and open to a lot of things, so things don’t phase me. So when parents want to come and conference with me and they have their way of doing things, see, I know that
they know that I’m with them on that, see you can pretend all you want, you can be professional and have your answers but I really want them to tell me what they want, and the bottom line is that they are the first set of people who are responsible for the lives of their kids.

M – um hum

J – I think of myself as a person who is trying to create as many dreams as possible, I’m here for you, so you’re gonna listen to me you have to do as I say, but you have to at least listen to what I want to tell you and then you tell me back what you want to do and that’s how we’ll proceed and I’ve um learned that maybe because I’m from this big family, that kids can be pretty independent, they don’t need all these bandaids, they don’t need all these smolchy explanations, they get it, I know they get it, cause I helped raise six of them, you know this is just no big deal and so I have very high expectations fro the kids that come in here emotionally and socially and I expect them to act like a family and a team and be kind and respectful cause that’s just the right thing to do.

So anyway you know ummm, if I could and when I know somebody well enough I don’t say it often but ah, I heard this one time, but when you die, God isn’t gonna ask you what your IQ is, he’s gonna wanna know if you’ve been nice to your neighbor and that’s exactly where I’m coming from and that better be happening. And the rest is incidental. And if the thing si if you have a very safe cooperative environment I spend very little time discipling and we get a lot done. So you know at the front end of the year, my mom spoils me rotten. I’ve very fortunate and I know I’m very fortunate that she’s retired and she lives across the street. She comes twice a week – and I’ve even asked her (laughing) about sharing her, and she looked me in the face and she said ―I come to help you‖. It embarrasses me a little bit, but she taught kindergarten for 20 years here in Middburg so when she comes, I plan for her too.

J - Compliment notes – written up in the front part of the year – breeds a lot of good will

J - Four behaviors – I said something nice to my friend, I used good self control, I raised my hand to talk and I was quiet in the hallway. Get those early on. Legitimate awards – celebrate the student

J - They work hard for me. They’re not perfect, but as long as I know they are tryin their best so for me its – and for families, I’m willing to give them a lot of time so if they have needs, and I meet with them about once a month, so I’m constantly communicating especially the ones who have problems.

J - It is nice begin close to home, you know. And people don’t abuse it, you know, they don’t. So that’s also nice to know. So anyway, when I went to Liberty, there was a, probably one of the best K teachrs I have ever known. She and I always got to the same end…you know she was the Van gogh and I was the Mozart. How we got there, but our kids excelled and how we got there was different. She was the best person. It was just so neat, she didn’t have to worry about me and I didn’t have to worry about her, it was fabulous. And they sent her to the Lincoln school when AYP and she raised that program
right up. But she was raised in a mining town of PA – she knew what it was like to be poor – she had a natural way of reaching out to the under achievers. I learned so much from her – you can really learn from other people. I would love to be able to go around and see and learn from my teammates. All the neat things you can get just from being around somebody, you know like oh my gosh, duh, look how they did that. You know, it’s too bad that life isn’t a little more perfect and students coming out of college can’t do that.

J - I don’t take student teachers cause I take too many special needs children and that would just put me under.

I’ve been on school improvement team for ever – so I help write grants for the school cause it is a very poor community out there – Lincoln

J - When I came here – it was very neat and unusual. All of this talent, all of this power in our wing. It’s pretty neat. And what was really nice, was when Mark interviewed me, I just said, you know what I don’t do things like everybody else. I’m just gonna be honest with ya, I cannot run my classroom probably like the county wants me to, I’ve gotta run it the way I wanna run it. And he was pretty loud and clear, cause he told us, he just said, I don’t want anybody to be like anybody else. Just get the job done. And he just said, all I’ll tell ya…from my side is, if a parent ever calls me up and asks a question, I’m gonna bring it to your door, just have your answers ready. And that’s it. He doesn’t come in here and tell us how to get it done. He just wants the job done. And I am so thankful he just cause otherwise I think I would just have to quit. That may surprise you, but for me to get scripted and put into these scripted plans and weekly assessments. That ain’t gonna work with me. It’s not a power thing. I would resent the efficiency that I have here in this classroom and to bog that down with 25 thousand ton weight cause I gotta finish a freakin piece of paper so I can plug it in on Friday afternoon.

M - But Mark kinda gives you the professionalism that allows you to…

J - Yea, but we have gradebook and we have weekly assessments that have to go in there. And I’m gonna, I do my own assessments, I’m assessing all da time. You wanna see it?? It takes a lot of time to do that…

Why would I waste 10 minutes teaching something they already know, because a book or a curriculum tells me it is time to do that.

…well when I went to school, I knew that the normal kids were gonna learn no matter what you do. I need to know about the kids who weren’t gonna learn, so I have a minor in sped. So when I was doing it at Hood internships at Rock Creek. And I’m glad I went there and did that. And then a woman named – she was a reading teacher and then a principal at Rock Creek, and I ended up having her daughter later in k but you end up having a lot of connections with the sped world and then when I took grad classes, it was
always in sped. Every one of them, you know, so I would know and be very well informed bout the kids and I took the exceptional individual and the gifted too. So you know what I have is my 30 hour plus, but I didn’t get a master, cause what happened as I was proceeding with that, my mother in law needed to move in with us and she lived with us for 13 years and she and I were very good friends but I was music minister at the church I was playing for all the services just about which I loved doing and I gave that all up to take care of her. Ummm hummm….so, yea, it just, that was hard. But I’m not a bit sorry, but it was hard…and I was a little scared when she first moved in, cause I didn’t know, not because we weren’t friends but you don’t know in the long haul if that’s a good thing or a bad thing…but…she came to school every day with me, she would drive herself 10 she loved the Pre-k – she has her name on a plaque out there…

What are they doing love bug, is it indoor recess…..

Ummm yea..

Ok…

Interview stopped.
Interview with Nicole on November 12, 2009 (7:45 AM)

J – Tell me about your background in teaching. For instance, how or why did you become a teacher. Those kinds of things.

N – I knew I wanted to be a teacher when I was in second grade because Mrs. Trice had the kind of job that I knew I wanted to have umm I would go back and help her in fifth grade and umm when I was in high school and it became time for career track, my guidance counselor said that I could do so much more than teach.

J–Oh

N – um hum true and umm and I stuck to it and knew that was my goal and I went from New York, upstate New York to Hood College.

J – Ok

N – and got a good degree in early childhood

J – Now what took you to Hood College

N – A private women’s college at the time umm to everyone’s liking ummm and ahh actually I knew of another gal who had gone there, a friend, years before, so it was a good fit

J – ok

N – for me. I graduated in 1982 and uh actually a semester early, I took some advanced classes, and got a job right out of, in Fair County, right out of student teaching. I student taught in K and 1st grade and the position that I got was in at Waverly where I had student taught. It just fit. Ok…so I was there for..oh I can’t even remember…many years and then I went to a city school, South Fair. But my first year was very good and it was with the same team (as student teaching) and they held the position. What happened was the numbers grew and back then when there weren’t budget constraints they could easily hire a, I believe it was a fifth teacher at the time umm so I got five children from each class and they created a, from the band room, a new kindergarten class.

J – So how long have you been teaching?

N – Since January of 1982!

J – Ok, and how long in kindergarten? Did you switch around?

N – I did, I did, both children are 18 and 14 and after I had children I stayed home for awhile and then came back and wanted to work just part time. When I came back, kindergarten leant itself to part time because it was half, just the morning so I job shared
with a dear friend of mine for five years. And then I went to two half days, Am and Pm, and then went it went full time, full day, so did I.

J- So how long in Kindergarten do you think?

N – from 1992 till now

J – And before that it was?

N – Started in first grade, second grade, third grade. I moved from country to city and grade levels because at that time I aspired to be an administrator and I knew how important it was to move around. Um but then I had children and decided that teaching leant itself better to parenting. Before I had children I thought it (admin) a good way to use my teaching skills, a good way to use business and management.

J – What was your degree in at Hood?

N – Early childhood and then I got my master’s in special ed and then got a certification in educational administration.

J – thinking back over your career can you think of some of the high points?

N – I think there is an ebb and flow in one’s career. The enthusiasm and wide eyed wonder in new teachers is ummm exciting but with it comes the angst of paperwork parent conference, curriculum, using that as a bible instead of a guide, so first year teaching was wonderful because of the wide eyed wonderment. Umm but when one becomes more relaxed and confident and you have more in your pocket to pull from, less important are the teaching guides. You already have created your files and um so that’s a great time in teaching

J – And at what point do you think you got to that place in your career?

N- Ummm I probably would say year five umm when there weren’t the added pressures of children, I taught for 8 years before I was even married so it was my life – it was my life and you could really put everything into it. I think another exciting time is umm as I said when you’re relaxed enough and you can walk in, and it’s not all about what’s in the plan book but what’s here to draw from. To do what we know what is right as opposed to what is written down by a curriculum specialist who may not have been in the classroom to see, what really happens. I think the curriculum is written to the nth degree and as new teachers we think that the only way to get from a to z is through the curriculum, that it is linear, but as seasoned teachers I think we know that we have to get from a to z but there are different paths to get there.

J – any special memories that sticks in your mind from your teaching career?

N- I do have one but I don’t want it to sound egotistical study.

J – oh no no no that’s what this is all about, it is an egotistical study. It’s all about you, so please share.
A couple of years ago I was honored by parents and staff for being Washington Post’s Agnes Myers Teacher of the Year for Fred County but truly I credit the paperwork that parents and teachers did to honor me with that and that really was a highlight because it was a celebration of all teachers not just me and um but that was a highlight. Umm it keeps me humble, because do these kids know – no do they care? No – it’s ..the reward doesn’t come from that or the paycheck you know that, it’s the achievement of a skill that is attained or the light bulb go off, or the hug you get in the morning...umm for 5 year olds that the affirmation. I ah I think I’m driven…having children of my own makes me a better teacher. I see the expectations that they want that they need. They are bright children and yet they still have goals and I want their teachers to shoot for the stars for my own children and I know that my task as a teacher is not to satisfy the children and make it all fun and games but to satisfy the parents, because I think the parents in this community also have the same aspirations, I do, I am a parent in this community, I have high expectations because that means they have a leg up for tracking that is inevitable for college and for career.

J – you talked about the families, how do you work with families.

N – I think um we are partners in this gig. When I assign homework it is not to put an extra 20 minutes on a parents schedule it is my way of communicating to parents what is happening in the school, so they can have that dialog with children at home so there is a link between school and home. Parents truly are the first educator and I let them know that. Parent conferences though we sit across the table, is more of a dialogue than a monologue. We learn a lot about kids from the parents. I think parents respect me because even if a child is gifted I still will give them goals. Umm to work on as they walk away from conferences. I am very candid. I don’t sugar coat a lot of stuff, and parents appreciate that through emails and conversations and um . Umm I treat their children as if they are my own, giving three warnings, time out heads down, and I think because I treat the children that way there is a trust, a learned expectation – an example of this is when we would cross group, I would be more hesitant to push push push other teacher’s children because I haven’t developed that relationship of “I love you” and that’s why I want you to do -- what you would do with your own child. So that’s why I like having my own students to push push push.

J – Ok now let’s go the other way, do you remember a time when things were difficult?

N – I remember a certain day – just one day specifically it was a first year teacher mistake, I can’t believe, I’m …I do I do think about this, um there was a child _____ who would continually laugh at children, and I would reprimand him, we don’t do this we don’t do that, I wasn’t a mother, I wasn’t a seasoned teacher, he did something wrong and I laughed at him. He cried and I immediately…. That was…1982, and I remember that…I was embarrassed ..for him. I just wished I could have rewound that and taken it back after all these years.

J – And what happened from that experience?
N - I think I said I was sorry, and I hugged him. I don’t think it scarred him as much as it affected me to know that you don’t bully kids – and whether that was just immaturity on my part, not having children (of my own) ..that was a new teacher mistake. I will always remember.

J- It sticks with you…

N- Oh it does…

J – and do you still have the emotion that goes with that, I mean can you still feel..

N – I can, I can and I think about that, and character counts education wasn’t big back then, so bullying wasn’t a word that came forth, you trustworthiness, citizenship, caring, that just wasn’t …

J – ok, um, so this next one is like an interview question. What is your philosophy of working with young children?

N – Well I had to write this for the Washington Post, so I would like to think this was fresh in my mind but it is not…you know when one, you think about um….the wisdom you impart or the skills…but truly, simply put I think I can, I think I can, I think I can. Ummm I expect of my children, lofty goals of social skills, academic skills, ummmm but it’s the same things that we expect of our friends and colleagues …the same things that we started in kindergarten.

J – Ok so what are the important aspects of teaching kindergarten for you? What are the important elements within your classroom that you feel are really critical.

N – You mean curricular areas?

J – Ummm any element, anything that is important in this room or things that you do with kids…

N – Um, probably something that sets me apart is the writing. Umm I umm emphasis the reading, writing, listening, speaking connection, and I do that with stretching of sounds, um, ah, expecting flowing thoughts, obviously not perfect mechanics in k but other teachers are sometimes in awe of what my kids can produce in writing.

J – Ok, those questions were more about you, your story. Now I have some that are more about kindergarten. What are some changes

N – ahhhh

J - that you have experienced in Kindergarten over time,

N – Yes

J - whether it be the time in school, or the curriculum, or the expectations, or the children themselves…changes in kindergarten.
N – Well in 1992 when I started this gig it was half day and there were thematic units, umm units based on children’s interests, umm example Mexico was the ethnic unit…umm..in September we learned about safety. October, arachnids. Novemeber, family. December we had a great toy unit! January was Mexico. February was dental health and friendship. March was castles and characters and with that we had a feast so our reading stories were about fictional castles and characters. Our feast had a huge knights of the round table. We had chicken legs and ate with our hands. We had learned that they didn’t use utensils. So it was fun, and those were memories created. Umm there was always a climatic culminating activity. But leading up to that, yes we still had listening, speaking, reading, writing, math. But it was entrenched into that unit for that month. Our centers were changed each month. Our bulletin boards were changed each month based on those units. When I would ask children at conferences what is your favorite part of school, at the end or the year, what are some special K memories….it would be the feast, it would be the fiesta with the piñatas. Umm and now when we ask the children, you know what is your favorite part of school, the answer is centers.

J – and what are centers now.

N – centers are ummm 8 different areas of the room, writing blocks, home living, which you would call dramatic play, community, computer, math, science3, art, and I have puzzles and school center where the kids can reread what we have read or play school and that is generally realistically 25 min 3 days a week ummm but back in 1992 it was 30 minutes 5 days a week in half day k, and it was during that time that we would pull as assess children. Now the amount and types of assessment that we have don’t lend themselves to the 25 min 3 days a week that I have centers. Another way that kindergarten has changed over the years is the amount of assessing, so that we set aside blocks of time or coverage is provided for us so that we can do the assessments –

J – so someone comes in to teach for you and you assess the kids one on one?

N – yes, yes, or when children are at specials, I give up my planning time and sit outside specials, I did this yesterday, I sat outside doubles and pulled children and assessed. On Tuesday, um we had a movie with our principles blessing and pulled and assessed children. I don’t want to say it’s optimum teaching but if we think assessing is part of teaching and its diagnosis and we adjust instruction based on the outcomes of that testing it is very important. But it’s the data keeping and the input on the grid that takes time.

J – ok um…what is your viewpoint or understanding of developmentally appropriate practices.

N – ummm

J – and how does that fit into the structure of standards based and your teaching now

N – I think of Piaget and the stages of development, and if I thought hard I could remember them. I think of Bloom’s taxonomy of questioning, and I think of developmentally, how appropriate it is for children to sit for x number of minutes or to focus for x amount of time and I think our curriculum often lends itself to thinking developmentally. I will break things up with getting the wiggles out, or the songs or the
dances or I will make sure there is a recess built into the morning. Or we as a team go to vocab group mid morning – two times a week

J – and do they go out everyday

N – they do

J – how many times a day?

N – um from our classroom one a day on a nice day for 15 minutes, then there is a lunch recess always for 20 minutes following lunch that teachers are not in charge of.

J – So do you feel you are able to teach developmentally while focusing on curriculum? You’re able to balance it?

N – Yes, but it’s a give and take. Somedays I feel we’re giving 110% to the curriculum. Somedays I feel like, umm there’s more time to remember that they are 5 and 6. My best friend had a child late in life. I held him when he was a baby. Now he is four and I look at him, and next year he is coming to kindergarten so I forget that they cute fun and games that Aunt Nancy does – next year when he comes to kindergarten, he is going to be held to task for this skill and this skill and this skill. And its important for us to remember that developmentally, they’re 5 – they’re 5 and 6.

J – So do you think that expectations are too much, do you think…I mean when you say he will be held to task and he is only five… I mean high expectations are good, you said that..

N – yes, and I would say that ummm years ago, my expectations were greater than Fair County’s. Now I would say that Fair County’s expectations have increased ummm

J – so maybe it’s not expectations for you? What’s different for you? You said your expectations were greater, now they’re equal. So what’s different – what are we doing that is NOT considering that they’re just 5 years old.

N – I think the rate of learning is fine. I think the umm skills in each term are appropriate. But it’s the amount of testing, really, the application part is appropriate, but it’s the testing that could put a stress on the kids, but because it is part of the day now that they have gotten used to it. Case in point. We have running records. Years ago the expectation was to pass a level 4 by years end. Now mimimum competency is level 8 – in kindergarten. My daughter in 1995 was on level 9 – we thought she was so gifted. Now a level 9 is just an average child. So you see it’s the same running records, the same skills, but the expectations has risen.

J - Can you describe a typical day in your kindergarten

N – children start filtering in at 8:30 they are allowed to get tub games to play. It is during that time that I might pull a child to read me a list of ABC’s or something…I’ll just use that time ummm to collect notes from parents, do the PR stuff. At 9 the bell rings and we have jobs and opening. Each child is assigned a job. We read the morning message which is always ties into what we are doing that day. It will have the skills
listed. We will emphasize phonics, punctuation. Then I'll do a total group activity. And while the kids are doing seat work I’ll pull up three groups, a needy group, a group that is reading a level 1 or 2, and then I have 5 kids who are reading.

J – the other day when I was here you had a group

N – yes, that was the needy group

J – so they were stretching words with you

N – yes yes, what you didn’t see what later I pulled a level 2 book for the clown, funny umm and I pulled a level 13 book for the food is fun because the word was funny – and did my top group. Ok so then we’ll have vocab group at 11:15 and then recess follow – it was four days a week, now we have gone to two. We free up two teachers during that time umm so that the targeted intervention teachers each take a group, that allows us, once every six weeks, to assess, so we have 40 minutes of an assessment block. Then the kids go to lunch and have a recess then come back for 20 minutes and I use that for a literature time

J – stories

N – stories good old fashioned sit at the rocking chair, maybe look at the author, illustrator, concepts of print but truly just enjoy some books. Reading for enjoyment. Then they go to specials, sometimes for 40 minutes, sometimes for 80 mintues. I have math then centers three days a week with dismissal at 3:20

Interview stopped
Interview with Cori (November 20, 2009, 7:30 AM)

C – Ok, ummm I guess I’ll give you my background in why I started in teaching. In third grade I had a wonderful third grade teacher, so I think that is what really sealed the deal with me. I grew up in Damascus in MC, however I came from a crazy family. So I’m the oldest of 6 kids I was adopted when I was three months from an Indian orphanage. My dad is dutch, my mom is the only one from the states in our family. I have a sister who is three months younger than I am, also from India but from another part adopted at a different time, she came speaking Marachi. And the Jacob, Bobby, Danny and Terri are my brothers, they are from Korea. They have a slew of disabilities Adhd Klienfelter’s, two of them are now diagnosed with bipolar, FAS, CT, the list goes on. So all the children were adopted. I was the only one in the family without an IEP, my sister even had learning disabilities she went through sped, so being the oldest, I have always kinda helped out played school with them so it kinda led me into this career.

I was thinking of sped, I graduated from Frostburg. I took a couple of grad courses during undergrad that were sped but I just stopped.

J-What was your certification?

C-Early childhood /Elementary

J-What grade levels

C-PreK-6th grade

J-Was it an EC/Elem certification?

C-Yes

J-So your graduate courses?

C-They are in reading, however, I am happy where I am and I don’t want to become a reading specialist. I basically went into that program so I could help these kids in K in my reading groups.

J-Ok

C-I will be done the beginning of the summer. I like the k kids

I like teaching everything. I love this age group. Ummm I don’t know, I like working with the kids. If I were to become a reading specialist I don’t, I don’t know…I really don’t want to help diagnos kids. You know within the whole school. I think this setting would be a little different because its’ you know, primary kids but I odn’t know. Maybe that’s because of my inexperience. I really don’t feel comfortable with the older kids because I really haven’t worked with them that much. Everyone kida has their nitch. This way you really get to know the children which is so nice and you can form that nice relationship. Our reading specialist, Helen, I don’t know if you have had the chance to
get to meet her but she is just amazing. And she has a connection with all the kids, even kids she doesn’t work with – she knows them all. She is an exception.

J – So how long have you taught

C – I would say like 5 years. I have kinda gone back and forth with it because I started at the end of a year, I started in March, and then I taught for a year, and then I went on maternity leave for a year and a half, came back as a long term sub – because it was the end of a year – taught for another year, ended up going on maternity leave for like – six months this time, and then came back.

J – All in K?

C – ah huh?

J – So where was your first position?

C - Charlotte, North Carolina. I kinda after Frostburg, I got out the map and closed my eyes and picked North Carolina – I said ‘Charlotte is a pretty name..I think I’ll move there.’ And then while I was there, I got pregnant. My boyfriend and I were dating at the time, we were together since 96, and then I graduated in 01. And then we were gonna have him go down there. We were kinda in between with do we have him move down there or come here…but I always said that when I get pregnant, I want to come here, be near family.

J – So thinking over your career, can you remember sometimes, some highlights when things were really good? Or situations – things just felt good to you as a teacher?

C – Ummm, I’d have to say the majority have been a highlight. I have really enjoyed my career so far. I’ve had great classes, ummm I have had wonderful teams and wonderful administration, this school is won— I mean it’s amazing. We have six on our team total, and we fit so nicely together, we help one another out, ummm Colleen and I have been together forever – since my whole career practically. So she has really been there to help me out. And its nice that we share this suite together..ummm…very comfortable..

J- And what does that do for you as a teacher, that teamwork, comfortability??

C – I think its like we are one big family, and ummm its so nice to be able to depend on them, for needs here, and for needs at home, and I’d say, that extends throughout the whole school, though. Its not just our team. It’s the entire school

J – Do you see each other outside of school?

C – We try to, ummm, it’s so crazy with our schedule and with kids.

J- So pretty much you have enjoyed everything. Have there been times when it has been a struggle.
C – ummm yea….ummmm, I’d say the second year. After coming off of maternity leave with Megan, that next year, that was hard with family life….I was going through a really bad separation and ummmm, having two and trying to juggle that….and then ummm, the biggest, hardest thing with teaching was last year. I don’t know if you heard, with ummm the little boy….

J- No…

C - ..ummm one of my students, a little boy was murdered by his father.

J- Oh…oh…ok…

C – The mom was supposed to watch Megan this year. So…that was really, and still is really hard…..

J – How did that affect your teaching…

C – It affected me personally…ummm… I had a wonderful class last year…I have a great class this year…but I enjoyed them from day one…you just have those years…you know a special class…everyone just got along so well…it was just a great great class…ummm and the kids did really well with it…I don’t think teaching wise…I mean…I think I was able to …I could teach….I couldn’t let the kids see that things were bothering me….

J – And how do you do that as a teacher…??

C – We put on that face, that mask…..it was personal….and I had the whole school’s support so….

J – That must have been really hard…

C – And I think with this situation, the hardest thing…and still is is …you know cancer is one thing…but the way this happened…..sudden….and I knew the family and I don’t know…it if I get started, I’ll start crying and it won’t shut off so…

J- I understand…

Interview stopped – continued below

J – So in your experiences with children, what do you consider to be important aspects as you work with young children.

C – I think …I tell parents the first day, to me honestly, with Kindergarten…I think the academics is strong…it’s obviously important ..it is…but I think they need to learn to love school. I think they need that and it is important that first year, because if they start off with a negative attitude…it will continue…and get worse.

J – So how do you do that in here. How do you foster a love of school?

C – I think I try to make it fun. Make learning through games and stuff. Ummm have different activities that they enjoy and that they feel confindent with…and that they can be successful with…its hard, you can’t always do that.. you know…especially with those
that are really struggling...and I talk with them, and I ask them...did you have a good day...are you having fun....so...

J – And you get good responses..?

C – umm hummm...ummm hummmmm

J – So what are your relationships like with your children?

C – Umm I am pretty close to all of them...certainly some more than others...ummm but for the most part, and they are...it’s this age...they all love one another, and they all love you...so...this age is really fun with that...

J- You can’t do anything wrong with kindergarten...

C – No you can’t in their eyes...and thank goodness, especially with the math...I can’t go any higher because I can’t do that math..

J- So tell me your philosophy of teaching...

C – You know...make learning fun...make them feel successful with learning...I guess that would be it. So...Kinda short and to the point...so...

J – That’s ok...the next question I have it about kindergarten...what are some of the changes you have experienced in kindergarten over the years.

C – Well I can actually start when I student taught....I taught with Colleen, she was my mentor teacher...ummm but with that...we did units, and it was also half day, so that was a huge change ummm going from half days and then moving to Charlotte and doing full days....now in Charlotte we still did units, but when I got back after Michael was born, we still had a full year of units, and then that’s when we switched it and they said, no more....but coming here and teaching full day in F CO was very different in the way that we hav set up the program here...and ummmm it’s just so much more academic now.

J – Units, can you describe that??

C – Ummm well, like doing a senses unit....doing Thanksgiving stuff....

J – And do you think you still taught academics that way.

C – I defiantly do...yea...and I think it was stronger in some points, because I think they had more fun with the units and got more out of them. And the fun parts, even last year....we did this whole beach unit...I did it the end of last year...and had them do an whole beach party, where they got to bring sea cases, suntan lotion, set up hotels, went outside and got beach balls and they played...

J – so talking about play...how do you consider play as an educative process for children.

C – Oh I think its very important. I think they need to learn those social skills, especially now when everyone is plugged into something...they don’t have those social skills and they don’t have the families at home spending quality time with them the way we used
to...I’m not blaming anyone...I have a busy schedule too...it’s just part of society....so I really think kids need to spend time in play and spend time socializing with one another, and it’s good for the kid watches...and parents, especially this age group, want to know how their child is socially in the room, and I have found it harder to answer that question now, because we don’t focus as much on that....its more of the academic piece, and less time for play. So I think that is one huge change that I’ve seen....I don’t have much input on social and emotional development anymore...and the times that they do centers, and play, I don’t have time to do the kid watches, because I’m assessing....there’s so much expected....even outside, there are times I sit down on the sidewalk and pull kids for running records...you know...letter and name sounds....I don’t even watch them play out there.... And you know, it’s funny because if you sit and ask the kids what is their favorite part of kindergarten, they will tell you center time.  They live for that play part of the week.  It really tells you something, how important that is in their lives and in their learning.  But we just feel so much pressure to get in all of the academics and assessments, so play falls away.”

J- So has that assessment piece changed for you?

C – I think the way we do them has changed, but the amount, in my 5 years, hasn’t.  It was a lot from the beginning...DIBELS helped, because there is 125 pages of phonics stuff that they had to go through, and DIBELS took out a lot of it.

J – So how many assessments do you do a year...

C – Ummm I can tell ya....Now the different ones....there are some that you redo...and redo....several times a year....in math we’ve got....32 here....that’s just the math....and then....let’s see, so then we have writing samples...language arts....four one for each term, and then we have running records...at least one for each term....so then ....nine here, plus dibels, and then summer screening...I wish I could get them all to pass them, and then I could stop assessing and focus on teaching instead...I feel like I am doing more assessing than teaching, and a big wig in the county told us that assessing IS teaching...she has told us that in our trainings...

J – Ok, how about the kids... have they changed over the years.

C – even in 5 years of teaching, I can see a decline in...

J- Yes....

C – respect.....the kids have changed socially....and we aren’t doing the social and play as much.  The scary thing is it starts here...the expectations are a lot, I think its good to push kids, but I think we are stressing them out....I have a child here on migraine medication...she has migraines in kindergarten...there are a ton...on anxiety meds...I think that’s so wrong and we contribute to it here and I think, I don’t know....I mean I have gone in and observed a psyc ward in the county and I think our increased expectations are contributing to that social problem.
Appendix D

Informal Student Progress Report to Parents

1st Term Testing Report: Fluency Tests Language Arts

Speed Test Notes from Jenny

Form 1

Form 2

Kindergarten Quarter 1 Math Objectives Assessed/Reassessed

Enrolled Grade Expectations for Language Arts

Enrolled Grade Expectations for Math

Kindergarten Report Card
STUDENT PROGRESS REPORT!

Please note that the facts that your child was able to recall are circled. Those that need more review are underlined. Your continued support at home, in aiding your child to learn those items that are underlined, would be greatly appreciated.

NUMERALS: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10

COlors: BLUE, ORANGE, PURPLE, BLACK, BROWN, YELLOW,
GREEN, RED, WHITE, PINK

SHAPES: CIRCLE, SQUARE, RECTANGLE, TRIANGLE, HEART,
STAR, DIAMOND, OVAL, HALF-CIRCLE, trapezoid, rhombus, hexagon

ALPHABET – UPPERCASE: A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K, L,

ALPHABET – LOWERCASE: a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i, j, k, l, m, n,
o, p, q, r, s, t, u, v, w, x, y, z

S, T, V, W, Y, Z

CHILD’S NAME: ______________________

DATE: ______________________

A: Adult gives the sound. Child gives the letter (Part B: Child receives a picture and they have to break off the sound)
VOWELS: (short sounds) Aa Oo Ii Uu Ee

Additional Math Items: (This is just an initial assessment. There are many more math skills that will be assessed later on in the year.)

Numerals to 11–20: 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20

More/Less/Same: (If they understand the concept, it will be circled)

Verbally Counts to: __________

Counting objects in a set to 20: __________ (A “smiley face” means they made it! If I have recorded a number, it will reflect the number where they loose track of which item they’re on when counting. Children must be able to achieve one-to-one correspondence in counting sets to 31 by year’s end.)

Can order numerals from 1–10 into correct order from left to right without the use of a visual numberline. Yes No

Can extend a pattern using just two attributes. Yes No

Understands and uses positional words:
over under above on next to
beside behind below between in out
1st Term Testing Report
Fluency Tests – Language Arts

There are many year-long assessments that have to be completed in kindergarten and fluency tests are just a part of this battery. If students are quick when accessing their letter/sound connections, then the reading process becomes easier. When the reading process becomes easier, then comprehension usually increases. Reading comprehension is the goal! Your child’s test results are listed below. The county requirement is listed first – followed by your child’s score. If your child needs to increase speed on any of the tests noted, he/she will be re-tested periodically before Term II. These two particular tests will be reassessed in January, looking for significant increase in speed.

**ABC recognition** – (County requirement = 9/minute) - ________________

**Initial Sound Connection** – auditorially making sound/symbol/picture connections

(County requirement = 9/minute) - ________________

**Student’s Name:** ________________________________

**Upcoming assessments:**
- Independently naming the five vowels and visually being able to sort them from a mixed collection of ABC letters – both upper and lower case.
- Identifying pairs of words to see if they rhyme – Your child will be asked to listen to pairs of words and indicated which pairs rhyme and which do not.
- Generating rhyme inside verse. (Eg. I am going fishing and today I wish – that when I put my hook in, I might catch a _____.)
Speed tests
4sec window
Country
Begin for fluency
1. Letters naming
2. Tense

V.C. Set
Are words the same?

Rhymes:
hear,
generating
Constant reassessing of every

Prog. Monitor
Nag bad
PM every
3-4 wks
Until Term III

Really bad
2 wks
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Form 2

Name

Recognize that words rhyme

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<td>Cow</td>
<td>Eat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soon</td>
<td>Moon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big</td>
<td>Dig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go</td>
<td>Look</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Generate rhyme

| 1. I put a fish in the _____ | (Dish) |
| 2. A bug lives in the _____ | (Rug)  |
| 3. The cat is wearing a funny _____ | (Hat) |
| 4. The king wears a pretty _____ | (Ring) |
| 5. The dog is sitting on a _____ | (Log) |
| 6. Once I saw a bear, who had funny _____ | (Hair) |
KINDERGARTEN - QUARTER 1
MATH OBJECTIVES BEING ASSESSED AND/OR REASSESSED

Name: ____________________________

Needs

Passed Review

_____ _____ Identify patterns that are already created - copy/extend

_____ _____ Identify sorts and describe them.
   Address the attributes that direct the sort. (color? size? shape? heavy?)

_____ _____ Identify shapes (including hexagon, trapezoid, rhombus)
   (Please practice: ____________________________ )

_____ _____ Uses and understands positional words – if marked, practice the
   following directional vocabulary:

_____ _____ Identify numerals to 10 (Review: ____________________________)

_____ _____ Order numberline to 10

_____ _____ Verbally counts to 31 (Your child miscounted in the following manner:
   ________________________________________________________________________ )

_____ _____ Count sets to 31

_____ _____ Estimate more/less and about the same

_____ _____ Understand and use ordinal numbers (items circled they know)
   (first, second, third, fourth, fifth, etc.)

Please review any information above where indicated. I will also continue reviewing
these skills with your child and will retest before term's end.

Together in education,
Enrolled Grade Expectations for Language Arts
Grade K

Phonological Awareness: Students will demonstrate knowledge of phonological awareness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Presented, but not fully assessed</th>
<th>Has Met</th>
<th>Has Not Met</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑</td>
<td>☑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L.A.K00.10.01</td>
<td>by recognizing words and sounds that are the same and words and sounds that are different.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L.A.K00.10.02</td>
<td>by recognizing word boundaries and segmenting sentences into words.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L.A.K00.10.03</td>
<td>by discriminating and generating rhyming words.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L.A.K00.10.04</td>
<td>by orally segmenting and blending syllables.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L.A.K00.10.05</td>
<td>by orally segmenting and blending onsets and rimes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Phonemic Awareness: Students will demonstrate knowledge of phonemic awareness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Presented, but not fully assessed</th>
<th>Has Met</th>
<th>Has Not Met</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑</td>
<td>☑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L.A.K00.20.01</td>
<td>by isolating and comparing phonemes in one-syllable words.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L.A.K00.20.02</td>
<td>by segmenting and blending phonemes in one-syllable words.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Phonics: Students will demonstrate knowledge of letter/sound relationships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Presented, but not fully assessed</th>
<th>Has Met</th>
<th>Has Not Met</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑</td>
<td>☑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L.A.K00.30.02</td>
<td>by recognizing, naming, and using letters of the alphabet in a variety of contexts.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L.A.K00.30.03</td>
<td>by recognizing and decoding beginning and ending consonants.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L.A.K00.30.12</td>
<td>by identifying and using short and long vowel patterns to decode words.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

DIBELS: Computerized County Assessments
Fluency standards increase significantly by year’s end.

Grade K Curriculum Communication
Fluency: Students will demonstrate the ability to read fluently as they demonstrate

\[
\begin{array}{|c|c|c|}
\hline
\text{Presented,} & \text{Has} & \text{Has} \\
\text{not fully} & \text{Met} & \text{Not} \\
\text{assessed} & & \text{Met} \\
\hline
\checkmark & \checkmark & \checkmark & \checkmark \\
\hline
LA.K00.40.02 & letter fluency by decoding. (DAEZE5) \\
\hline
LA.K00.40.03 & by recognizing and reading high frequency and irregular words from the 25 Most Frequently Read Words from kindergarten. \\
\hline
LA.K00.40.04 & word accuracy by recognizing and reading high frequency and irregular words and phrases within kindergarten continuous text. \\
\hline
LA.K00.40.06 & growth in word accuracy and automaticity through continued practice and monitoring of grade level appropriate words correct per minute. \\
\hline
\end{array}
\]

Vocabulary: Students will demonstrate an understanding of the role language plays as they demonstrate

\[
\begin{array}{|c|c|c|}
\hline
\text{Presented,} & \text{Has} & \text{Has} \\
\text{not fully} & \text{Met} & \text{Not} \\
\text{assessed} & & \text{Met} \\
\hline
\checkmark & \checkmark & \checkmark \\
\hline
LA.K00.50.01 & meaning for words and ideas by participating in experiences that expand general knowledge and increase expressive and receptive vocabulary. \\
\hline
LA.K00.50.02 & understanding of new vocabulary within curricular areas through appropriate use of content vocabulary in discussions, responses to questions, and in seeking information during content lessons and beyond. \\
\hline
\end{array}
\]

Comprehension: Students will demonstrate an understanding of the role strategies play in developing meaning as they demonstrate

\[
\begin{array}{|c|c|c|}
\hline
\text{Presented,} & \text{Has} & \text{Has} \\
\text{not fully} & \text{Met} & \text{Not} \\
\text{assessed} & & \text{Met} \\
\hline
\checkmark & \checkmark & \checkmark \\
\hline
LA.K00.60.01 & an understanding that print conveys meaning. \\
\hline
LA.K00.60.02 & an understanding of book conventions. \\
\hline
LA.K00.60.03 & an understanding of concepts of print to determine how print is organized and read. \\
\hline
\end{array}
\]

Grade K Curriculum Communication
Mathematics
Enrolled Grade Level Expectations for Kindergarten

### Algebra, Patterns and Functions
Presented, but not assessed by FCPS standards

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standards</th>
<th>Has Met</th>
<th>Has not met</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identify, copy, and extend a pattern</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Create and describe a pattern</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Represent a story pictorially</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tell a story representing number combinations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Geometry
Presented, but not assessed by FCPS standards

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standards</th>
<th>Has Met</th>
<th>Has not met</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sort objects and describe how he/she sorted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identify shapes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Use positional words (over, under, above, on, next to, beside, behind, below)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Statistics
Presented, but not assessed by FCPS standards

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standards</th>
<th>Has Met</th>
<th>Has not met</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collect data in a group setting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Display data using a graph</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Read information from a graph</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Number Relationships
Presented, but not assessed by FCPS standards

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standards</th>
<th>Has Met</th>
<th>Has not met</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identify numbers 0-10 in random order</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identify numbers 0-31 in random order</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Count 31 objects</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Constructs sets to 31</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Match a numeral to a set</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Order numbers 0-10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Order numbers 0-20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Write numerals 0-9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Estimate using less, more, and about the same</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Use ordinal numbers first through fifth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Subitize (instant recognition on domino patterns 1-9)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Build relationships with 5 and 10 frames</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Count forward/backward from any number to 20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Represent addition problems concretely and pictorially</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Represent subtraction problems concretely and pictorially</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Compose/decompose numbers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identify and name the value of a quarter, dime, nickel, and penny</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Measurement

Presented, but not assessed by FCPS standards | Has Met | Has not met
--- | --- | ---
**X** |  | Describe and compare properties
**X** |  | Measure using everyday objects
 |  | Explore the clock (by the hour)
 |  | Use time terms (morning, afternoon, night, before, after)

### Processes of Math

Presented, but not assessed by FCPS standards | Has Met | Has not met
--- | --- | ---
 |  | Make a plan to solve a problem
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructional Level</th>
<th>Term</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Curricular Area</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LANGUAGE ARTS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phonological Awareness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discriminates and generates rhyming words</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifies individual sounds in spoken words</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blends sounds to make spoken words</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phonics – Letter/Sound</td>
<td></td>
<td>/</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Produces appropriate letter sounds when presented letters</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>/</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses grade-level phonetic skills to decode unfamiliar long and short vowel words</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>/</td>
<td>/</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fluency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Automatically identifies letters and their sounds</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Automatically recognizes grade-appropriate words</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses content vocabulary appropriately in expressive and receptive experiences</td>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrates the meaning of new vocabulary presented, using the vocabulary in appropriate context</td>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehension</td>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applies concepts about print</td>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applies &quot;before&quot; reading strategies to prepare for comprehension through &quot;heard aloud&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applies &quot;during&quot; reading strategies to gather and connect ideas for comprehension through &quot;heard aloud&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applies &quot;after&quot; reading strategies to assist with comprehension through &quot;heard aloud&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applies comprehension of text orally</td>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrates the ability to retell information from text orally, pictorially, or through dramatization</td>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrates the ability to follow multi-step oral directions</td>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses letter-like shapes, symbols, letters, and words to convey meaning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understands purposes for writing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dictates, draws, and/or writes using pictures, letters, or words to express personal ideas, and/or writes to inform</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizes and organizes ideas in prewriting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drafts writing with idea and organization</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Revises writing by adding or changing ideas or details</td>
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<tr>
<td>Edits writing by using capital letters and sentence punctuation</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>ART</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participates in and responds to art</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shows progress acquiring art skills and developing creativity</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses art vocabulary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>MUSIC</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participates in and responds to music</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shows progress acquiring music skills and developing creativity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses music vocabulary</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Curricular Area</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MATHMATICS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Algebra, Patterns and Functions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizes, copies, describes and extends patterns</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geometry and Measurement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifies and describes shapes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizes shapes in the world</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizes time by using terms such as morning, afternoon, night, before, and after</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relates seasons to real-life activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collects, organizes, and represents data (real and picture graphs)</td>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reads and interprets data in a data display (real and picture graphs)</td>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number Relationships and Computation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makes sense of numbers (to 31) and operations (+,-)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adds and subtracts numbers 0-9 using counting strategies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematical Thinking and Processes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solves problems involving numbers and shapes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicates thinking — how and why</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOCIAL STUDIES</td>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describes and shows respect for the roles of family members and school personnel: principal, teacher, crossing guard, bus driver</td>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses experiences to give examples of different choices people make to meet their needs</td>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses geographic tool (maps and globes), features (natural, physical, and human), and terms (near-far, above-below, here-there) to locate and describe places</td>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizes that natural and human resources are used to make products that are sold in local markets</td>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compares daily life and objects of today with those of long ago</td>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifies contributions of people, past and present, such as George Washington and Rosa Parks</td>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCIENCE</td>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application of Scientific Skills and Processes</td>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formulates questions about the scientific world and seeks answers</td>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makes observations and shares ideas with others</td>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describes and compares orally or in pictures</td>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construct Knowledge of Scientific Concepts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earth/Space - Recognizes/identifies interactions of the environment, Earth, and the universe</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life - Recognizes/identifies the nature of living things, their interactions, and the results from their interactions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemistry - Recognizes/identifies the composition, structure, and interactions of matter</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physics - Recognizes/identifies the interactions of matter and energy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental - Recognizes/identifies the interactions of environmental factors and their impact from a local to a global perspective</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHYSICAL EDUCATION</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrates beginning knowledge of movement concepts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizes components of a healthy lifestyle</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrates effort, cooperation, fair play, and safe practices</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrates competency in a variety of motor skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Teacher Comments:

**Term 1**
- Needs to hear and recognize rhyming words
- Needs practice matching and sorting objects
- Needs to recognize letters

**Term 2**

**Term 3**

**Term 4**

### Learning Skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>X</th>
<th>Consistently</th>
<th>\</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>#</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### EFFORT
- Exhibits self-control
- Works well independently
- Works well in a group
- Maintains attention to learning tasks
- Engages in learning tasks

### BEHAVIOR
- Obey school and classroom rules
- Shows courtesy and consideration for others
- Respects personal and school property
- Follows directions
- Shows willingness to try new things
- Uses strategies to solve problems
- Handles changes and transitions

### Services Received

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Services Received</th>
<th>Term 1</th>
<th>Term 2</th>
<th>Term 3</th>
<th>Term 4</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ELP</td>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BLP</td>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELL</td>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>504</td>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GT/Magnet</td>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

### Interim Issued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Term 1</th>
<th>Term 2</th>
<th>Term 3</th>
<th>Term 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

### School Absences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Lawful</th>
<th>Unlawful</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This Marking Term</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year-to-Date Total</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
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</table>

### Explanation of Grades

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Term 1</th>
<th>Term 2</th>
<th>Term 3</th>
<th>Term 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I = Independently applying skills/concepts
X = Consistently demonstrating skills/concepts
N/A = Not formally assessed at this time
Vita of Jennifer Chestnut Pyles

EDUCATION

The Pennsylvania State University: Ph.D. Candidate in Curriculum & Instruction
Expected Date of Graduation: December 2010
Concentration: Early Childhood Education

Shippensburg University, Shippensburg, Pennsylvania
M.Ed. Curriculum & Instruction; May, 2005
Concentration: Early Childhood Education

James Madison University, Harrisonburg, Virginia
B.S. Education, May 1988
Concentration: Early Childhood Education

EXPERIENCE

Fall 2010-Present  Assistant Professor, Hood College
Fall 2009-Spring 2010  Instructor, Hood College
Fall 2007-Spring 2009  Graduate Assistant, The Pennsylvania State University, Course
                     Instructor and Research Assistant
Fall 2005-May 2009  Shippensburg University, Course Instructor and Supervisor of Student
                     Teachers, Department of Teacher Education
1989-2005  East Pennsboro Area School District, Classroom Teacher, Half-Day
           Kindergarten Program, First Grade, Second Grade, Full Day Kindergarten
           Program
1988-1989  Magic Years Childcare Center, Carlisle, Pennsylvania, Teacher of Pre-K

PUBLICATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS

J. Johnson (Eds.). Approaches to Early Childhood Education, Volume 5. Columbus, OH: Merrill.

July 2008 Invited Faculty Facilitator: The Governor’s Institute for Early Childhood Educators, Juniata
College, Huntingdon, Pennsylvania

May 2008 Invited Presenter: The Diversity Institute, The Pennsylvania State University. Families and
Early Childhood Education

November 2007 Presenter: National Association for the Education of Young Children, National
Early Childhood Education

June 2007 Invited Presenter: Professional Development Institute, The National Association for the
Education of Young Children, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. A Model for Scaffolding Student Teachers to
Intentionally Build Relationships with Students

April 2007 Invited Presenter: Play in the Standards Based Classroom, The Association for the Study of
Play and the International Play Association, Rochester, NY.