

The Pennsylvania State University

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**EARLY-CARE AND EDUCATION TEACHERS' PRECEPTION OF HIGH QUALITY  
EARLY-CARE AND EDUCATION PROGRAMMING IN RELATION TO THEIR  
EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT LEVEL AND EXPERIENCE**

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by

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## ABSTRACT

Early-care and education research, relative to positive outcomes for young children, birth through age five, enrolled in high quality early-care and education programs is compelling. This same research also names the classroom teacher as pivotal in establishing and maintaining high quality within their classrooms and practices. Currently, within the United States, this represents 2.3 million employed early-care and education professionals. Additionally, statistics point out that currently in the United States, more than 11 million children under the age of five are in some type of early-care and educational program for an average of 36 hours every week. Approximately one-third of these children are in multiple programs so that parents can meet the demands for care during traditional and non-traditional working hours.

In this research study I wanted to listen to the “voices” of early-care and education teachers as they define and describe their perceptions of what a high quality classroom looks like and the teaching practices that they identify and use within their classrooms. Since research also proposes that the educational level of the teacher makes a difference in the quality of their practices, I also wanted to explore their perceptions regarding higher education and their motivation to return to post-secondary education to obtain a degree.

The research study was guided by the following six research questions: a) How do early-care and education teachers define and describe a high quality classroom, b) what teacher practices do they identify as necessary in a high quality classroom, c) what influences their descriptions of high quality and their identification of the teacher practices that support high quality: i.e. educational attainment level, experience, or a

combination of educational attainment and experience, d) do early-care and education teachers identify a higher level of education as an indicator of quality, e) what is the perception of early-care and education teachers regarding years of experience, and f) what are the perceptions and reactions of early-care and education teachers regarding the current expectation or requirement that in-service teachers obtain a degree (Associate or Bachelor)?

Multiple research tools such as open-ended interviews, field observations, informal surveys and reflection journals were used to gather data. It was through this data collection that I was able to authentically represent the “voices” of the early-care and education teachers and see patterns within their written and verbal responses.

The data revealed a number of findings. First, the early-care and education teachers’ describe high quality early-care and educational programming as a) child-centered , b) involves parents, c) teamwork within the center, d) environment of the classroom, e) developmentally appropriate curriculum, as well as the f) education and the g) experience of the teacher. The second finding was that the teaching practices identified as necessary in a high quality classroom reflect either structural or process quality.

My third finding, regarding the educational level and years of experience that represent early-care and education teachers was mixed. The majority of the participants did agree that some level of education is beneficial, such as, a Child Development Accreditation Certificate (CDA), Associate in Applied Science (AAS) or Bachelor (BS/BA). However, the participants pointed out that the focus of the degree program must be Early Childhood Education, preferably birth through age five years.

Longevity or their years of experience within the field of early-care and education is highly important and viewed as valuable to the participants and should be positively recognized and validated at institutions of higher education. Lastly, the trials and tribulations facing teachers going back to school were heard in many interviews, their hopes and dreams too often, and always at least an implicit dedication to quality for children and families they serve.

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## Chapter One

### INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Approximately 2.3 million currently employed professionals serving young children birth through age five years represent the field of early-care and education. Approximately 1.2 million are providing service in formal settings, such as childcare centers or family childcare homes (National Childcare Referral and Resource Center, 2011). Statistics also identify that during their first five years of life, many young children spend a vast portion of their day in early-care and education settings outside of their home. In fact, the *National Association of Childcare Resource & Referral Agencies* (NACCRRA) reports that in the United States more than 11 million children under the age of five years are in some type of early-care and education program for an average of 36 hours every week. Approximately one-third of these children are in multiple programs so that parents can meet the demands for care during traditional and non-traditional working hours. This is alarming, because to date the quality of early-care and education programs varies significantly from state to state. In addition to the inconsistencies within early-care and education programming amongst the states, many states have very minimal standards (National Association of Childcare Resource & Referral Agencies, 2011).

Unfortunately, many of our young children, more specifically our most vulnerable and at risk young children, attend programs that are of low quality (Ackerman & Barnett, 2006; Barnett & Yarosz, 2007; Burchinal, Vandergrift, Pianta & Mashburn, 2009; Early, 2007; Edelman & Grace, 2010; Goffin, 2010; Jones, 2010; Kagan, Kauerz & Tarrant, 2008; Whitebook, et.al, 2009a; Whitebook, et. al., 2009b). This is disturbing, because access to high quality early-care and education programming not only positively influences cognitive and social development, but increases the likelihood of success in elementary school (Russell, 2010; Washington & Andrews, 2010). In May 2010, the *National Institute of Child Health and Human Development* (NICHD) reported that high-quality early-care and education has

a long-lasting impact on a child's development, behavior and cognitive abilities. Their findings show that children who attend high-quality early-care and education programs in the first few years of life, score higher in measures of academic and cognitive achievement when they are 15 years old, than those who were enrolled in lower-quality early-care and education programs (Vandell, et. al., 2010).

### **Quality Improvement Initiatives in Early-care and Education**

The lack of high quality early-care and education programming for young children is also a concern for communities and the public workforce. It is believed that the lack of high quality programming negatively impacts families, communities and the overall economy. Their concern for high quality early-care and education programming for young children has been heard within state governments. As a result, there has been a wave of statewide quality improvement initiatives across the United States that has changed the face of programming for young children (Barnett, 2003; Barnett, 2010; Bowman, 2010; Edelman & Grace, 2010; Egertson, 2010; Goffin 2010; Herzenberg, Price & Bradley, 2005; National Association Childcare Resource and Referral Agency, 2010).

State governments propose that this need for change is largely based on the fact that early-care and education programs for young children, birth through age five years have: a) risen in esteem as a public good; b) are now politicized; c) are expected to produce results; d) must organize itself as an effective delivery system and e) currently lacks the capacity to meet the public's expectation (Barnett, 2010; Bowman, 2010; Egertson, 2010; Espinosa, 2002; Fuller, Gasko, Anguiano, 2010; Goffin, 2010). In response to the above five assertions, there is a growing move toward state implementation of quality rating systems (Egertson, 2010; National Association of Childcare Resource and Referral Agency, 2010).

Those states that currently have quality rating systems cite the following three major purposes for measuring quality in early-care and educational settings: a) the measurement of quality for regulation evaluates a program against mandatory standards, such as voluntary participation in the accreditation process which indicates accountability to high standards; b) the evaluation of programs for quality improvement and development are formative or constructive in nature, allowing the encouragement of

growth and c) the measurement of quality in early-care and education takes place in empirical research (Child Trends, 2010; National Association Childcare Resource and Referral Agency, 2009; Pennsylvania Early Learning Keys, 2010).

Pennsylvania was one of the first states to implement a quality rating system entitled *Keystone STARS* in 2002. The purpose of this state program, is to “improve, support and recognize the continuous quality improvement efforts of early learning programs in Pennsylvania,” through the use of standards, training/professional development, assistance, resources and support (STARS) (Pennsylvania Early Learning Keys to Quality, 2010). The outcomes from this initiative are very positive. As a matter of fact, four years after Pennsylvania implemented the *Keystone STARS*, Barnard, Etheridge -Smith, Fiene and Swanson (2006) state that the results from their research study, *Evaluation of Pennsylvania’s Keystone STARS Quality Rating System in Childcare Settings*, show that the *Keystone STARS Quality Improvement Initiative* supports early-care and educational programs in improving their program quality. Also, their indicators point to a reversal of the negative trends in quality programming within early-care and education that was experienced in the 1990’s.

Most recently, research has indicated that “more than 97% of preschoolers who attend *Keystone STARS* three and four star programs, display age-appropriate or emerging age-appropriate proficiency in literacy, numeracy and social skills” (Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Education, 2010).

Nevertheless, the continuous trek towards providing high quality early-care and education programming for all children, birth through age five years is very slow and the quality of early-care and education throughout the United State remains inconsistent (Barnett, 2010; Cryer, & Clifford, 2003; Herzenberg, Price, & Bradley, 2005; National Association of Childcare Resource and Referral Agency, 2010).

### **The Role of the Teacher in Early-care and Education**

Research constantly names the teacher as pivotal in early-care and educational programming (Ackerman, & Barnett, 2006; Kagan, Kauerz & Tarrant, 2008; Torquati, Raikes & Huddleston-Casas,

2007; Whitebook, et.al, 2009a; Whitebook, et. al., 2009b, Whitebook, et. al., 2010). The teacher's responsibility for enhancing the development of skills for children birth through age five years, through high quality educational experiences is of paramount importance. This belief is best supported by three historic longitudinal studies: *High/Scope Perry Preschool Study*, *Carolina Abecedarian Study* and the *Chicago Longitudinal Study* (Institute for Research on Poverty, 2004; Masse & Barnett, 2002; Schweinhart, 2003). These three well-known research studies provide the historical evidence and support for the present argument that the educational qualifications of the teacher positively shows a relationship with high quality programming for young children.

Building on the above studies, current research confirms that the educational qualifications of the teacher significantly affects the quality of early educational experiences provided to young children and those higher qualified teachers contribute to more positive short and long-term educational outcomes. (Ackerman & Barnett, 2006; Bowman, Donovan & Burns, 2001; Goffin, 2010; McMullen & Alat, 2002; Phillips, et. al., 2000; Tout, Zaslow & Berry, 2006; Whitebook, et. al., 2009a; Whitebook, et. al., 2009b; Whitebook, et. al., 2010). Currently, within the state of Pennsylvania, as well as other states, professionals working in the field of early-care and education represent a variety of educational levels. Many states including Pennsylvania, acknowledge a Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood Education as most desirable (Egertson, 2010; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2011; Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning, 2010).

A copious amount of research and a new understanding regarding the connection of educational attainment and high quality early educational programming, has lead to monumental changes within the field of early-care and education. Teachers are now asked and are in some instances required to return to higher education and obtain either an Associate in Applied Science or Bachelor's Degree. Early-care and education programs are now seeking degreed professionals to add to their staffs. The Child Development Accreditation Certificate (CDA), long accepted as the only necessary requirement in early-care and

education, is now viewed as an entry level to higher educational attainment (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2011).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The field of early-care and education is now witnessing a movement toward high quality programming for young children birth through age five years. The educational requirements of the present early-care and education workforce are now established and there is a push for early-care and education teachers to obtain a post-secondary degree ( Fuller, Gasko & Anguiano, 2010; Landry, Anthony, Swank & Monseque-Baily, 2009; Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning. 2010; Vesay, 2008; Vu, Jean & Howes, 2008; Whitebook, et. al., 2009a; Whitebook, et.al, 2009b). The literature seems to indicate that a Bachelor's degree is preferable, yet there does not seem to be an agreement amongst the researchers regarding the focus of the degree (Whitebook, et. al., 2009a; Whitebook, et. al., 2009b & Zaslow & Martinez-Beck, 2006).

There appears to be another variable "teachers' perceptions" that also influences how early-care and education teachers establish and maintain high quality early educational programming. These perceptions include their a) beliefs about the impact of teaching in general, as well as their understanding of how children learn; b) perceptions of themselves as teachers, how they feel about their own abilities to influence learning outcomes and c) perceptions about how events in the classroom are contingent upon their own actions, how much they attribute learning outcomes to their own actions. Research proposes that the teacher's philosophy of education contributes to their "perceptions" of high quality programming (File & Gullo, 2002; Kagen, 1992; McMullen, 2003; McMullen & Alat, 2002; Nespor, 1987; Torquati, Raikes & Huddlestone-Casas, 2007; Vartuli, 2005). This leads one to question if whether teacher education, support through state quality improvement initiatives and most recently, the education stimulus money given to the states by the federal government, are enough to establish and to sustain high quality early educational programming for young children.

This research study examines the “perceptions” of teachers with attention to a) descriptions of a high quality classroom; b) practices that teachers should use in establishing and maintaining a high quality classroom and c) variables that influences their description of high quality programming and teacher practices, i.e. educational attainment level, experience or a combination of educational attainment and experience. This research study is directed to better understand early-care and education teachers’ “perceptions” of the need for them to obtain a post-secondary degree in relationship to their experience or longevity in the field of early-care and education. This research also endeavors to demonstrate the trials and tribulations experienced by veteran teachers who are expected or required to return to colleges/universities and earn a post-secondary degree.

To generate data and help answer these questions, multiple research tools have been used. The tools used are open-ended interviews, questionnaires, site observations and reflective journals. Using multiple tools provides the opportunity to listen to the “voices” of the 55 participants that must be heard. Through their “voices”, I hope to add insight to the field of early-care and education with regard to the teachers’ issues and concerns. My research study hopefully will bring attention to the field of early-care and education regarding the issue of whether educational attainment level or longevity within the field is more necessary in establishing and maintaining high quality programming for young children birth through age five years. Furthermore, do they see more formal education in the context of experience as a predictor of quality overall.

## Chapter Two

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Current early-care and education statistics have identified that during the first five years of life, many young children spend a vast portion of their day in early-care and educational settings outside of their home. In fact, the *National Association of Childcare Resource & Referral Agencies* (NACCRRA) reported in their most recent issue of, *Care in America: 2010 State Fact Sheets*, that in the United States, more than 11 million children under the age of five years are in some type of early-care and educational program for an average of 36 hours every week. Approximately one-third of these children are in multiple programs so that parents can meet the demands for care during traditional and non-traditional working hours. Research has indicated that in the first five years of life, young children display considerable growth in the areas of social/emotional, physical, cognitive and language development and the quality of their experiences in early-care and educational programs influences their future academic success (Jones, 2010; Vandell, et. al., 2010; Washington, & Andrews, 2010; Wishard, Shivers, Howes & Ritchie, 2003).

The purpose of this research study is to listen to the “voices” of early-care and education teachers as they define and describe their perceptions of what a high quality classroom looks like and the teaching practices that establish and support a high quality classroom. Their perceptions regarding higher education and their motivation to return to post-secondary education to obtain a degree, is also explored.

In this chapter, I will review relevant literature as it relates to a) research regarding the importance of high quality early-care and education; b) research relative to the educational attainment of early-care and education teachers and the c) research regarding the perceptions, beliefs and motivations of early-care and education teachers of themselves as professionals.

In recent decades, early-care and education has been a vital part of the nation's social policy landscape. As in most other advanced industrialized countries, early-care and education evolved out of a variety of diverse backgrounds, such as child protection, services for children with special needs, services to facilitate participation in the workforce by mothers and government initiatives such as *Head Start*. In fact, more recently early-care and education has witnessed changes through the establishment of state standards and most notably, *No Child Left Behind* (Cryer & Clifford, 2003 & Pochner, 1996).

Early-care and education began in the United States in the 1830's with the establishment of day nurseries designed to take care of the children of working mothers. Day nurseries grew in response to rapid industrialization and immigration and were custodial in nature, focusing primarily on basic care and supervision of young children (Cryer & Clifford, 2003 & Pochner, 1996).

The growth of day nurseries and nursery schools was minimal during the nineteenth century. However, a significant increase did occur during the 1920's, influenced primarily by parental interest in enriched experiences for their children. The next sizable increase in the attendance of early-care and education programs occurred during the 1960's and 1970's. It was during this time, that changes occurred within programs serving young children, resulting in two central programs, daycare programs and nursery schools (Cryer & Clifford, 2003 & Pochner, 1996).

In recent years, in an effort to professionalize the field of early care and education and more specifically, for those teachers who work in programs serving young children birth through age five years, the common term daycare was changed to childcare. Currently, with many states implementing standards for early childhood programs and with the inception of quality improvement initiatives, childcare is now being referred to as early-care and education. Due to the increased interest in daycare centers and nursery schools in the 1960's and 1970's, there occurred a resurgence of national interest in early childhood development. It was at this time that researchers began advocating the importance of early education as a strategy for school readiness and ensuring access to health care and improved nutrition for young children (Cryer & Clifford, 2003 & Pochner, 1996).

## **Longitudinal Research Studies**

The literature relative to high quality early-care and educational programming is heavily supported by three well-known longitudinal studies: a) *The High/Scope Perry Preschool Project*, b) *The Carolina Abecedarian Study* and c) *The Chicago Longitudinal Study*. These studies are models that support the benefits of high quality early-care and education for young children and their families.

The *High/Scope Perry Preschool Study* is one of the oldest longitudinal studies still currently generating data. This study was one of the first to assess the effects of high quality early-care and education for young children who have backgrounds in poverty. The *High/Scope Perry Preschool Study* was considered a scientific experiment conducted by David Schweinhart and other researchers in Ypsilanti, Michigan. The study identified 123 low-income African-American young children and randomly assigned them into two groups; those receiving preschool services and those who were not offered these same services. All of the identified children were determined to be at risk for school failure (Schweinhart, 2003 & Schweinhart, 2005).

The overall result of the study propose that high quality programming for young children, especially those living in poverty, improves their educational performance, contributes to their economic development, helps prevent them from committing crimes and provides a high return on the investments of taxpayers. More specifically, in the most recent assessment with the participants at age 40, it was noted that there appears to be significant gains in employment, particularly male employment, higher annual earnings and home ownership. Additionally, the participants also report strong family relationships and significant male family involvement. The researchers noted that the major conclusion of this mid-life phase of the study was that high quality early-care and educational programs for young children, particularly those living in poverty, contribute to their intellectual and social development in childhood and their school success, economic performance and reduced commission of crime in adulthood (Schweinhart, 2003 & Schweinhart, 2005).

An interesting fact did appear as a result of this study and is a precursor to current changes today, concerning teacher qualifications. This study identified that the teachers who worked in the Perry Preschool all had acquired Bachelor's degrees, which appeared to impact child outcomes, a claim that is supported by recent research (Ackerman, 2004; Burchinal, Cryer, Clifford & Howes, 2002; Early & Winton, 2001; Espinosa, 2002; National Institute of Child Health and Development, 2006 & Roach, Riley, Adams & Edie, 2005).

The *Carolina Abecedarian Study*, which began in 1972, was an experiment in the provision of intensive preschool services to children in low-income families from infancy to five years of age. The program followed an experimental design which included a control and experimental group and involved 112 children, 98% African-American, born between 1972 and 1977. The families involved in this study were believed to be of a nature that would put children at risk of "retarded intellectual and social development" (Masse & Barnett, 2002). The researchers designed a "high-risk index" consisting of factors such as household income, parental education, school histories of family members, parental intelligence, and parental occupations (Ramsey & Campbell, 1984).

The overall outcomes of this study were significant, with child educational gains being reported at the preschool level, age eight and age twelve. At age 15, the educational gains of the participants seemed to "fade", yet the scores for reading and math remained positive and significant (Ramsey & Campbell, 1984). The most recent educational assessment for the participants occurred at age 21. This assessment again indicated similar effects with respect to measures of intelligence and achievement. Conversely, the data gathered at age 21, did note that participants from the experimental group were more likely to have attended a four year college than those from the control group (Masse & Barnett, 2002).

The *Abecedarian Study* did document factors, namely, participants of the study experienced lower levels of grade retention and placement in special education classes. Regarding parental outcomes from the study, it was noted that the teenage mothers who participated in the study completed high school

graduation, enrolled in post-secondary training, were self-supporting, less likely to have additional children and were more likely to be employed in skilled or semi-skilled jobs (Masse & Barnett, 2002).

The *Chicago Longitudinal Study* conducted in 1985 and 1986, investigated the life course development of 1,539 children born in 1980, from low-income families, predominately African-American. The participants were randomly divided into two groups, those who completed preschool and kindergarten in the Child-Parent centers and those who did not attend preschool, but did participate in a full-day kindergarten program at five randomly selected schools. This quasi-experimental design, included children that met the following criteria: a) residence in a Title I school district; b) demonstration of substantial educational need due to poverty and c) agreement from the parents to participate. Data from this study was collected yearly through parent, teacher and child report. School records were also used (Reynolds, Temple, Robertson & Mann, 2002).

The educational outcomes from the *Chicago Longitudinal Study* were significant, not only for the preschool participation, but also for the school-age and extended summer program. The study found that young children who participated in the Child-Parent Centers had greater cognitive skills at kindergarten entry and higher school achievement. This leads to a reduction in the need for school remedial services, lower rates of delinquency and higher rates of school completion. The school-age participants were associated with greater school achievement at ages 9 and 15 and a reduction in school remedial services. The extended summer program reported similar results as the preschool and school-age participants. However, it was noted that with this program there were lower rates of child abuse and juvenile arrests (Reynolds, Temple, Robertson & Mann, 2002).

The outcomes demonstrated by *The High/Scope Perry Preschool Study*, *The Carolina Abecedarian Study* and *The Chicago Longitudinal Study*, illustrates that early-care and education does make a difference in the lives of young children which continues throughout their lifespan.

## Other Relevant Studies

The twenty-first century still finds researchers advocating the importance of high quality early-care and education. In 2000 (Shonkoff & Phillips), a comprehensive report was released by *The National Research Council* and *The Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences*, entitled *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development*. Based on a critical analysis of extensive research, the committee identified the essential features of early-care and education. These include: a) individualized service delivery; b) high quality program implementation; c) appropriate knowledge and skills of early childhood teachers and d) positive relationships between parents and professionals.

Evidence continues to mount, supporting the idea that quality early-care and education is valuable in the educational success of young children. In a policy statement by the *Committee on Early Childhood, Adoption and Dependent Care* (2005), it is stated that high quality early-care and education for young children, which includes the child's experiences at home and in early-care and educational settings, improves their health and promotes their development and learning (2005). Additionally, the *U.S. Department of Health and Human Services* has also weighed in with their report *Childcare Quality: Does It Matter and Does It Need to be Improved?* Findings from this report are consistent with other data, in that early-care and educational quality does make a difference. In fact, the data from their report concluded that children who attended higher quality early-care and educational programs displayed better cognitive, language and social competencies on standardized tests (Vandell and Wolfe, 2000).

Since 1926, the *National Association for the Education of Young Children* (NAEYC) has been instrumental in steering the quality of early-care and education programs. NAEYC has been instrumental in implementing a program accreditation system. This program accreditation system focuses on four central issues: a) children; b) teachers and assistant teachers; c) leadership and administration and d) family and community partnerships and ten supporting standards. As a result, the *NAEYC Accreditation Program* has gained international recognition for its visible support of high quality early-care and

education programs and many states have implemented their own early learning standards based on the standards set forth by NAEYC (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2011; Richie & Willer, 2007).

With the adoption of standards, it must be made clear that standards alone do not ensure high quality early-care and education programming. In a study conducted by Zin (2005), 116 NAEYC accredited classrooms were evaluated and the results were surprising. Zin cites that these classrooms exhibited a wide range of scores from inadequate to excellent on the 11 curriculum related items that were the focus of this study. Thirty-four classrooms scored in the inadequate or minimal range and 18 classrooms scored within this range four or more times. Zin acknowledges that the overall level of quality in most of the classrooms in the study looked very good when the total scores were examined. However, the subscale scores painted a different picture. Although excellence in areas such as space and furnishings, personal care routines and parent/teacher relationship contributes to quality, these areas alone cannot compensate for an inadequate curriculum or lack of high quality teaching practices.

Kagan and Scott-Little (2004) have also raised issues relative to high quality early-care and education. They applaud the states that have adopted, or are in the process of adopting, early learning standards, but do question the variance amongst the standards for each state. Their fear is that this may cause some concern regarding the consistency of high quality early-care and education, across the United States. Kagan and Scott-Little also questions how states will use the early learning standards. Although every state indicated that their early learning standards would not be used to make high stakes decisions about individual children, there is always the possibility that children's' progress expressed in the standards may be used in kindergarten placement decisions (Kagen & Scott-Little, 2004).

More recently, in May 2010, the *National Institute of Child Health and Human Development* (NICHD) reported that high-quality early-care and education has a long-lasting impact on a child's development, behavior and cognitive abilities. Their findings indicate that children who attended high-quality early-care and educational programs in the first few years of life, scored higher in measures of

academic and cognitive achievement when they were 15 years old, than those who were enrolled in lower-quality early-care and educational programs (Vandell, et. al., 2010).

### **Quality Rating and Improvement Systems**

In response to the statistics that many early-care and educational programs demonstrate a lack of high quality programming, many states have instituted *Quality Rating Systems*. As of May 2010, only twenty states have statewide quality rating and improvement systems (Child Trends, 2010).

*Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS)*, are composed of five distinct components: a) quality standards; b) a process for monitoring standards; c) a process for supporting quality improvements; d) provision of financial incentives and e) dissemination of information to parents and the public about program quality (Child Trends, 2010; National Association of Childcare Resource and Referral Agency, 2009; National Association of Childcare Resource and Referral Agency, 2011 & National Childcare Information Center, 2010). *QRIS* provide a benchmark for early-care and education program quality using indicators such as professional development, or qualifications of the teachers, the quality of the learning environment and the involvement of parents and community members (Child Trends, 2010). Unfortunately, the number of evaluation studies is small and this is an area that needs further study.

Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Colorado and Tennessee have evaluated the QRIS and found improvements in the quality of programming. More recently, the *Missouri Evaluation* (2009), supported the previous evaluations, in that low quality early-care and educational programming for young children birth through age five years, has an adverse impact upon the social and emotional skills of young children and that at-risk young children attending high quality programs made significant gains in cognitive and early literacy skills, as well as social and emotional development (Tout, Zaslow, Halle & Forry, 2009).

### **Pennsylvania Quality Rating and Improvement System**

Pennsylvania introduced the *Keystone STARS Quality Initiative* in 2002. As of 2010, *Keystone STARS* is the largest quality early education program in Pennsylvania, with approximately 4,500 early-

care and education programs involved (Pennsylvania Early Learning Keys to Quality, 2010). The acronym STARS, represents *Standards, Training, Assistance, Resources* and *Support* and the mission is to create a quality improvement system in which all early-care and educational programs and practitioners are encouraged and supported to improve child outcomes. Improvements in programming such as, increasing the capacity to support children's learning and development, increasing the educational attainment levels amongst early-care and education teachers and enhancing professional skills and competencies of early-care and education teachers in support of children's learning and development, are the focus of *Keystone STARS*, which is currently a voluntary program. To establish a baseline of quality within a setting, each early-care and educational program participating in *Keystone STARS* is assessed, using either the *Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS-R)*, *Infant/Toddler Environmental Rating Scale (ITERS-R)*, *Family Day Care Rating Scale (FDCRS)*, or the *School-Age Care Environmental Rating Scale (SACERS)*. The qualifications of the education staff are assessed and evaluated through their completion of educational degree programs (Pennsylvania Early Learning Keys to Quality, 2010).

Outcomes relative to the success of the *Keystone STARS* program have been positive in several key areas, namely, the number of programs involved and their progression through the STARS levels. Seventy percent of the state's early-care and education centers serving approximately 170,000 children birth through age five years are participating. There has also been also an increase in the number of early-care and education professionals achieving their Child Development Accreditation Certificate (CDA), and becoming enrolled in Early Childhood Associate programs, thus leading to higher educational qualifications (Barnard, Etheridge-Smith, Fiene & Swanson, 2006; Pennsylvania Economy League, 2007; Pennsylvania Early Learning Keys to Quality, 2010).

It has been demonstrated that more than 97% of the young children enrolled in STAR three and four early-care and education programs showed age-appropriate or emerging age-appropriate skills in literacy, numeracy and social skills during 2009-2010 (Pennsylvania Early Learning Keys to Quality, 2010). Between 2008-2009, approximately 32% of STARS early-care and education programs increased

in at least one STAR level and more importantly, Pennsylvania's parents now are able to make the best choice of early-care and educational programming for their child/children, by using the STARS rating scale as a guide (Pennsylvania Early Learning Keys to Quality, 2010).

In recent years, there has been a growing emphasis on improving the quality of early-care and educational programs, outside the public schools. Research has demonstrated that increasing teacher qualifications, specifically requiring Bachelor's level teachers with degrees in Early Childhood Education/Child Development has been one of the most effective ways to increase program quality for young children (Kagan, Kauerz & Tarrant, 2008; Tout, Zaslow & Berry, 2006). Currently, the *National Association of Childcare Resource and Referral Association* (NACCRRA, 2011) notes that 20 % of center-based early-care and education teachers and 43% of the assistant teachers had at best, only a high school diploma or less. Forty-seven percent of the teachers and 45% of the assistant teachers had some college, but no degree and only 33% of the teachers and 12% of the assistant teachers, had any type of college degree.

Unfortunately, early-care and educational programs within the United States vary widely in teacher education requirements. In 2002, the Midwest Childcare Research Consortium conducted a study looking at teacher education and benefits in subsidized childcare programs. The results of the study found that teachers in subsidized programs tend to have less formal education than their counterparts in non-subsidized programs. The report also highlighted the disparity in teacher salaries and lack of benefits such as health insurance, paid sick leave, retirement and educational reimbursement. This disparity impacts the employment and retention of highly qualified teachers (Thornburg, Scott & Mayfield, 2002).

Until recently, Head Start, the nation's largest federally funded program, did not require teachers to have a Bachelor's Degree. Currently, only a quarter of Head Start's teachers have a Bachelor's Degree, with the remaining teachers having some college, such as an Associate Degree, while many have a Child Development Accreditation Certificate (CDA). These statistics are worrisome in that Head Start

has mandated that 50% of their teachers must have a Bachelor's Degree by 2013 (Head Start Association 2010).

### **Teacher Qualifications**

Current research confirms findings from the past two decades that teacher qualifications significantly affect the quality of early-care and education provided to young children and that highly qualified teachers contribute to more positive short and long-term outcomes for these children (Ackerman & Barnett, 2006; Bowman, Donovan & Burns, 2001; Early, 2007; Goble, Moran & Horm, 2009; McMullen & Alat, 2002; Phillips, et. al., 2000; Saracho & Spodek, 2007).

The National Day Care Study (NDCS), initiated by the federal government, sought to guide the development of national childcare standards by identifying the key provisions of early-care and education quality in center based, full day programs that best predict positive outcomes for young children. A total of 3,167 childcare centers in seven states were contacted by phone for the study, with 70 childcare centers receiving onsite visits. This study found that “in classrooms whose lead teachers had child related education, interacted with children more and children showed more cooperation and greater task persistence” (Whitebook, 2003). The study also indicated that when young children attend early-care and education programs with a higher proportion of educated teachers, these children exhibit greater cognitive gains than those with less educated teachers (Whitebook, 2003).

Honig and Hirallal (1998) looked at the behaviors of 81 early care and education teachers working with three to five-year-old children, in 24 urban centers. The teachers were categorized as low or high in education, experience and training, based on the following distinction: high school through AAS degree (low) versus a BA/BS degree or higher (high); one to four training courses (low) versus five or more training courses (high) and one to three years of experience (low) versus four or more years (high). These researchers observed the teachers using the *Adult Behaviors in Caregiving Scale* (ABC). With respect to teacher facilitation of language and social/emotional development, Early Childhood Education (ECE)/Child Development (CDA) training, accounted for more variance in predicting teacher

behavior, with education making a less significant contribution. In the area of concept development, only ECE/CD training contributed to the variance. In fact, when all subscales were combined, ECE training accounted for 62% of the variance in early-care and education teacher scores and formal education increased the variance by 10%. Neither years of experience, nor job stability increased teacher enrichments of children's learning or social/emotional development.

Some may feel that this study paints a negative picture relative to teacher education at the college or university level. However, what this study does propose is that qualified teachers must acquire their post-secondary education with a focus in early childhood education or child development. This study is also consistent with the perception which unfortunately, is still being proposed, that an early-care and education teacher with *any* acquired degree can successfully work in early-care and education.

In an investigation of early-care and education programs in Massachusetts, conducted by Marshall, Creps, Bursten, Glantz, Robeson and Barnett (2001), the researchers examined the quality in 90 full day, 12 month center-based classrooms that were randomly selected to represent early-care and education within the state. The researchers used Harms, Clifford and Cryer's (1998) revised *Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS-R)* to assess classroom quality, as well as interviews to determine teacher backgrounds. More than one-half of the classrooms in the sample did not meet the benchmark of quality as defined by the *ECERS-R*. The study revealed that only 10% of teachers at centers serving predominately low-income families had a two year college degree or more, compared to 28% at centers serving low to moderate income families and 62% at centers serving moderate to high income families.

This is alarming because research has demonstrated that children who are at risk for school failure are more strongly influenced by the quality of early-care and education settings and it has been only within the last five years, that there has been an effort to increase the educational attainment level of early-care and education teachers. This effort was a result of a report published by the *Economic Policy Institute* by Herzenberg, Price & Bradley, (2005). In their report *Losing Ground in Early Childhood*

*Education: Declining Workforce Qualifications in an Expanding Industry, 1979-2004*, the authors examined the *Current Population Survey* (CPS) and Census Bureau data from the past 25 years to document what many of us in the early-care and education have long suspected. The study identified that early-care and education has changed for the worse since the early 1980s. They found that fewer center-based teachers with a four-year college/university degree, falling from a high of 43% in 1983-1985 to 30% in 2002-2004.

The researchers note that more teachers are working in the field of early-care and education with a high school diploma or less, up from 25% in the early 1980s to 30%. At the same time, more early-care and education teachers, 40% in 2004, up from 33% in 1983 have completed “some college,” although short of a four-year degree. This overall decline in educational attainment is most pronounced among younger workers (age 22 to mid-40s), with the most educated cohort now in their late 50s or older (Herzenberg, Price & Bradley, 2005).

One reason that the study has gained such attention is that its findings fly so directly in the face of current understandings of what is good for young children. These 25 years have brought a vast increase in knowledge about the crucial importance of children’s early development for lifelong learning and success, the key role of teachers and other adults in young children’s lives (especially teachers who have been trained specifically in early-care and education), and widening gaps, based on ethnicity and class, in children’s school readiness and achievement (Bowman, Donovan & Burns, 2001; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

Although *Losing Ground* documents a serious decline in the educational qualifications of the early-care and education workforce, this should not be construed to mean that any previous era of early-care and education quality was any better. Even in the 1970s, and again in the late 1980s, the first major studies of the U.S. childcare system (Ruopp, Travers, Glantz & Coelen, 1979; & Whitebook, Howes & Phillips, 1990) found troubling patterns of mediocre services, high teacher turnover and very low pay.

Research has clearly established that the educational attainment level of teachers in early-care and education and more specifically, early childhood education, is a key link which enhances teacher quality, which enhances the quality of the classroom, which enhances the outcomes of young children birth through five years. However, early-care and education teachers are faced with a variety of paths in their quest to become more qualified. There have been questions raised within the field of early-care and education regarding which degree is most effective: the Child Development Accreditation Certificate (CDA), Associate of Applied Science Degree (AAS) or the Bachelor's Degree (BA/BS) (Whitebook, Howes & Phillips, 1990 & Whitebook, 2009).

There has been a number of research studies conducted within the last 20 years, linked to the positive contribution of the Bachelor's degree which specializes in Early Childhood Education/Child Development to teacher behavior and program quality. These studies include; the Bermuda College Training Program Study, (Arnett, 1989); National Childcare Staffing Study (Howes, Phillips & Whitebrook, 1992); Cost, Quality and Child Outcomes Study (Blau, 2000; Helburn, 1995 & Howes, Phillips & Whitebrook, 1995), Florida Quality Improvement Study (Howes et al., 1998), the Three-State Study covering Massachusetts, Georgia and Virginia (Phillips, et. al., 2000), Then and Now: Changes in Childcare Staffing (Whitebook, Sakai, Gerber & Howes, 2001), Head Start FACES (Zill et al., 2001) and the New Jersey studies (Barnett, Tarr, Lamy & Frede, 2001).

Most currently, the ongoing research of Whitebook, Gomby, Bellm, Sakai & Kipnis; *Preparing teachers of young children: The current state of knowledge and a blueprint for the future. Part I: Teacher preparation and professional development in grades K-12 and early-care and education: Differences and similarities and implications for research* (2009a) and *preparing teachers of young children: The current state of knowledge and a blueprint for the future. Part II: Effective teacher preparation in early-care and education: Toward a comprehensive research agenda* (2009b), has also supported the idea of the correlation of educational outcomes and high quality early-care and education.

Unfortunately, explanations of the degree of efficiency, specifically of the Child Development Accreditation Certificate (CDA) and the Associate of Applied Science Degree (AAS), remain muddled, with many of the studies only indicating the importance of early-care and education teachers obtaining a Bachelor's Degree. While one could agree that the acquisition of a Bachelor's Degree with a specialization in Early Childhood Education/Child Development is optimal, consideration must also be given to the CDA and AAS degree which is a popular entry-level form of education for early-care and education teachers.

Two studies the Florida Quality Improvement Study (1998) and the Cost, Quality and Child Outcomes Study (1995) from the above eight, did attempt to address the three most common degree programs available to early-care and education professionals. Unfortunately, the CDA was not addressed in the Cost, Quality and Child Outcomes Study (Blau, 2000; Helburn, 1995; Howes, Phillips & Whitebook, 1995; Philipsen, Burchinal, Howes & Cryer, 1997). Nonetheless, data from the Cost, Quality and Child Outcomes Study did indicate that teachers with the most advanced education were the most effective overall. Teachers with a BA/BS, or a more advanced degree in Early Childhood Education/Child Development were rated as more sensitive than teachers with AAS Degrees in Child Development, who in turn were rated as more sensitive than teachers with other backgrounds. Teachers with at least an AAS Degree were less harsh and more effective than teachers with some college, or a High School Diploma, plus education workshops.

The Cost, Quality and Child Outcomes Study (1995) also proposed that children in classrooms with early-care and education teachers who have at least an AAS degree in Child Development had higher scores on the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, than did children in classrooms with teachers having only a High School Diploma (Blau, 2000; Helburn, 1995; Howes, Phillips & Whitebrook, 1995; Philipsen, Burchinal, Howes & Cryer, 1997).

Unlike the Cost, Quality and Child Outcomes Study, the Florida Quality Improvement Study included data relevant to the CDA. In this study, (Howes, et al., 1998) findings revealed that, teachers

with at least a BA/BS Degree in ECE/CD were rated as more sensitive than all other teachers. They also note that children whose teachers have at least a BA/BS Degree in ECE/CD were observed to have higher percentages of responsive involvement scores than children with all other teachers. On the other hand, children with teachers who have a CDA receive a higher frequency of positive initiation than children with teachers with only a High School Diploma.

Howes, et al., (1998) also points out that children, whose teachers have at least a BA/BS in Early Childhood Education/Child Development, an AAS in Child Development, or CDA had higher frequencies of language, play and positive management, than children whose teachers had only a high school education. Lastly, children whose teachers had at least a BA/ BS in ECE/CD engaged in more creative activities than children in all other classrooms.

With many teachers presently working in early-care and education, now required to begin, or continue the process of attaining higher education, questions exist regarding the relevance of acquiring a post-secondary education. In some instances, these early-care and education teachers have been working with young children for many years and feel that they have been successful due to their experience and attendance of early childhood professional development workshops. It must be recognized that many of these teachers will only successfully become qualified by beginning with the CDA and thus moving up through an AAS and eventually a BA/BS. Providing benchmarks established through research, regarding teacher outcomes, as a result of acquiring a CDA, AAS or BA/BS, would solidify why obtaining a degree is important for teachers of young children and their families.

### **Pennsylvania Early-Care and Education Professional Development**

The knowledge and skills required of an effective early-care and education teacher have increased as developmental science has revealed more about the capabilities of young children, their learning patterns and the importance of early learning for later school success. the *National Research Council* (NRC) report, *Eager to Learn*, (Bowman, Donovan & Burns, 2001), recommends that early-care and education teachers need to know how young children learn and what they need to learn based on an

understanding of child development and knowledge in specific subject areas. Early-care and education teachers should also have an understanding of how to individualize their teaching practices based on the temperament, responsiveness, learning style, ability, home language and culture and other characteristics of each individual child. They must also be skilled in working with groups of young children, as well as establishing effective relationships with children and their families.

Early-care and education teachers should also have a broad understanding of the philosophy of developmentally appropriate practices. Developmentally Appropriate Practice curriculum, teaching and assessment focuses on relating appropriately to the overall development of the whole child across social, emotional, aesthetic, moral, language, cognitive and physical domains. Developmentally Appropriate Practices relates to the everyday realities of individuals within a group, as well as the community of learners and supports problem-solving, critical thinking and intellectual risk-taking, as well as stimulating the process of lifelong learning (Bredenkamp & Copple, 2009).

In recent years, many states have developed and implemented *Early Learning Standards*. In 2005, *Early Learning Standards* were developed in Pennsylvania, as a collaborative effort of the Department of Education and Department of Public Welfare. Structured on ten guiding principles that are indicative of high quality early-care and education, these standards were designed as a framework for quality programming and to provide guidance relative to what young children should know or be able to accomplish upon entering kindergarten. Knowledge of the *Early Learning Standards* will inform teaching practices, influence curriculum decisions and drive quality programming (Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning, 2010).

Armed with copious amounts of research relating to the importance of high quality early-care and educational programming and given the number of both center based (5,195) and family home based centers (3,399) in Pennsylvania, the Department of Child Development and Early Learning has established state guidelines regarding the education and professional development of early-care and education professionals entitled *Early Learning Keys to Quality*. This professional development based

quality improvement program is founded upon the *Early Learning Standards*, the *Standards Aligned System*, *Keystone STARS Program Standards*, the *National Association for the Education of Young Children Accreditation Standards* and the *Pennsylvania Core Body of Knowledge (CBK)* (Pennsylvania Department of Child Development and Early Learning, 2010).

In their report *Early Childhood Education Teacher Quality: Recognizing High Quality Core Content in Pennsylvania*, the state identified the *Core Body of Knowledge (CBK)* as their guide for professional development. The *Core Body of Knowledge* is defined as “a set of early childhood core competencies linked to the learning standards that need to be mastered by all those working with children. The primary focus of CBK is to facilitate child learning and development and to work effectively with families (Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning, 2010).

### **Perceptions of Themselves as Teachers**

Researchers propose that teachers’ perceptions are influenced by three distinct criteria: a) philosophies of education, including their beliefs about the impact of teaching in general, as well as their understanding of how children learn; b) perceptions of themselves as teachers, how they feel about their own abilities to influence learning outcomes and c) beliefs about how events in the classroom are contingent upon their own actions. For example, how much they attribute learning outcomes to their own actions (File & Gullo, 2002; Kagan, 1992; McMullen, 2003, 1999; Nespor, 1987; Spodek, 1988; Vartuli, 1999).

However, researchers report inconsistencies or at best, a small connection between teachers’ self reported perceptions and the actual practices of teachers in the classroom. In studies that report inconsistencies, the typical patterns are that early-care and education teachers report highly appropriate perceptions, but are found to engage in low quality teaching practices (DeLuccie, 2002; Early, et. al., 2006; Kagan & Smith, 1988; McMullen, 2003 & Orton, 1996).

Several reasons are offered as to why early-care and education teachers’ report high quality practices, but their demonstration in the classroom indicates the opposite of the descriptions they provide.

These problems are reported as environmental or work related stresses, i.e. feelings of being unsupported by parents, colleagues and administrators, low salaries and the perception society holds that early-care and education teachers are not considered professionals (Mc Mullen, 2003, 1999). Based on the research of Ceglowski and Bacigalupa (2002), in which they examined early-care and education quality perspectives and found that early-care and education teachers report that they believed high quality early-care and education includes health and safety criteria, personal characteristics such as warmth and sensitivity, communication between parents and teachers and the early-care and education program's flexibility in meeting the needs of the working parents. No mention was made of educational objectives and learning goals for young children and the importance of high quality programming in young children's' acquisition of developmental skills. McMullen proposes that teachers' may be challenged in their attempts to live out their perceptions by their own personal characteristics. Certain personality traits, tendencies and levels of preparation or professional experience, may make it difficult for these teachers to engage in the practices in which they indicated that they believe (McMullen, 2003).

McMullen uses the hypothesis proposed by Bandura and Jourden (1991) relative to educational self-efficacy perception. Educational self-efficacy beliefs, is defined as the beliefs of teachers regarding the ability of education in general, to have a positive impact on the performance of children. Bandura and Jourden propose that educational self-efficacy perceptions act as a mediator of the behaviors of teachers, in that "it affects both the choice of activities and how much effort one will ultimately put forth" (1999, pp.217). Bandura and Jourden identified two components of educational self-efficacy that influence the practices of early-care and education teachers: a) outcome expectancy, which is the belief that certain behaviors can lead to specific outcomes and b) efficacy expectation, which is the perception about one's own competence or ability to bring about certain outcomes.

These researchers argue that educational self-efficacy involves feelings of competency which links the teachers' educational self-efficacy to the achievement of young children. An early-care and education teacher with low educational efficacy believes that early-care and education cannot affect the

performance of young children. Whereas a teacher with high educational efficacy believes that early-care and education does positively affect learning outcomes. Teachers with high educational efficacy are more willing to implement innovative activities and are more persistent in working with young children, to achieve learning goals (Bandura & Jourden, 1991 & McMullen, 1999).

A second efficacy term, personal teaching efficacy, refers to the early-care and education teachers' sense of their own effectiveness in having an influence on the achievement of young children. McMullen describes early-care and education teachers with low personal teaching efficacy, as being more likely to believe that they personally cannot affect the learning and performance of young children. Conversely, early-care and education teachers with high personal teaching efficacy believe that they personally can affect the outcomes of young children, that all young children can learn and that they, as teachers, are personally responsible for that outcome (McMullen, 2003, 1999).

Educational self-efficacy and personal teaching efficacy are important factors to consider in the education of teachers. Educators in institutions of higher learning should consider these variables in the design of their curricula, planned projects and activities and in the length of time allotted for field experiences (Whitebook, et. al., 2009a; Whitebook, et. al., 2009b & Whitebook, et. al., 2010).

Teacher education is also an important source to consider when explaining factors that affect the perceptions and confidence of early-care and education teachers regarding high quality programming. Extensive research identifies the relationship between high quality early-care and education programming and teacher practices and the level of teacher education (Apple, 2004; Brousseau, Book & Byers, 1998; Whitebook, et. al., 2009a; Whitebook, et. al., 2009b & Whitebook, et. al., 2010). Positive teacher perceptions regarding program quality and confidence or efficacy in their demonstration of these perceptions in classroom settings, coupled with the level of teacher education, have been identified as important factors in achieving high quality early-care and educational programming (Cassidy, Buell, Pugh-Hoese, & Russell, 1995; Gable & Halliburton, 2003; McMullen, 2003, 1999; McMullen & Alat, 2002; Whitebook, et. al., 2009a; Whitebook, et. al., 2009b; Whitebook, et. al., 2010).

Yet, there are observable instances where there is disconnect, between the early-care and education teachers' stated perceptions of high quality programming not being demonstrated within the classroom. Documentation of this involves early-care and education teachers no matter what their educational attainment level is (Whitebook, et. al., 2009a; Whitebook, et. al., 2009b; Whitebook, et. al., 2010). This disconnect between teachers' stated perceptions, the educational attainment levels of the teachers and the lack of quality demonstrated within their classroom, is an issue of concern.

Kahlich and Dorminey (1993) conducted a study addressing the role-perceptions of early childhood pre-service teachers. Their study revealed that while teachers were able to appropriately discuss quality practices necessary for enhancement of young children's learning, when asked to describe how these practices would look in the classroom, these same teachers had difficulty making the application. This same scenario also occurs with early-care and education teachers who are currently working in the field and are returning to higher education to obtain a post-secondary degree. One would think that the application of new knowledge would successfully occur due to the experience of these teachers. However, when observed, the new knowledge learned through the coursework is not evident within the classroom. Whitebook, Gomby, Bellm, Sakai & Kipnis (2009) and Whitebook, Sakai, Kipnis, Bellm & Almaraz (2010) are currently researching this concern. Their recommendation is that early-care and education professionals learn best through the experiences of their colleagues. Their suggestion is to use a cohort system at the college/university level. This will allow the early-care and education professionals to become familiar with their colleagues and less intimidated to ask questions and seek advice. This would facilitate the transference of new knowledge gained at colleges/universities into their teaching practice in the classroom. More research is needed in the study of transference of new knowledge acquired through their post-secondary education into their current practices.

Consideration must also be given on how to change the perceptions that early-care and education teachers hold, regarding what influences high quality early-care and educational programming. Tatto and Coupland (2003) point out four ways to alter perceptions. They believe that if beliefs are expected to

change, colleges/universities must provide more and better: a) field and classroom experiences for both pre-service and in-service teachers; b) opportunities for reflection, individually or with peers; c) opportunities for understanding oneself in relation to challenging and novel situations in a secure environment and d) theoretical and applied knowledge about subject matter, pedagogy, curriculum, teaching, learning, diverse students and technology.

### **Perceptions of Themselves as Students**

There is little research on what specifically motivates early-care and education teachers to go on for higher education. Tout, Zaslow, Halle & Forry (2006) speculates that perhaps there is a relationship between a professionals' motivation to go on for higher education and the qualities that make them effective in the classroom. The literature on adult learners gives useful insights into what motivates adults to enter and to persist in higher education, because a great majority of early-care and education teachers are women and many are over the age of 25 (National Association of Childcare Resource and Referral Agency, 2011). Many non-traditional students are also "first-generation students" who are the first in their families to attend a college/university (Giancola, Munz & Trares, 2008).

Adult learners or non-traditional students are usually part-time undergraduate students, who, in addition to working full time, have dependents, are financially independent and have the responsibility of their homes (Garavusco, 2007; Giancola, Munz & Trares, 2008; Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002). They represent approximately 40% of students attending community colleges (National Association of Childcare Resource and Referral Agency, 2010).

Non-traditional adult students have been found to have more intrinsic motivation for coursework, interest in learning for learning's sake and see higher education for self-improvement and personal growth, as compared to traditional age students ages 18-25. Traditional age students are more interested in starting their career and view higher education as a means to obtain that goal (Bye, Pushkar & Conway, 2007; Carney-Compton & Tan, 2002; Karsworm, 2005). Extrinsic motivation does play a role for adult students if, for example, they are returning to school to fulfill job requirements, or for career enhancement

to obtain a more satisfying job (Dayton, 2005). Karsworm (2005) noted that adult students are serious students who show confidence, participate in class and use their past experiences as assets, especially when they are in classes with younger, more traditional age students.

Since approximately 46% of early-care and education teachers have had at least “some college” (National Association of Childcare Resource and Referral Agency, 2011), it implies that they “stopped out” *i.e.* began their education, left and resumed their studies, often several times before completing their degree (Spanard, 1990). Typically, women students stop out for a number of reasons, including family commitments, finances or time and work commitments (Dayton, 2005; Plageman & Sabina, 2010). They have to make a conscious decision then, to re-enter higher education. In considering re-entry into higher education, several factors can come into play. The timing of re-entry to college/university has been found to be related to family needs. Various other factors can also influence their re-entry. Family support is especially important to Hispanic students, whereas having a family of origin with strong academic emphasis was most important for African American women who reentered higher education. Lastly, having the emotional support of significant others, having financial assistance and feeling that their significant other was proud of them was also important, especially in persistence to stay in school to complete their degree (Plageman & Sabina, 2010).

Spanard (1990) notes that for adults, re-entering higher education is a transitional activity where there is some significant event in their lives that precipitates it, such as a family situation, or their dissatisfaction with their current position, or their image in the workplace. A three-step process can possibly occur when non-traditional students begin thinking about completing a post-secondary degree. First, intent to enter or return to college/university may happen at different points in a person’s life. Secondly, determining if the benefits outweigh the costs, as does the time and expense and other benefits of college/university outweigh the time and money that could be spent elsewhere. Thirdly, persevering until the degree is completed.

Miller's (1967) motivational theory uses a 'push-pull model' of motivation and suggests that if forces pushing non-traditional students towards college/university are stronger than those which pull individuals away from college/university, including their individual needs and how higher education matches those needs, they will enroll. Smart & Pascarella (1987) have noted the importance of adult students' initial undergraduate experiences play a role in their decision to return to higher education. Examples of these experiences may include, the number of years they attended college and their satisfaction with the college/university experience, their grades and the number of higher education institutions they attended. Smart & Pascarella proposes that the number of colleges/universities that non-traditional students previously attended may lead to a greater chance they will eventually return to complete their degree.

Factors such as emotional support, which includes acceptance, encouragement, praise and institutional support, which includes financial support, assistance with childcare and household chores, were also found to be very important in an adult's decision to return to school (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002). Important supports can come from professors/instructors, family, friends, supportive employers who encourage their employees to return to school, as well as the availability of financial aid (Dayton, 2005). Buell's (1999) study of early-care and education teachers attending community college found the support from their workplace, how well the students were integrated into college life and their relation with faculty to be additional important factors in determining adult students' persistence to complete their degrees. The most recent research studies that specifically looked at the motivation of early-care and education professionals, relative to returning to post-secondary education, was Washington (2008) and Whitebook, et.al., 2009; Whitebook, et.al., 2010). These researchers propose that early-care and education professionals must see a higher level of education as relevant to their current role in the classroom.

## **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this research study is based on the premise found in the early-care and education literature, that teachers play a vital role in establishment and maintenance of high quality early-care and educational programming. Researchers, such as, Ackerman (2004); Barnett (2005); Barnett, Tarr, Lamy & Fede (2001); Bowman (2010); Early (2007); Fuller, Gasko & Anguiano (2010); Goffin (2010); Honig & Hirallal (1998); Landry, Swank & Monseque-Bailey (2009); Mashburn (2008); Tout, Zaslow & Berry (2006); Schweinhart (2005); Washington & Andrews (2010) & Whitebrook, Howes, & Phillips (1990), as well as others, have identified the early-care and education teacher as pivotal in establishing and maintaining quality, within the classroom environment and curriculum.

Secondly, considering the perceptions and beliefs of early-care and education professionals, based on the work of Bandura & Jourden (1991); Cassidy, Pugh-Hoese & Russell (1995); Kagen (1992); Kahlich & Dorminey (1993); McMullen (2003); Nespor (1987); Orton (1996); Tato (1998); Vartuli (2005, 1999) is vital to this research study. These researchers suggest that the beliefs and self-efficacy of teachers makes a difference in their practices. They also propose that some teachers do not see their teaching practices as being influential in the learning outcomes of their students. In the field of early-care and education, there is an additional variable that influences the perceptions, beliefs and self-efficacy of its professionals- the belief of society regarding those who work in early-care and education, as professionals.

This research study also takes into account the level of education and years of experience of early-care and education professionals. The work of Barnett (2010); DeLuccie (2002); Early (2007); Egertson (2010); Fuller, Gasko & Anguiano (2010); Goffin (2010); National Association for the Education of Young Children (2011) & National Childcare Information Center (2010) as well as others, is compelling evidence that the educational level of the early-care and education teacher significantly shows a relationship with positive learning outcomes and later success in school and adulthood. The literature

cites a Bachelor's Degree as most desirable; however the literature is not consistent, regarding the focus of the Bachelor's Degree.

The field of early-care and education is heavily supported by professionals with a long history of experience within the field and in some cases, a long history of consistently working in their current center and position. Unfortunately, there is little in the research that critically looks at the experience of early-care and education professionals, as it draws a parallel to an educational degree. This is an issue that must be looked at more critically by researchers (Early, et.al, 2006; Honig & Hirallal, 1998; Bechtold, Huss-Keeler, Kirkwood & Peter, 2010).

Research must also address the motivation of early-care and education professionals returning for a post-secondary education. Again, this is an area of research within the field of early-care and education that needs more attention. Current adult education literature can be generalized to early-care and education professionals (Bechtold, Peters & Huss-Keeler, 2011; Dukakis, Bellem, Seer & Lee, 2007; Whitebook, et.al, 2009 a; Whitebook, et.al, 2009b; Whitebook, et.al, 2010). Four critical factors impact their decision to return and graduate from a college or university. These factors are interest in returning to post-secondary education, availability of degree programs that focus on young children birth through age five years, the support of their family and workplace and finance.

Lastly, my research study is also consistent with *the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Conceptual Framework for Professional Development*. The work of this organization is well-known and highly respected and literally drives the standards and developmentally appropriate practices that the early-care and education field must adhere to. It is NAEYC's position that the principles set forth in their conceptual framework must be embraced and practiced for high quality programming and teachers' practices to ever occur and remain in place (Lutton, 2011 & National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2011).

### **Rationale for the Research Design**

The use of research methods can be valuable in uncovering an individual's perceptions, as well as understanding the process that ultimately leads to these perceptions (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Maxwell, 1996; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The focus of this research study was not to define high quality early-care and education programming, but to make audible the often unheard "voices" of early-care and education professionals currently working in the field.

Descriptive-field study research with many cases is the research design I used for this study. I wanted to let us hear what the participants have to say about the current educational requirements, their longevity or years of experience in the field and their teaching practices. To me, this design is similar to the collective case study design. Creswell described this form of research design as "exploration of a bounded system or a case or multiple cases over time and through detail, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context" (Creswell, 1998, p.61). It is also the research method that is conducive for "how and why" questions, when the researcher has little or no control over the situation and when the focus of the research is on contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context" (Yin, 2003, p. 13).

### **Structural and Process Quality**

The use of Cassidy, et.al's (2005) structural and process quality indicators are well known in the field of early-care and education, as an assessment tool when determining the quality of a program or classroom. Cassidy, et.al, (2005) and Bigras, et. al., (2010) suggest that process quality includes an adult being actively involved with young children, using materials, participating in activities or supervising. They also propose that process quality includes interaction between children (child-child interactions), between children and adults (teacher-child interactions), or between adults (adult-adult interactions), including parents and teachers. They suggest that the types of interactions can be relational, and/or teaching, and/or meeting an individual child's needs. They maintain that process quality also includes

modeling behaviors, extending activities, facilitating activities or taking an active role to allow a behavior or activity to occur.

Structural quality is characteristic of the environment that is independent of human interaction between individuals. This includes materials, equipment, schedules, procedures, rules and guidelines. Cassidy, et.al, (2005) and Bigras, et. al., (2010) suggest that structural quality does not focus on “how” the guidelines were developed or the thinking process behind setting up materials or defining a schedule. Instead, it is the presence or absence of the materials or documents that is the primary consideration. Structural quality includes the presence of materials and equipment, and a child’s or adult’s actions on objects.

In reviewing the early-care and education literature, it became evident that there is a distinct association between the educational attainment level of early-care and education teachers and the level of quality in the classroom and the programs in which they serve. While the Bachelor’s Degree seems to be optimal, the literature is inconsistent in determining the focus of the degree. There is minimal research in early-care and education as to ways to overcome the barriers that hinder the advancement of high quality programming, such as one’s perception of themselves as professionals and the role they play in establishing and maintaining high quality programming. In addition, I was able to find very little early-care and education literature that points to motivating early-care and education professionals to engage in activities that lead to high quality programming for young children, such as attainment of a degree with a focus on young children birth through five years. This is troubling, because the push in early-care and education currently is towards professionals earning a post-secondary degree.

Lastly, it should be noted that some early-care and education teachers have never attained a post-secondary education degree. Many of these same professionals have a history of longevity in the field of early-care and education. The field is mainly supported by teachers with many years of experience. It is imperative that the leaders in the field of early-care and education help these teachers to understand that

not only would their teaching practices be enhanced with a higher level of educational attainment, but also their perceptions of themselves as professionals.

## Chapter Three

### METHODOLOGY

This research study rests on the assumption often found in the extant literature, which identifies the early-care and education teacher as being significant in the establishment and maintenance of high quality classroom programming and practices (Ackerman, 2004; Arnett, 1989; Barnett, 2005; Bowman, 2010; Early, 2007; Kagan, Kauerz & Tarrant, 2008; Lutton, 2011; Prochner, 1996; Schweinhart, 2005 & Whitebook, 2003). The following six research questions guided my study:

1. How do early-care and education teachers define and describe a quality program?
2. What teacher practices do they identify as necessary in a quality classroom?
3. What influences their description of quality and their identification of the teacher practices that support quality: educational attainment level, experience, or a combination of educational attainment and experience?
4. Do early-care and education teachers identify a higher level of education as an indicator of quality programming for young children?
5. What are the perceptions of teachers regarding their years of experience in the field of early-care and education?
6. What are the perceptions and reactions of early-care and education teachers regarding the current expectation or requirement that in-service teachers obtain a degree (Associate or Bachelor)?

I used the descriptive-field study research design with many cases for my research study.

Creswell described this form of research design as “exploration of a bounded system or a case or multiple cases over time and through detail, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context” (Creswell, 1998, p.61).

#### Research Study Setting

The research study takes place in Lancaster County, which is located in the southeastern portion of Pennsylvania. Lancaster County is a fairly diverse county, including rural, suburban and urban areas. Early-care and education within Lancaster County offers a wide selection of programming such as, public preschools found in the local school districts, private preschools and full day programming represented by

center-based, group childcare homes and family childcare homes. The following descriptions provide a more detailed picture of the types of full day programming found in Lancaster County:

**Center Based Programs:** provide care for seven or more children who are not related to the operator of the facility. The facility must have a certificate of compliance/license from the Department of Public Welfare in order to legally operate.

**Group Childcare Home Programs:** provide care for seven through 12 children of various ages, or seven through 15 children from fourth grade through 15 years of age, who are not related to the operator of the facility. A group childcare home program must have a certificate of compliance/license from the Department of Public Welfare in order to legally operate.

**Family Childcare Home Programs:** provide care for four, five or six children who are not related to the caregiver. A family childcare home program must have a certificate of registration from the Department of Public Welfare in order to legally operate (Pennsylvania Office of Child Development and Early Learning, 2010).

Center-based programs provide the most conducive setting for the research study. My rationale is that most center-based programs provide early-care and education for a sizeable number of children of various ages, thus employing the staff necessary to meet the needs of these children. This research study represents only the early-care and education professionals working with preschool children, ages three through five years. This decision was based on my need for consistency in programs, terminology and practice descriptions. My assumption is that early-care and education teachers who work with same-age children will commonly use the same terminology, program descriptions and practice indicators.

Fourteen early-care and education programs agreed to participate in my research study. These programs more than adequately represent early-care and educational programming found in Lancaster County. The centers vary in the number of children served, the smallest program serves 20 children and the largest program serves 165 children. All of the participating early-care and education programs are involved in *Keystone STARS* (see Table 3-1).

### **Pennsylvania Keystone STARS**

Pennsylvania introduced the *Keystone STARS Quality Initiative* in 2002. As of 2010, *Keystone STARS* included approximately 4,500 (70 percent) early-care and education programs involved (Pennsylvania Early Learning Keys to Quality, 2010). The acronym STARS, represents *Standards*,

*Training, Assistance, Resources and Support* and the mission is to create a quality improvement system in which all early-care and educational programs and practitioners are encouraged and supported to improve child outcomes. Improvements in programming such as, increasing the capacity to support learning outcomes and development, increasing the educational attainment levels amongst early-care and education teachers and enhancing professional skills and competencies of early-care and education teachers in support of children's learning and development, are the focus of *Keystone STARS*.

To establish a baseline of quality within a setting, each early-care and educational program participating in *Keystone STARS* is assessed, using either the *Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS-R)*, *Infant/Toddler Environmental Rating Scale (ITERS-R)*, *Family Day Care Rating Scale (FDCRS)*, or the *School-Age Care Environmental Rating Scale (SACERS)*. The qualifications of the education staff are assessed and evaluated through their completion of educational degree programs (Pennsylvania Early Learning Keys to Quality, 2010).

Table 3-1  
*Early-care and education Program STAR Designation (N=14)*

STAR Two	STAR Three	STAR Four
N=7	N=3	N=4

### **Research Study Participants**

Fifty five participants were in my research study. Fifty four of the participants are female and one participant, Participant 29 from Center Seven is male. I did not ask the participants to identify their ethnicity on the *Teacher Demographic Questionnaire*, however, the participant group, while diverse, represents predominantly Caucasian ethnicity.

The participants were both lead teachers and assistant teachers. Inclusion of both lead teachers and assistant teachers recognizes and supports the already established teaching teams often found in early-care and education classrooms. Though, in some early-care and education programs, two lead teachers represent the teaching team. Educational background and/or experience were not a requirement for

participation in the research study. The only requirement was that each participant is currently employed in an early-care and education program located in Lancaster County and working with young children ages three, four and five years.

Participant demographic information such as level of education, years of experience, age of the participant and the childcare center in which they worked provides an insight of the background of the 55 participants (See Appendix A). This demographic data was used in my analytical process for the results represented in Chapters Four and Five. In developing my analytical process for high and low education, I base my decision on the fact that research indicates that the Bachelor's Degree is most optimal. So, the educational levels of Bachelor's and above were coded as High Education and the educational levels below the Bachelor's Degree (High School Diploma, CDA, AAS and other education) were coded as Low Education. To determine high and low experience, I mathematically averaged the participants' total years of experience and determined that 10 years of experience and below as Low Experience. Participants with more than ten years of experience were coded High Experience. The education/experience grouping, are as follows: a) L L=Low education/Low experience; b) L H= Low education/High experience; c) H H=High education/High experience and d) H L=High education/How experience.

Discussion relative to the educational attainment level and the years of experience of the participants can be found in the *Teacher Demographic Questionnaire* section of this chapter. I did include a question regarding the age of the participants on the *Teacher Demographic Questionnaire*. I chose to use age groups with the belief that I would receive a better response to this question. My findings are in Table 3-2 below.

Table 3-2  
*Participants' Identified Age Group (N=55)*

18-25 years	26-30 years	31-35 years	36-40 years	41-45 years	46-50 years	51-54 years	55-60 years	61-65 years	66+ years
N=13	N=9	N=6	N=7	N=7	N=3	N=4	N=4	N=1	N=1

Table 3-3 below reflects how many participants represent in each Education /Experience Level grouping.

Table 3-3  
*Education/Experience (N=55)*

Low Education/Low Experience	Low Education/High Experience	High Education/Low Experience	High Education/High Experience
N=24	N=13	N=14	N=4

The commitment of the participants to the research study is evident in that all 55 participants completed both of the questionnaires and willingly participated in both of the one-hour interviews. Their participation in both of the one-hour interviews is commendable. The best time for me to meet with the participants was during nap-time, which is usually a two-hour period of time. Nap-time is usually the time where early-care and education teachers work on lesson plans, gather resources for the children and take their lunch break. On the other hand, nap-time is the best time for dealing with changes in staff-child ratio for center directors. With this in mind, I was concerned about the willingness of the participants to “give up” this important time of the day. Overall, the participants came to the interview with a positive attitude and sincerely shared their perceptions.

## Research Study Recruitment

There are 133 licensed center-based early-care and education facilities offering full-day programming located in Lancaster County. Using the requirement that the early-care and education program must be participating in *Keystone STARS*, I mailed participant recruitment letters (See Appendix B) to 66 of the licensed childcare programs. My rationale for using only childcare centers participating in *Keystone STARS* was based on my need for consistency in what a high quality program should look like and the participants experience in working in childcare centers that are participating in the *Keystone STARS* program. Childcare centers participating in this program are required to meet the standards established by *Keystone STARS* and are monitored regularly to ensure the standards are being met. Compliance with these standards ensures that the childcare centers is high-quality; (i.e. STAR Four) or are working towards high-quality programming (i.e. STAR Two and Three).

Response to my first participant recruitment letter resulted in 19 programs agreeing to participate and 27 programs declining. A follow-up letter was then sent to the early-care and education programs that did not respond (See Appendix C). No additional programs agreed to participate. I made a personal call to all of the center directors who agreed to participate in my research study, which resulted in three early-care and education programs withdrawing their participation agreement due to unforeseen staff turnover and overall concerns regarding “staff” unwillingness to participate in the study.

An informational meeting was offered to each participating early-care and education center, where all prospective participants were provided with an overview of the research study. The expectations of the participants were presented and time was provided for discussion (See Appendix D). It is at this meeting that consent forms were given to the participants for their signature (See Appendix E). After this meeting two additional early-care and education programs withdrew from the study citing staff turnover as the mitigating issue.

## Data Collection

This investigation is a descriptive field study with many cases ( $N=55$  cases). The data gathering techniques are meant to provide a holistic representation of the perceptions and beliefs of each participant and by so doing reflect each participant's "voice". Multiple measures to tap the perceptions of each participant were used. This included two questionnaires, two one-hour interviews, participant journals and on-site visits. My research lasted a full year, beginning January 2007 and culminating December 2007.

Whereas each research method has its strengths and weaknesses, collectively incorporating all of the above methods allows me as the researcher, to compensate for the weakness of one method by capitalizing on the strengths of another (Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Merriam, 1988). To secure a rich description, cross techniques were employed to triangulate the data. This is consistent with 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).

The study begins with each participant being asked to complete two questionnaires, a *Teacher Demographic Questionnaire* (See Appendix F) and a *Teacher Practice Questionnaire* (See Appendix G). Both of these questionnaires were checked for content validity twice before their use in the study. My procedure for content validity is as follows. I asked early childhood education students from a local college to complete both questionnaires. Forty five college students agreed to participate and completed the entire *Teacher Practice Questionnaire* and Part A of the *Teacher Demographic Questionnaire*. My instructions to the students were the same as the instructions provided on the questionnaires. I instructed them to answer based on how they felt about each statement. For example, "was the statement important or not important to them, or somewhere in between." "Did they agree or disagree with the statement." I assured the students that I would be the only person reviewing their answers. I also did not ask for identification information. I encouraged the students to make comments by each statement that was confusing or unclear. After reviewing the student questionnaires, I made changes to the statements that the students identify as confusing or unclear.

My second check for content validity came through a pilot study that I conducted in a STAR Four early-care and education center in rural Lancaster County. For this study I used the revised *Teacher Demographic Questionnaire*, the revised *Teacher Practice Questionnaire* and *Interview One*. Ten participants agreed to participate in my pilot study. My rationale for the pilot study was to check the above tools for content validity with professionals currently working in the field of early-care and education. I followed the same procedure as I used with the college students. After gathering the data, I reviewed the questionnaires and then invited the participants to meet as a focus group, to discuss the interview questions and the questionnaires. Based on the responses and suggestions made by the focus group participants, coupled with the comments from the college students, I believe that I have designed clear and concise questionnaires. From the input of the focus group regarding the questions in *Interview One*, I became aware that additional questions were needed, which are found in *Interview Two*.

### **Teacher Demographic Questionnaire**

All 55 participants completed this questionnaire which consisted of fifteen general Likert style questions. The focus of these questions was the participants' perceptions relative to high quality programming, post-secondary education and longevity or years of experience in the field of early-care and education. Section B of the *Teacher Demographic Questionnaire*, poses four questions that focus on the participants' experience, educational background and their plans for remaining in their current position, or the field of early-care and education. I also included a question that examines what influences early-care and education professionals to leave the field. The *Teacher Demographic Questionnaire* also invited the participants to reflect on their self-perceived teaching strengths and weaknesses.

The *Teacher Demographic Questionnaire* is essential in gathering relevant background information of the participants in particular, as well as providing a basic overview of the participants' perceptions of high quality early-care and education programming and the early childhood field in

general. Table 3-4 below, represents the experience of the participants from the data found on the

*Participant Data Table* (See Appendix A).

Table 3-4  
*Length of Professional Experience (N=55)*

One to five years	Six to ten years	Eleven to fifteen years	Sixteen to twenty years	More than twenty years
N=21	N=15	N=9	N=5	N=5

I am impressed with the number of participants ( $N=34$ ), 62% in my research study that told me that they have been in the field for more than five years. Historically, the rate of staff turnover is high within the field of early-care and education. To gain an insight into this phenomenon, I asked the participants the following question, “Do you plan to continue working in childcare?” Eighty-nine percent of the participants ( $N=49$ ) signify that they are planning to remain in early-care and education and six participants reveal that they are planning to leave the field. This favorable response to this question signifies the commitment that the participants have for their profession.

The *Teacher Demographic Questionnaire* also looks at the educational attainment level of the participants. Table 3-5 represents the participants’ educational level. My coding strategy can be found at the bottom of Table 3-5.

Table 3-5  
*Participants Educational Attainment Level (N=55)*

GED/HSD	CDA	AAS/ECE	BA/BS/ELED	BA/BS/ECE	M.ED	Other
N=16	N=4	N=14	N=13	N=3	N=2	N=3

GED/HSD = General Education Diploma or High School Diploma

CDA = Child Development Accreditation

AAS/ECE = Associate Degree (Early Childhood Education)

BS/EE = Bachelor Degree

BS/ECE = Bachelor Degree (Early Childhood Education)

M.ED = Master Degree (Early Childhood Education)

Other = Represents degrees within disciplines outside of education

### **Teacher Practice Questionnaire**

All of the participants ( $N=55$ ) completed the *Teacher Practice Questionnaire* which consists of 30 Likert style questions regarding the practices of early-care and education teachers. I designed the questions using the standards of high quality programming set forth by the *National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Preparing Early Childhood Professionals-NAEYC'S Standards for Programs, Developmentally Appropriate Practices, The Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS-R)* and *The Four Curricular Subscales Extension to the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS-R.)*. Additionally, I included two commonly used descriptors of quality programming; structural quality and process quality (Bigras, et.al., 2010; Cassidy, et.al., 2005; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Harms, Clifford & Cryer, 2005; Lutton, 2011; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2011; Sylva, Siraj-Blatchford & Taggart, 2011).

NAEYC has a well established reputation as the leading organization within early-care and education for establishing and maintaining standards that ensure high quality programming for young children. NAEYC is also the leading organization awarding accreditation to high quality early-care and education programs. In fact, based on their stringent requirements for accreditation, Pennsylvania's *Keystone STARS* program awards the highest level of STARS possible, (Five STARS) to early-care and

education programs that hold accreditation with NAEYC. To ensure high quality programming for young children birth through age eight, NAEYC uses rating scales such as the *ECERS-R* and *ECERS-E* as well as the *Developmentally Appropriate Practices* set forth in Copple & Bredekamp's (2009) book.

*ECERS-R* and *ECERS-E* are well established rating scales used nationally and internationally to assess classroom environments, classroom resources, teacher/child interactions and curriculum.

*Developmentally Appropriate Practices* is often called the "Bible" of early-care and education.

*Developmentally Appropriate Practices* is instrumental in guiding professionals with strategies that are considered "best practices" for young children (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 2005; Lutton, 2011; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2011; Sylva, Siraj-Blatchford & Taggart, 2011).

The use of Cassidy, et.al.'s (2005) and Bigras, et.al. (2010) structural and process quality indicators are well known in the field of early-care and education, as an assessment tool when determining the quality of a program or classroom. Cassidy, et.al. (2005) and Bigras, et.al. (2010) suggest that process quality includes an adult being actively involved with young children, using materials, participating in activities, or supervising. They also propose that process quality also includes interaction between children (child-child interactions), between children and adults (teacher-child interactions), or between adults (adult-adult interactions), including parents and teachers. They suggest that the types of interactions can be relational, and/or teaching and/or meeting an individual child's needs. They maintain that process quality also includes modeling behaviors, extending activities, facilitating activities, or taking an active role to allow a behavior or activity to occur.

Structural quality taps characteristics of the environment that are independent of human interaction between individuals. This includes materials, equipment, schedules, procedures, rules and guidelines. The researchers suggest that structural quality does not focus on "how" the guidelines were developed or the thinking process behind setting up materials or defining a schedule. Instead, it is the presence or absence of the materials or documents that is the primary consideration. Structural quality

includes the presence of materials and equipment and a child's or adult's actions on objects. These may be viewed as proximal structural variables and distal structural variables.

The purpose of the *Teacher Practice Questionnaire* was to gain an insight into the perceptions of early-care and education teachers regarding the classroom and their teaching practices. In answering this questionnaire, the participants were asked to consider the term "young children" as three to five year olds. I encouraged the participants to choose the answer that best describes their own practice/practices.

It should be noted however, that while all 55 participants did complete the *Teacher Practice Questionnaire*, some chose not to answer all of the questions. These questions include #3 - where one participant circled two answers, #11 - one participant did not answer, #12 - three participants did not answer, #13 - two participants did not answer, #15 - one participant did not answer, #16 - one participant did not answer, #20 - four participants did not answer, #24 - one participant did not answer, and #28 - one participant did not answer.

## **Interviews**

"Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable and able to be made explicit. We interview to find out what is in and on someone else's mind to gather their stories" (Patton, 2002, p341). For this research study, two one hour interviews were conducted with 55 participants. I did all of my interviews at the early-care and education program of each participant. The center director determined the time of the day that was best for the interview and I worked within their schedule. Most of the interviews occurred during naptime when additional staff was available to cover for the teachers participating in my study.

The interview process took an entire year, because the interview schedule was subject to change based on the needs of each early-care and education program. If the program was experiencing staff absence on the day of the interviews, the participants were needed in the classroom and were unable to participate in the interview. Since the interviews are a vital part of the research study, I willingly adjusted to the schedule of each childcare center.

A standardized open-ended interview process was used for both interview sessions. This was to make sure that all participants were asked the same questions. This ensured that the answers obtained in the interviews were comparable in the analysis of the data. The use of open-ended interviews, where the participants are asked the same questions has been supported through the study of qualitative research. Researchers such as Patton (2002), Rossman & Rallis (2003) and Seidman (1991) argue that the standardized open-ended interview makes data analysis easier as the researcher is able to locate and organize each participant's response, especially in multi-site case studies.

The first interview was scheduled during the first six months of the research study and included the following questions. Follow-up probes such as "can you elaborate on that" were used.

#### *Interview One*

1. How would you describe a high quality childcare center?
2. What activities or experiences would you identify as necessary in a high quality childcare center or classroom?
3. Are you familiar with the Early Learning Standards recently adopted by Pennsylvania?
4. Please identify the teacher practices you use in your classroom that supports your description of high quality programming for young children.
5. In your opinion, what issues hinders quality within childcare centers?
6. Who would you identify as being a role model in your life as a teacher and why?
7. What is your opinion regarding mentors as a resource for teachers?
8. The Pennsylvania Keystone STARS program has identified teacher education as an indicator of quality, do you agree or disagree and why?
9. Please share with me your experience in higher education (i.e. CDA, Associates, and BA/BS).
10. What is your opinion regarding teacher experience and years spent in the field of childcare, and the current expectation that in-service teachers obtain a degree?

It was during the first interview that the participants shared their description of a high quality early-care and education classroom and identified what practices they use to ensure high quality within their own classroom.

The second interview was scheduled during the last six months of the research study and included the following questions along with follow-up probes similar to what I used in *Interview One*.

#### *Interview Two*

1. What teacher practices would you identify as your strength?
2. What teacher practices would you identify as a weakness?
3. Think about your teacher practices that you identify as a strong area, what influenced your decision to incorporate these practices into your classroom?

This accommodated the time necessary for the participants to complete a reflective journal of their own teaching practices and for me to do classroom observations.

Each interview was conducted and audio-taped in a separate room outside of the classroom, allowing for little or no interruptions during the interview. Interviewing participants is challenging when the participants are not familiar with the interviewer. I was familiar with the director of each center because I had recently served as President-Elect and President of the *Lancaster Area Association for the Education of Young Children*, but I was not always familiar with the participants in my study.

I began the session with an introduction of myself and my experience in early-care and education and then I asked them to introduce themselves. This strategy was successful in most cases. The participants freely answered my questions; but there were a few participants that needed prompting during the interview process. I was consistent with my prompts so that the interview process would remain consistent with all 55 participants.

#### **Reflective Teacher Practice Journals (See Appendix H)**

My rationale for using *Reflective Teacher Practice Journals* in this research study was based upon the fact that reflective journaling is particularly useful in grounding the investigation within the

context of the problem being investigated (Merriam, 1988). Document analysis can also be helpful when researchers wish to explore multiple and conflicting voices and differing and interacting interpretations (Hodder, 2000).

To gain a more holistic picture of each participant and their identified teaching practices, each participant was encouraged to keep a journal of their teaching practices for five days. The participants were instructed to write short statements each day about teaching practices they used that day that provided them a sense of positive satisfaction. The participants were also encouraged to address the practices they used that day that made them wish they had handled the situation in a different manner. I informed the participants that they may use this journal during the second interview. After *Interview Two*, the journals were collected.

During *Interview Two*, I realized that this research tool was challenging for many of the participants. Only 27 of the 55 participants made use of their journals. When I probed for the reason that they chose not to participate in reflective journaling, the participants alluded to classroom responsibilities as the major reason for not participating. Nevertheless, several participants did identify that they felt uncomfortable with the writing aspect of the journal.

In the end, all of the participants who participated in the *Reflective Practice Teacher Journal* candidly shared about an equal number of teaching practices that they felt good about and teaching practices they were not so proud of. Some of the participants expressed that journaling helped them to think more openly regarding their practices and that they would continue journaling.

### **Classroom Observations**

Classroom observations are central to the holistic intent of this research study. This is consistent with the existing literature in which researchers indicate that direct observations provide opportunities to better understand the research context, as well as gain insight into the things that people would not be willing to share in an interview (Patton, 2002). My use of classroom observations was only to inform the study as to the teaching practices that the participants used daily in their classrooms. It was also my hope

that the classroom observations would provide common ground between myself and the participants during *Interview Two* and as they shared their *Reflective Journals*. Based on this rationale, I did not feel it was necessary to use rigorous coding or an analysis for the classroom observations.

Within the twelve months of the interview process of the research study, all 55 participants were observed once within their classroom setting for two hours. During this time, I recorded descriptive notes of the teaching practices the participants use in their classrooms. During *Interview Two*, I used my field notes as examples when discussing the participants' teaching practices.

### **Data Analysis**

My analytic strategy began with coding all of my data collection with center numbers and participant numbers. Then, I grouped the 55 participants into four groupings based on their educational attainment level and their years of experience in the field of early-care and education. The variables for the four groupings are as follows: a) Low Education/Low Experience; b) Low Education/High Experience; c) High Education/ Low Experience and d) High Education/High Experience. I began by dividing the participants into two educational attainment groups. Participants with a High School Diploma, Child Development Accreditation Certificate, Other Non-Education related degrees/certificates and Associate of Applied Science Degree in Child Development represented the Low Education grouping. The participants with a Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood Education/Elementary Education and those with a Master in Education Degree typified the High Education grouping. For longevity, I mathematically averaged the years of experience for all of the participants. Using ten years of experience as the median, the participants with ten years or less were identified as Low Experience. Those with more than ten years of experience were identified as High Experience.

My strategy for analyzing the interviews included, first transcribing all of the participant interviews. After transcribing the interviews, I read the interview transcriptions making comments and coding common themes in the margins of each page. I then listened again to all of the interviews and re-

read all of the transcription documents. I then extracted common themes and relevant data, as suggested by Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003).

The *Teacher Demographic Questionnaire* required a frequency count. On the other hand, the analytical process for the *Teacher Practice Questionnaire* was more complex. First, in the development of the *Teacher Practice Questionnaire* I made sure that 15 statements reflected structural quality and 15 statements reflected process quality. As previously stated I used the work of well-known researchers such as Bigras, et.al., (2010); Cassidy, et.al., (2005) Copple & Bredekamp, (2009); Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, (2005); Lutton, (2011); National Association for the Education of Young Children, (2011) & Sylva, Siraj-Blatchford & Taggart, (2011) in guiding the development of this questionnaire.

Using only the participants' responses of agreement (4) or disagreement (1) for each of the statements on the *Teacher Practice Questionnaire*, I conducted a frequency count for each individual participant. Upon completion of the frequency count, I counted the number of times they indicated structural teaching practices and process teaching practices. Using the category (ie structural or process quality) with the greatest number, I was able to determine if the participant demonstrated structural quality teaching practice or process quality teaching practices.

### **Research Verification**

I believe my use of multiple data collection methods provided strength to this research study. The credibility of the findings was established through triangulation, member checking, and rich thick descriptions. The use of triangulation, according to Maxwell (1996) "reduces the risk of chance associations and of systematic biases due to a specific method and allows for a better assessment of the generality of the explanations you develop" (p 93).

Member checking is a process that assists the researcher to determine the accuracy of his or her findings by soliciting feedback from the research participants. Member checking in this research study was extremely vital, in that the premise and outcome of the study was to represent the "voices" of the research participants. It was imperative that I maintain the trust that I established with each participant

and that I accurately represented them. Member checking occurred after the use of each research method. For the questionnaires, the participants were asked to recheck their answers to see if their answer to each question accurately represents their viewpoint and their perceptions. Upon conclusion of the interviews, each participant was invited to add to their answers or change any answer that did not accurately reflect what they wanted to convey. For both the reflection journals and classroom observations, I spoke individually with each participant to establish clarification for any misunderstanding on my part.

I believe that my research study mirrors a descriptive field study. Through the use of multiple research tools I was able explore the perceptions and beliefs of the 55 participants through their descriptions of high quality programming and the teaching practices they use within their classrooms. In Chapter Four and Five I present my findings as I search to answer my six research questions. I use only the words of the participants by including direct quotes from the interviews. I accurately report the participants' answers from both of the questionnaires. Using rigorous analytic strategies, I am able to represent the "voices" of the research participants, as well as to provide an accurate medium in which readers will be able to identify with my findings.

## Chapter Four

### RESULTS FOR RESEARCH QUESTIONS ONE-THREE

Chapter Four represent the findings for the first three research questions. The schema for my data analysis is as follows. *Research Question One*: “How do early-care and education teachers define and describe a quality program,” was primarily answered by using *Questions One* and *Two* from *Interview One*. The data from this question was best represented by using a content analysis. *Research Question Two*: “What teacher practices do the participants identify as necessary in a quality classroom,” was answered by using the data generated from the *Teacher Practice Questionnaire* and *Question Four* from *Interview One*. *Research Question Three* was answered by using both of the questionnaires and the data results from research *Question Four, Interview One*.

The data that will answer the above three questions is represented in the table below. The analysis code is as follows:

Column Letter	Represented Data
A	Participant Number
B	Childcare Center
C	Education/Experience Category
D	Noting Structural Quality ( <i>i.e.</i> classroom equipment, classroom materials, schedules, policies and procedures)
E	Noting Process quality ( <i>i.e.</i> teacher interaction, child interaction, relationships with children and adults, parental involvement)
F	Citing Play ( <i>i.e.</i> child choice, imaginative play, outdoor play, adults and children playing together)
	<b>Structural Quality Teacher Practices</b>
G	Citing Curriculum ( <i>i.e.</i> activities, content, learning centers)
H	Citing Classroom Environment ( <i>i.e.</i> staff-child ratio, child-friendly, materials)
	<b>Process Quality Teacher Practices</b>
I	Citing Interaction/Communication ( <i>i.e.</i> teacher/child approaches, eye-level, adult/child conversation, teacher/parent conversations)
J	Citing Teacher Instruction ( <i>i.e.</i> teacher-directed, child-directed, hands-on activities)

Table 4-1  
*Research Questions One-Three (N=55)*

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
1	1	LL	<b>Yes</b>	No	No	No	No	<b>Yes</b>	No
2	1	HL	<b>Yes</b>	No	No	<b>Yes</b>	No	No	No
3	1	LL	<b>Yes</b>	No	No	No	No	<b>Yes</b>	No
4	1	LL	<b>Yes</b>	No	No	No	No	<b>Yes</b>	No
5	1	LH	No	<b>Yes</b>	No	No	<b>Yes</b>	No	No
6	1	HL	<b>Yes</b>	No	No	No	No	<b>Yes</b>	No
7	1	LL	<b>Yes</b>	No	No	No	No	No	<b>Yes</b>
8	1	HL	<b>Yes</b>	No	No	No	No	No	<b>Yes</b>
9	1	LH	<b>Yes</b>	No	No	<b>Yes</b>	No	No	No
10	2	LL	<b>Yes</b>	No	<b>Yes</b>	No	No	<b>Yes</b>	No
11	2	LH	No	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	No	No	<b>Yes</b>	No
12	3	LH	No	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	No	No	<b>Yes</b>	No
13	3	HL	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	No	No	No	<b>Yes</b>	No
14	3	HH	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	No	No	No
15	3	LL	<b>Yes</b>	No	No	No	No	<b>Yes</b>	No
16	3	HL	No	<b>Yes</b>	No	No	No	<b>Yes</b>	No
17	4	LL	<b>Yes</b>	No	No	No	<b>Yes</b>	No	No
18	4	LL	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	No	No	No
19	4	LL	<b>Yes</b>	No	No	<b>Yes</b>	No	No	No
20	5	LH	No	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	No	No	<b>Yes</b>	No
21	5	HL	No	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	No	No	<b>Yes</b>	No
22	5	HL	No	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	No	No	<b>Yes</b>	No
23	5	LL	<b>Yes</b>	No	<b>Yes</b>	No	No	<b>Yes</b>	No
24	6	LL	No	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	No	No	<b>Yes</b>	No
25	6	HL	<b>Yes</b>	No	No	No	<b>Yes</b>	No	No
26	6	LL	<b>Yes</b>	No	No	<b>Yes</b>	No	No	No
27	6	LL	<b>Yes</b>	No	No	No	No	No	<b>Yes</b>
28	7	LH	No	<b>Yes</b>	No	No	No	<b>Yes</b>	No
29	7	HH	<b>Yes</b>	No	No	<b>Yes</b>	No	No	No
30	8	LH	<b>Yes</b>	No	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	No	No	No
31	8	LL	<b>Yes</b>	No	No	No	No	<b>Yes</b>	No
32	9	HL	<b>Yes</b>	No	No	No	No	<b>Yes</b>	No
33	9	LH	<b>Yes</b>	No	No	No	No	No	<b>Yes</b>
34	10	HH	No	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	No	No	No	<b>Yes</b>
35	10	LL	<b>Yes</b>	No	No	No	No	<b>Yes</b>	No
36	11	LL	<b>Yes</b>	No	No	No	No	No	<b>Yes</b>
37	11	HL	No	<b>Yes</b>	No	<b>Yes</b>	No	No	No
38	11	LH	No	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	No	No	<b>Yes</b>	No
39	11	LH	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	No	No	No	<b>Yes</b>	No
40	11	LL	No	<b>Yes</b>	No	<b>Yes</b>	No	No	No
41	11	HL	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	No	<b>Yes</b>	No	No	No
42	11	LL	No	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	No	<b>Yes</b>	No	No
43	11	HL	<b>Yes</b>	No	<b>Yes</b>	No	No	<b>Yes</b>	No
44	11	LL	No	<b>Yes</b>	No	No	No	<b>Yes</b>	No
45	11	LL	No	<b>Yes</b>	No	No	No	<b>Yes</b>	No
46	11	LL	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	No	<b>Yes</b>	No	No

47	11	L L	No	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	No	No	<b>Yes</b>
48	11	L L	No	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	No	No	<b>Yes</b>
49	12	H H	No	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	No	No	<b>Yes</b>
50	12	L H	No	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	No	No	<b>Yes</b>
51	12	L H	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>	No	No	No	<b>Yes</b>
52	13	L H	No	<b>Yes</b>	No	No	No	<b>Yes</b>
53	13	H H	<b>Yes</b>	No	No	<b>Yes</b>	No	No
54	14	L L	<b>Yes</b>	No	<b>Yes</b>	No	No	<b>Yes</b>
55	14	H L	<b>Yes</b>	No	No	No	No	<b>Yes</b>

As mentioned in Chapter Three the participants were divided into Education/Experience groupings. The Bachelor's and Master's Degrees signified High Education. The remaining educational levels, *i.e.* High School Diploma, Child Development Accreditation Certificate, Associate of Applied Science Degree in Child Development and other certificates/degrees unrelated to education; are identified as Low Education. The experience of the participants was mathmatically averaged with ten years of experience or lower, as a Low Experience and 11 years of experience and above as a High Experience. As noted on the table below 44% of the participants identified with L/L, 25% identified with H/L, 24% with L/H and 7% with H/H.

Table 4-2  
*Education/Experience (N=55)*

L/L	L/H	H/L	H/H
N=24	N=13	N=14	N=4

From the beginning of the study, I sought to learn if the participants agreed or disagreed with existing early-care and education literature, regarding the relationship between the quality of programming for young children and their learning outcomes. As indicated in the literature review, researchers cite positive outcomes for young children, birth through age five years and more specifically for this research study young children ages three through five years, who are involved in high quality educational programs.

The findings from the *Teacher Demographic Questionnaire, Questions One and Four* and *Question 25* from the *Teacher Practices Questionnaire*, revealed that the participants appeared to be consistent in recognizing the importance of quality programming and its effects on young children. However, when I specifically asked the *Question Three* from the *Teacher Demographic Questionnaire* the responses from the participants were mixed. This question asked about the importance of the quality of childcare programming and kindergarten readiness. Eighty-seven percent of the participants either agreed or somewhat agreed and 13% either disagreed or somewhat disagreed with the connection between high-quality early-care and educational programming and kindergarten readiness.

While this may reflect a small percentage of participants who appeared to believe that the quality of programming makes little difference in kindergarten readiness, it is a relevant issue to examine because the foundational premise of this research study is the importance of high quality programming for young children. I must note here though, that I did not ask any follow-up questions regarding kindergarten readiness. One participant did comment, that while she somewhat agreed that high quality early-care and education experiences influences kindergarten readiness, however “for some children, but others can bounce from home-life to school structured activities” (Center 10, participant 35, LL, January, 2007).

In Table 4-3 below, the data represents the responses from the participant group as a whole, relative to the referenced questions from the *Teacher Demographic Questionnaire*.

Table 4-3  
*Importance of High Quality Programming (N=55)*

Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree
N=52	N=3	N=0	N=0
<i>High Quality Programming and Kindergarten Readiness</i>			
Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree
N=30	N=18	N=5	N=2

In addition, the findings revealed the participants' perceptions regarding the role of the classroom teacher. Early-care and education literature names the "classroom teacher" as crucial in the establishment and maintenance of high quality programming. The participants overall agreed with this assertion in that 84% of the participants either agreed or somewhat agreed as can be seen in Table 4-4 below.

Table 4-4

*High Quality and Role of Teacher (N=55)*

Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree
N=19	N=27	N=7	N=2

The fact that there is a difference between the participants who agreed, 35% and 49% who somewhat agreed, is interesting. Since the participants did not have an opportunity to elaborate, I used *Question 12* from the *Teacher Demographic Questionnaire*, to hypnotize that they were identifying the "center director" as the person most responsible, (N=24 who agreed, or somewhat agreed and N= 31 who disagreed or somewhat disagreed). Participant 32 (HL), from Center 9 noted that "the director should make sure the teacher has quality in the classroom, however it is the teacher who maintains the quality." In reading the quotes from *Interview One, Question One*, I identified that not only was the "center director" cited as the person most responsible for establishing and maintaining high quality programming, but the "parents" were also identified as influential in this process.

### **Research Question One**

The data results for this question came primarily from *Questions One and Two* of *Interview One*. The procedure for the content analysis is as follows. I first only listened to the audio-tapes of the participants. I then listened a second time while transcribing. After completing my transcription of *Questions One and Two*, I listened again to the participants' while reading along with my transcription notes. From my transcription notes I found seven themes that the participants' most often referred to in

their descriptions of high quality. These themes are: a) child-centered programming, b) parental involvement, c) teamwork within the center, d) environment, e) curriculum, f) education of the teacher, namely the lead teacher and g) the experience of all teachers within the classroom.

Below are examples of the participant responses for each of the above themes. I should also note that many of the participants included several of the above themes when answering, so each theme reflects the number of times the participants cited each theme.

### **Child-centered programming (N=18)**

To me a high quality childcare center is one that cares for children and one that nurtures children and loves children. Children come first and they should feel welcomed and safe and loved. Activities that would involve children like, when they are painting they are proud of what they made. It doesn't matter how they did it, even if they made one or two letters, they feel so proud of what they did. That is important. Working with children and helping them be proud of what they have done, is very important. (Center 1, participant 5, L H, January, 2007)

One that puts the child first and everything revolves around the child. There should be good lesson plans and make sure that everything is age-appropriate for the child and that the child is able to learn when they come in. That there are age-appropriate toys and activities, so they can develop socially and mentally. That way, the child can become more, well-rounded. (Center 3, participant 15 LL, February 2007)

### **Environment (N=17)**

When I walk into a high quality childcare center, I like to see the ratio of staff and teachers, the way it is supposed to be. The children are engaged in many different activities. There are appropriate centers for the children to visit. They have activities for the parents to join in. The teachers and staff are qualified and there is professional training going on. (Center 13, participant 53, H H, July, 2007)

I feel it should have a wide variety of materials available to the children, that touch on different cultures and that things are acceptable to them and on their level. It should be clean and have a good staff, good in the sense of sensitive to the children's needs. It should have some sort of curriculum and some sort of plan, with the parents. They need to be exposed to reading and writing on their level and crafts and things like that are important too. There should be different centers in the room, like the art table or the game table. (Center 4, participant 17, L L, February, 2007)

**Parental involvement (N=4)**

I would describe as one who teaches the children as their main focus. One who cares for the parents and helps them out in any way. They should be able to understand situations that families go through. (Center 9, participant 32, H L, May, 2007)

I guess the first thing I would have to say is, I would look for staff and how they feel about being there each day. I also feel that there is communication between parents and staff, that also makes for high quality, because if the parent feels that they can come to the staff person and that teacher at any time and speak with them, knowing that their child is secure and loved is very important part also. (Center 11, participant 39, L H, June, 2007)

**Teamwork within the center (N=12)**

A center staffed with individuals who care and feel that working as a group and working with parents as a team, is most important and who just doesn't see this as a job, but as a passion. (Center 2, participant 11, L H, January, 2007)

A high quality childcare center would be a center that meets the needs of the children, parents and teachers. It allows the parents to feel open and be a part of the center itself. The teachers would feel at ease and comfortable with all of the people working with them and with the administration. (Center 12, participant 50, L H, June 2007)

**Curriculum (N=12)**

It would be a center that has a literacy based curriculum. There should be free play and a time to have activities as a group. They would want to prepare the children for school and get them ready for kindergarten. There should be time for them to have free play and move around the room and choose what they want to do. Any activities that go with language and letters and such. There should be activities that allow the kids to be kids. (Center 6, participant, 24, L L, March 2007)

There should be good teacher interaction; there should also be quality curriculum and a quality environment. I think that the teacher interaction and the education of the teachers would be one of the biggest. (Center 6, participant 25, H L, March 2007)

**Teacher education (N=10)**

Qualified staff and certified teachers. (Center 14, participant 55, H L, July 2007)

A center staffed with educated individuals who care and nurture children, who principles are based in early childhood development. (Center 8 participant 31, L L, April 2007)

**Teacher experience (N=4)**

Well, I think that number one, you need to have a mixture of qualified teachers and teachers with experience. I think that a high quality childcare center that loves the children but also strives to help them learn to the best of their abilities. (Center 11, participant 42, LL, June, 2007)

I would say a combination of educated people along with people who have lots of experience. I think that there would be teacher resources, like craft material and the internet, books and extra classes outside. (Center 11, Participant 46, L L June 2007)

**Research Question Two**

The second research question examines the practices of teachers. I modeled my analysis on the work of Cassidy, et.al. (2005) and Bigras, et.al. (2010). These researchers propose that quality early-care and education can be measured by using two variables, structural quality and process quality. They name indicators such as a) environment; b) materials; c) equipment; d) schedules and e) procedures are more often found in classrooms that display structural quality. For process quality, interaction is more prevalent such as a) teacher/child interactions; b) child/child interactions and c) adult/adult interactions.

The data in relation to structural and process quality was generated from the *Teacher Practice Questionnaire* and *Question Four from Interview One*. The *Teacher Practice Questionnaire* consists of 30 Likert statements and reflects 15 process quality statements and 15 structural quality statements. This questionnaire was checked for content validity, as described in Chapter Three and I believe that the equal number of structural quality and process quality statements provides a consistent data set (See Appendix I).

To determine whether the participant identified with structural or quality teaching practices, the four categories (i.e. very important, somewhat important, somewhat unimportant and not important) were merged for this analysis into two groups, very important and not important. I then conducted a frequency count for each individual participant. Upon completion of the frequency count, I counted the number of times they indicated structural teaching practices and process teaching practices. Using the category (ie structural or process quality) with the greatest number of responses from each individual, I was able to determine if the participant identified with structural quality teaching practices or process quality teaching practices.

I also included five statements relative to play in *The Teacher Practices Questionnaire*. These statements reflected process quality because the teaching practices included communication and interaction which are descriptors of process teaching practices and also is reflective of play.

### **Structural and Process Quality from Questionnaire**

The data revealed that 49 % ( $N=27$ ) participants indicated that their teaching practices reflected structural quality. From the 49%,  $N=15$  represented the Low Education/Low Experience group,  $N=3$  represented the Low Education/High Experience group,  $N=2$  represented the High Education/High Experience group and  $N=7$  represented the High Education/Low Experience group.

Thirty eight percent ( $N=21$ ) of the participants mentioned teaching practices that are more often found in process quality. Again, from the 38%,  $N=7$  were from the Low Education/Low Experience group,  $N=8$  were from the Low Education/High Experience group,  $N=2$  were from the High Education/High Experience group and  $N=4$  were from the High Education/Low Experience group.

Thirteen percent ( $N=7$ ) of the participants revealed that their teaching practices reflected both structural and process quality. Two participants represented the Low Education/Low Experience group, two represented the Low Education/High Experience group, two participants represented the High Education/Low Experience group and one participant represented the High Education/High Experience group.

### Structural and Process Quality from Participant Interviews

In my quest to discover the practices that early-care and education teachers identify as high quality, I asked them to share with me the teaching practices that they use in their own classrooms. In my analysis of their responses, I found their responses as either structural quality or process quality. Using the same procedure as previously stated for *Research Question One*, I again conducted a content analysis to look for indicators of structural and process quality. Two predominate indicators appeared for each type of quality. For structural quality, the participants referenced classroom environment and curriculum. They stated communication/interaction and teacher instruction for process quality. I read the responses a second time and coded each response as either structural or process quality as shown in Table 4-5 below. The participant quotes further supports the data found on Table 4-5.

Table 4-5  
*Structural/Process Quality Verbal Responses (N=55)*

Education/Experience	<i>Structural Quality</i>		<i>Process Quality</i>	
	Curriculum	Classroom Environment	Communication/Interaction	Teacher Instruction
Low Education/Low Experience	N=4	N=3	N=13	N=4
Low Education/High Experience	N=2	N=1	N=11	N=0
High Education/Low Experience	N=3	N=1	N=7	N=1
High Education/High Experience	N=3	N=0	N=2	N=0

### Environment

The environment would be inviting for the children and the parents.  
The planning would center around the childrens' needs.  
(Center 1, participant 5, L H, January, 2007)

We have a lot of self-help skills. We let them do a lot of things on their own. We let them pass things out and we let them clean up. We let them wash their hands on their own too. We encourage them to work things out on their own, so they learn how to socialize correctly. We will give them suggestions on how they can handle certain things. We foster literacy, we help them find certain words with certain letters and we help them sound it out.  
(Center 6, participant 27, LL, March, 2007)

I am here first thing in the morning, so I am here at 7:30 am and I will put out markers, paper and type of things like that for the children to play with. Normally when I come into the classroom, I start off with "Ok, what do you guys want to play with today?" If I get a lot of I "don't know," then I go, "Ok, we are playing with this" and I pull out these things. Other mornings I will have five different things, "I want to do this, I want to do this." Sometimes I do need to say, "You can't do that today," for some reason or another. What I have learned from working here is to try to keep it flexible, to give them suggestions. When you do get a "I don't know," but also let the children. I feel this is important too, let the children decide what they want to do.

(Center 11, participant 44, L L, June 2007)

I have a center-based room. It is open centers, children move around freely. We do a short fifteen minute circle time to touch on a subject, if the subject is interesting, we turn it into a study or a project.

(Center 8, participant 30, L H, April 2007)

We have at least thirty minutes of free-play that the child does when they come in. We do inspect the grounds when we go outside and we look for broken toys and such. We always try to encourage safe walking and that type of thing. We wash our hands and keep the room clean. We try to have music and movement. We feel that the room is the childrens' room and that it is their place and these are their toys and their things and it should be centered around the children. We try to have a learning environment.

(Center 5, participant, 21, H L) March 2007.

## Curriculum

We always plan together and we all know what is going on. We put tons of extra work into what we bring into the room, whether it be a craft or extra stuff, tasting things, showing things, inside and outside. We use a lot of attention getters, like songs and things like that. I just think that the biggest thing is that, I have two people who, we work really well together and we want the same things for the kids. (Center 11, participant 46, L L, June 2007)

I go by what the schools are doing. We are not really a preschool; I go by their themes, what they are teaching. (Center 8, participant 31, L L, April 2007)

I think the main thing I like to do is to plan, to always have a plan. I sit down in the summer and I get a general plan for the year and then I break it down into weeks. With that plan I derive my language exercises around a theme, or something we are learning. (Center 5, participant 23, L L, March 2007)

The different lesson plans that we use incorporate what you are talking about. If we are talking about animals at our sensory center we will have dirt; they can make homes out of. If we are talking about animals that live in the cold, we will have ice cubes. (Center 3, participant 15, L L, February 2007)

We have a circle time every day. Usually I try to have three elements. Sometimes we will have a story, song and our numbers or shapes. We have craft time, which we work on our fine motor skills. We do a lot of cutting, gluing and pasting. We have a lot of

outside time. We go outside at least once in the morning. Sometimes we go and play on the equipment, or we go to the nature trail area and look for bugs or different color stones. (Center 6, participant 25, H L, March 2007)

We start out with a gathering circle and then we move into choice time where they can choose what they want to do. We do a bathroom time and then a circle time. During our circle time, we do calendar and songs and poems. We do outdoor play time or we do movement on the carpet. Then we have lunch time. (Center 10, participant 34, H H, May 2007)

### **Communication/Interaction**

I try to be very aware any type of issue that reflects self-esteem and communication. If the child has done something that they should not have done, I would say, "I understand that you must have been upset that someone took your toy, but you can't throw the toy at them." I think that communication is a big part. It needs to be one of the main things in the classroom that the kids are working on. (Center 11, participant, 48, L L, June 2007)

We try to encourage manners and asking nicely for things and not demanding things. We encourage them to take some leadership roles, instead of us doing it for them. We encourage them to go to each other and work together to do some of the things they would come to us for. (Center 12, participant 51, L H, June 2007)

Sitting down and playing with the children. I love children with a willingness to work with all types of children, by not giving up on them. (Center 1, participant 4, L L, January 2007)

I would say that making sure that our rules are very clear so that they know what to expect. Making sure that they know what happens if they do break one of the rules. Making sure that they feel valued and that I am using positives, more than negatives. That is something that we always try to do, so they feel rewarded, instead of them feeling that all they hear is what they are doing wrong. I try to make sure I am listening to what the children are saying. If they really don't like doing something, we will change it. I guess the best thing for me, I am just trying to read the kids and what works for them and what doesn't, so I am not trying to force them to do things. (Center 2, participant 11, L H, January 2007)

I think it is the parent coming into the classroom and feeling comfortable with the caregiver and their child being themselves. Greeting parents when they come in and making parents feel important upon entering the classroom, letting them know that you are a partner with the parent. Also, a lot of child-directed activities, letting the child get into different areas. Let them learn through their play. We try to hit all the five areas of development. We do a lot of inside and outside play things. We want them to learn through their play, so they feel important in their classroom. (Center 12, participant 49, H H, June 2007)

## Teacher Instruction

We have a circle time every day, sometimes it is numbers, sometimes its colors, and sometimes it is just a story related to what is going on. We always have a craft of some sort. Sometimes, we incorporate what the kids are actually doing. For instance, if they are playing with blocks and they are different shapes, you can bring in the matching of shapes. You incorporate a lot of things with what they are doing, that kind of thing. I think in my class, we give the kids a lot of love, we care about them. They are more than just a job. (Center 11, participant 42, L L, June 2007)

Well, let's see. I believe in structure, but I believe in an open structure. I like to have the children knowing what is expected, but yet I like to have the spontaneity that they give me from that too. I have my mornings planned out, when I come in. I know exactly what I want to accomplish for that day. Sometime we get that done and sometimes we don't, depending on the day and how it goes. We always come in and we have time to greet all the children, which I think is very important. We have our snack time and we follow this pretty much every day. Some days it might be different because we are doing something from the outside, or someone is coming in. So, it changes. After we have an open play time, where we are doing class, where we put out things on the table, such as, today we had a real pumpkin for each child. Those pumpkins were set on the table with Halloween stickers and markers and they could decorate and do whatever they wanted to do with their pumpkin. We also did a carving of a pumpkin, which we all came together for that and each one of us were able to talk about the pumpkin and were a group at that time, so it was like a group activity. We are now in a library time, which happens every Tuesday that takes up a portion of our time. We still do a circle time. Our circle times are not long, because children can only go for so long. We do calendar, we do weather, we talk about the day and we talk about what will be happening tomorrow. We also have our outside play time too, which is also very important. We always run on a schedule. It doesn't always work that way, but we try to keep to a schedule" (Center 11, participant 39, L H, June 2007)

I think we have a very personal relationship with the children. We evaluate the children so we know where they are and what their interests are and what they are capable of understanding. We also use some of our older children to help the younger children; it helps the younger children to want to learn more. It becomes more child-directed then teacher-directed. We do lesson planning; we have lot of recourses ready at their finger tips. (Center 12, participant 50, L H, June 2007)

I feel that the children need to be allowed to express themselves. There needs to be activities where some activities they are being directed where, their asked to do certain things. I think there also needs to be activities where they are able to express themselves. For example, with craft projects, I think there needs to be a good mixture of, sort of child-directed projects, like practicing cutting, so they can better their fine motor skills. I also think there needs to be times, where they are allowed to create whatever they want to create. So I think you need to take a little bit of like, open ended teaching and child-directed teaching and things like that and combine them and allow for both. That way, the child can get the best of both worlds. Yes, they are learning to follow directions and they are learning to

do what they are asked too, but they are still allowed to have time to express themselves and be creative and figure things out on their own. (Center 4 participant 19, L L, February 2007)

I would have to say that one of the practices that I use the most is clear instruction to get across what I am expecting and with that also, even directions for an activity. Usually it provides the best results, instead of always reminding what they should be doing, having them give me a response of what their behavior should be. (Center 1, participant 2, H L, January 2007)

There are some things that we are doing currently and there are some things that we are working on. One of the things we are doing now is that we try to get some sort of sensory experience at least every day. It doesn't always happen. We try to have the children do a lot of play and learn through play. Maybe they are building with blocks and we will help them sort the blocks or count the blocks, or whatever. We try to put things out on the child's level and we really try to work in small groups, so we can get that individual attention if we can. The other things that we are working towards, that we will have done by the end of November, is a print enriched environment. We want to try to get everything in the classroom labeled with pictures and words and all of that. That is something that we just put in our November newsletter for the parents. (Center 11, participant 37, H L, June 2007)

I give the children choices as to where they want to go and what they want to do. I ask them to give me a plan, as to what they are going to do. If they want to go to the block center, I was asking them what their plans for the block center or what will they be doing in that center. They will tell me, sometimes they will go and do it, or sometimes they will find something on the way that seems better to them. I show them respect when it comes to behavior. I also reach out to parents so they become more involved. (Center 13, participant 53, H H, July 2007).

### **Research Question Three**

The final research question in this chapter looks at what variable(s), if any, influenced the responses of the participants. This research study proposed three variables; a) education; b) experience or a c) combination of education and experience. To investigate this hypothesis I used my findings from the *Teacher Practice Questionnaire* and *Question Four*, from *Interview One*. I established my baseline by determining how many participants represented each Education/Experience group. The table below represents this data.

Research consistently points to the educational attainment level of an early-care and education teacher, in their use of process quality practices. The rationale again is based on the work of Cassidy, et.al (2005) and Bigras, et.al, (2010). Structural quality is more basic in nature, such as the way in which the classroom is arranged and maintained, the equipment used within the classroom and daily schedules. Structural quality also consists of materials used in the classroom, the curriculum and program procedures and policies, along with employee and parent handbooks.

Process quality not only includes the necessary structural indicators, but also variables that involve human interaction and communication. Teacher/child interactions, child/child interactions and adult/adult interactions are examples of process quality. Successful communication and interactions found within the classroom as referred to in research are best accomplished by a teacher who has a strong background in child development and an understanding regarding what constitutes “best practices” for the age group of the children that they are currently working with.

Based on the above hypothesis, I proposed that those participants who indicated that they use structural quality practices represented the Low Education group. The participants who responded that they use process quality practices in their classroom represent the High Education group.

Table 4-6 reflects my findings for structural and process quality using Low Education and High Education variables.

Table 4-6  
*Structural and Process Quality (N=48)*

	Low Education	High Education
Structural Quality	N=18	N=9
Process Quality	N=15	N=6

Using the above findings, I was interested in seeing if experience made a difference in the Low and High Education groups. As shown in Table 4-7 below, with the addition of the data found on Table 4-1, I examined the relationship, if any, between post-secondary education and experience.

Table 4-7

*Structural/Process Quality Education and Experience (N=48)*

	L/L	L/H	H/L	H/H
Structural Quality	N=15	N=3	N=7	N=2
Process Quality	N=7	N=8	N=4	N=2

As indicated earlier in Chapter Four, the findings revealed seven participants who cited both structural and process quality. Four participants represented the Low Education group and three participants represented the High Education group. The participants from the Low Education group were Participant 18, from Center 4 L L, Participant 39, from Center 11 L H, Participant 46, from Center 11 L L and Participant 51, from Center 12 L H. Those representing the High Education group were Participant 13, from Center 3 H L, Participant 14 from Center 3 H H, Participant 41, from Center 11 H L.

This chapter represented the findings for the first three research questions. These questions explored how professionals described a high quality early-care and education program. It also identified the teaching practices necessary in establishing and maintaining high quality programming. Research Question Three investigated the variable(s) which influenced the responses of the participants regarding high quality early-care and education programming and the necessary “teaching practices” that will sustain this high quality programming.

The data from the *Demographic Questionnaire* revealed that all of the 55 participants agreed that high quality programming is necessary for young children and that the quality of a program showed a relationship with the learning outcomes of young children. In analyzing the data, I discovered that the participants described high quality early-care and education programming using seven different themes:

a) child-centered programming; b) parental involvement; c) teamwork within the center; d) environment; e) curriculum; f) education of the teacher, namely the lead teacher and g) the experience of all teachers within the classroom.

From the *Teacher Practice Questionnaire* and verbally from *Interview One, Question Four*, the teaching practices that the participants referred to as important in a high quality program are based on structural and process quality indicators often cited in the early-care and education literature. Two themes were apparent for both structural and process quality. These themes were environment and curriculum for structural quality and communication/interaction and teacher instruction for process quality. Using a cross tabs, looking primarily at the participants' level of education and years of experience 27 participants named teaching practices that reflected structural quality and 21 participants mentioned teaching practices that best reflected process quality. Seven participants named both structural and process quality when describing their teaching practices.

In answering the third research question which looked at the variable(s) that possibly influenced the participants' responses I examined each Education/Experience group. Since the participant group did not represent equal numbers for both High and Low Education I was not able to specifically determine if the educational attainment level of the participants made a difference. The findings did disclose that the participants with Low Education ( $N=18$ ) most often used structural quality teaching practices. The same is true for the High Education group ( $N=9$ ).

Longevity or years of experience in the field of early-care and education did make some difference. Of the 18 participants who used structural quality teaching practices from the Low Education group,  $N=15$  had ten years or less experience and  $N=3$  had more than ten years of experience in the field. This finding remained consistent for the High Education group, where ( $N=4$ ) represent Low Experience and ( $N=2$ ) represent High Experience.

## Chapter Five

### RESULTS FOR RESEARCH QUESTIONS FOUR-SIX

Chapter Five represents the data from the research study relative to the educational attainment level of early-care and education teachers and their professional experience. The literature within the field of early-care and education indicates the importance of professionals having a post-secondary education. On the other hand, in most states, including Pennsylvania, only a General Education Diploma (GED) or a High School Diploma is required by early-care and education center licensing standards. To improve the educational requirements in early-care and education, Pennsylvania as well as other states, has implemented a Quality Improvement Rating System (QIRS), in which programs must demonstrate that their teachers are highly qualified through the acquisition of a post-secondary degree. While the Bachelors' Degree has been identified by researchers as most desirable, it has only been in the past decade that the field of early-care and education has been slowly responding to the need for Bachelors' Degreed teachers. In many states, as well as Pennsylvania, this need has been addressed through the development of state professional development career lattices.

The current post-secondary education expectation for early-care and education professionals has caused controversy within the field and concerns have been raised. First, the field of early-care and education is greatly supported by professionals who demonstrate a history of longevity in the field of early-care and education. In fact, of the 55 participants in this research study, 36% indicated that they have worked five years or less, in early-care and education. It should also noted that, out of the remaining 64%, 9% revealed that they have been working in early-care and education between 16 and 20 years and 9% have been working in the field longer than 20 years. With this knowledge, it is easy to see why one of the major concerns of early-care and educational professionals, is the value of their years of experience within the field. These professionals wonder if their commitment to young children and their families is seen as valuable. They also wonder if there is even a need for a higher level of education and at what

level of education is one considered highly qualified. Additionally, early-care and education teachers question how their experience will fit in with their degree plan at institutions of higher education. Lastly, there is the issue of income. Many programs are not able, or can only provide a small increase in pay, upon completion of a post-secondary degree program.

This research study closely examined the relationship between high quality programming and teacher practices with the level of education of the teachers. It is imperative that I closely examine the concerns that have been raised by early-care and education professionals currently working in center-based programs.

The *Teacher Demographic Questionnaire* and *Interview One, Questions Eight and Ten* provided the data necessary that answered the following three questions: a) Do early-care and education teachers identify a higher level of education as an indicator of quality; b) What are the perceptions and reactions of early-care and education teachers regarding the current expectation or requirement that in-service teachers obtain a degree (Associate or Bachelor) and c) What are the perceptions and beliefs of early-care and education teachers regarding their years of experience?

The findings for the above three research questions are found on Table 5-1 and the coding system for this table can be found prior to Table 5-1. In the analysis of the data, I only included the responses where the participants either totally agreed or totally disagreed. For the responses where the participants either cited somewhat agree/somewhat disagree, I used the letter "O". My rationale for this procedure was based on the assumption that the participants may have had some resistance to the content of the four questions. This resistance can best be represented with participant quotes.

Column Letter	Represented Data
A	Participant Number
B	Childcare Center
C	Education/Experience Category
D	<i>Teacher Demographic Questionnaire, Question 5</i> Teacher education is imperative in ensuring quality childcare programming.
E	<i>Teacher Demographic Questionnaire, Question 9</i> Teachers' acquisition of a degree professionalizes the field of Early Childhood Education.
F	<i>Teacher Demographic Questionnaire, Question 10</i> The experience of teachers is sufficient to ensure quality childcare programming
G	<i>Teacher Demographic Questionnaire Question 11</i> Experienced teachers should be expected to obtain a degree if they don't already have one

Table 5-1  
*Research Questions Four-Six (N=55)*

A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1	1	LL	Agree	Agree	O	O
2	1	HL	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree
3	1	LL	O	O	Disagree	Agree
4	1	LL	O	O	O	O
5	1	LH	Disagree	O	Agree	Disagree
6	1	HL	O	O	O	O
7	1	LL	O	Agree	O	O
8	1	HL	O	Agree	O	O
9	1	LH	Disagree	Agree	Agree	O
10	2	LL	Agree	Agree	Agree	O
11	2	LH	O	O	O	O
12	3	LH	O	O	Disagree	O
13	3	HL	O	O	O	O
14	3	HH	Agree	O	O	O
15	3	LL	Agree	O	Agree	O
16	3	HL	O	O	O	O
17	4	LL	O	Agree	O	Agree
18	4	LL	Agree	Agree	O	O
19	4	LL	Agree	Agree	O	Agree
20	5	LH	Agree	Agree	O	O
21	5	HL	Agree	O	O	O
22	5	HL	O	O	O	O
23	5	LL	Agree	O	O	O
24	6	LL	Agree	Agree	O	Agree
25	6	HL	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree
26	6	LL	Agree	Agree	O	Agree
27	6	LL	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree
28	7	LH	O	Agree	O	O

29	7	HH	Agree	Agree	O	Agree
30	8	LH	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Agree
31	8	LL	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Agree
32	9	HL	Agree	Agree	Agree	Disagree
33	9	LH	Agree	Agree	Agree	Disagree
34	10	HH	O	O	O	Disagree
35	10	LL	Agree	Agree	Agree	Agree
36	11	LL	O	O	Disagree	O
37	11	HL	O	Agree	Agree	O
38	11	LH	O	O	O	O
39	11	LH	Agree	O	O	O
40	11	LL	Agree	O	O	O
41	11	HL	Agree	Agree	O	O
42	11	LL	O	O	Agree	O
43	11	HL	Agree	Agree	O	O
44	11	LL	Agree	Agree	O	O
45	11	LL	O	O	Disagree	Disagree
46	11	LL	O	O	O	O
47	11	LL	O	O	O	O
48	11	LL	O	O	Agree	Disagree
49	12	HH	O	Agree	O	O
50	12	LH	O	O	O	O
51	12	LH	O	O	Agree	O
52	13	LH	O	O	O	O
53	13	HH	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Agree
54	14	LL	O	Agree	O	Agree
55	14	HL	O	Agree	Agree	Agree

#### Research Question Four

Two statements on the *Teacher Demographic Questionnaire* addressed this issue, the education of the teacher is imperative in ensuring high quality childcare programming (see Question 5 *Teacher Demographic Questionnaire*) and the acquisition of a degree qualitatively make the field of early-care and education more professional (see Question 9 *Teacher Demographic Questionnaire*). As shown on Table 5-1, 48% ( $N=26$ ) of the participants agreed that the education of an early-care and education teacher does ensure high quality programming and 4% ( $N=2$ ) disagreed with this statement. When asked if the acquisition of a degree professionalizes the field of early-care and education, 54% percent ( $N=29$ ) of the participants totally agreed that it does, with no participants disagreeing.

From *Interview One, Question Eight*, the participants were asked to reflect on the following statement. “The Pennsylvania Keystone STARS program has identified teacher education as an indicator of quality, do you agree or disagree and why.” The findings disclosed that 47% of the participants agreed with the statement and 7% of the participants disagreed. Interestingly, the data revealed that 46% of the participants displayed mix feelings about the statement and was not able to either agree or disagree. I did not indicate that I was looking for a specific level of education when asking this question, whereas the questions on in the *Teacher Demographic Questionnaire* indicated the following educational levels: a) CDA; b) AAS in Child Development; c) BA/BA in Elementary Education; d) BA/BS in Early Childhood Education and e) Masters in Education.

In reading the participants’ responses to this question, I quickly realized that the participants themselves use the education levels of AAS and above in their answers. The following quotes support the findings in Table 5-1, as well as fill in the gaps for those participants who somewhat agreed/somewhat disagreed with the above two statements.

### **Agreement that the teachers’ level of education is an indicator of quality**

In answering *Question Eight from Interview One*, the participants who agreed that the level of education was an indicator of quality predominately referred to the relationship between a higher educational level and the learning experiences for young children. Examples of their quotes are as follows:

The more educated teachers are, the more they can bring that into the classroom. That means there will be better quality in that classroom. The teachers will work together and they will have the same training and they are able to understand where each one is coming from (Center 1, Participant 7 L L) January, 2007.

I agree. I think that the quality of the center can only be as good as the education of the teachers. I think that is one of the reasons our center does as good as it does. All our teachers have an Associate or a BA in Education. I think that it makes teachers feel more professional and that they are just not babysitting all day. I think that it helps the quality of a childcare center (Center 6, Participant 26, L L) March 2007.

I agree. I was in a four stars center and all the employees had education the quality of the center really improved. We were all on the same page and we were all working towards the same goal. I think that teacher education is important (Center 13, Participant 53 H H) June 2007.

However, while the participants did agree that a higher level of education is an indicator of quality, there were other indicators that the participants mentioned that need to be considered. The participants believed that the focus of the degree and a passion for working with young children played a large role in high quality experiences for young children. The participants felt that these indicators as well as a post-secondary degree also interrelate with high quality learning experiences for young children.

I do agree with teachers who have early childhood education. You can see the difference with that and the ones who have elementary. The ones with elementary education do not have a clue about what they are doing in the classroom (Center 2 Participant 11, L H) January, 2007.

I think that it is very important. I think that there are other aspects too. The education is very important, I agree with that. It is important to get ideas and learn new things, but you also have to have something inside to go with it -that would be love for the children (Center 3, Participant 12 L H) February, 2007.

While the participants agreed that a higher level of education was an indicator of quality, some participants also noted barriers that impact the attainment of a higher level of education, such as finances and experience. In fact, one participant singled out in their quote the teacher's ability to transfer the knowledge gained at a post-secondary institution into the classroom and their teaching practices. The quotes below address these barriers.

I feel that it is good, but not everyone can afford it. It should be a program that can help those who can't afford it. I cannot afford to go to college. I have children at home and I need to watch how much I spend. I don't have to have a high degree, I can learn. Caring for children is much more than a piece of paper (Center 1, Participant 1 L L) January, 2007.

I agree with some areas and there are areas that I don't agree. I think that a teacher having education or a degree shows experience and knowledge that they have. I feel that it doesn't indicate how or their quality of teaching. Someone can be very knowledgeable and know a lot about certain areas and know how to teach something, but maybe the way they present it isn't appropriate or on the child's level. (Center 9, Participant 32, H L May 2007).

### **Disagreement that the teachers' level of education is an indicator of quality**

Seven percent of the participants disagreed with *Question Eight* from *Interview One*. While this is a small percentage, a phenomenon emerged within the group of participants who totally disagreed with *Question Eight* from *Interview One*. The findings expose that participants who hold a post-secondary degree pointed out that the educational level of an early-care and education teacher does not necessarily correspond with high quality experiences for young children. In fact, one participant with a Bachelors' in Early Childhood Education states:

I disagree. I think that there are some very good educators out there that don't have a degree. If you have been out there doing for a long time and you know what you are doing, then you have what it takes to teach these kids what it is they need to know. I don't think that a piece of paper makes a difference. Yes, there are some things going on when you have a degree, you do get more in-depth stuff, but I think that the true education is being out there and doing it. I think that if you have done it and you can do it and you get out there and do it, it is just as quality as someone with a degree. I have been with teachers who have a degree and they are only half of the teacher as someone who doesn't have a degree. I don't agree that not having an education makes you a bad teacher or not a quality teacher (Center 3, Participant 13 H L) February, 2007.

Another participant with a Bachelors' in Elementary Education adds, "I kind of disagree with that, because when I was at another childcare center. There was a teacher there who didn't have any educational experience. She just had her high school diploma and she was one of the better teachers there. She was very upbeat with the kids and she go down to their level and she was fantastic with the kids. She didn't have any special training; it was just her personality and her ability to work with children that made her a great teacher" (Center Three, Participant 16, H L February 2007).

Participant Six from Center One, draws a parallel between the early-care and education teachers' years of experience in the field with "they must be doing something right" so why should we expect these professionals to return to post-secondary institutions and obtain a degree?

I sort of disagree with it. My opinion is that if they have been in the field for a while, it must be something that they enjoy and they must be doing a good job as well. To expect them to go back to college is a hardship for them. If they are pleased with their income level and where they are at, I don't think there should be an expectation. I understand if the expectation was placed on them right from the beginning, if you are going into the field and you are told this, but to expect them to go back now; I think that would be a difficult thing (Center 1, Participant 6 H L January, 2007).

### **Research Question Five**

In the above section in which I explore the perceptions of early-care and education teachers, regarding the concept that the education level of the teacher is an indicator of quality, I noticed that the research participants were very passionate about their experience in the field of early-care and education. As I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, this is understandable. In fact, of the 55 participants who participated in the research study, 36% ( $N=21$ ) indicated that they have worked five years or less in early-care and education. This indicates that 64% ( $N=34$ ) of my participants have six or more years of experience. In fact, out of the remaining 64%, 9% ( $N=6$ ) of the participants have been working in early-care and education between 16 and 20 year and 9% ( $N=4$ ) have been working in the field longer than 20 years. I must also note that Participant 9 from Center 1 has been working with young children in early care and education for 35 years. It is understandable that the value of their years of experience is a major concern for the participants in relationship to the "push" for them to earn a degree.

In examining the participants' perceptions relative to longevity within the field of early-care and education; the use of *Question Ten*, from the *Teacher Demographic Questionnaire* was necessary. This question explores the perceptions of the perceptions of the participants regarding the experience of teachers as being sufficient to ensure quality childcare programming. The assumption was that the majority of the participants would disagree with this statement, especially those in the H L and H H

grouping. The data demonstrates that 13% ( $N=6$ ) disagree and 27% ( $N= 15$ ) of the participants agreed.

Table 5-2 below represents the distribution amongst the four groups.

Table 5-2

*Teacher Demographic Questionnaire Question 10 (N=22)*

Categories	L/L	L/H	H/L	H/H
Disagree	N=4	N=1	N=0	N=1
Agree	N=6	N=4	N=6	N=0

The following quotes highlight the passion that is often demonstrated when there is a discussion relative to the value of experience.

I agree and I disagree. Teacher education comes from a lot of different places, not just formal education. Although I do think that formal education is helpful; there is something to say for just experience (Center 1, Participant 2 H L, January, 2007).

I don't fully agree with that, because sometimes experience goes a long way, whether you have an Associate degree or not. There are many things you know just by being experienced as a teacher, you have been there and done that already. I don't agree with it. You can learn from each other (Center 1, Participant 4 L L) January 2007.

### **Research Question Six**

Research consistently points to the educational attainment level of the classroom teacher as pivotal in establishing and maintaining high quality programming for young children. Armed with the findings of multiple researchers, early-care and education programs have increased their educational requirements for currently employed teachers. These programs are by and large, Head Start, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Accredited childcare centers and early-care and education programs who are part of a Quality Improvement Rating System which can be found in many states, such as Pennsylvania. This requirement for a post-secondary degree has not been wholeheartedly embraced by all teachers within the field of early-care and education.

This research study asserts that the classroom teacher is critical in establishing and maintaining high quality programming. Because of this assertion, it is necessary to explore the current issue within the field, regarding in-service teachers being required to return to higher education for a post-secondary degree.

In examination of this issue, the data came from primarily two sources, *The Teacher Demographic Questionnaire* and *Question 10* from *Interview One*. From *The Teacher Demographic Questionnaire*, *Question 11*, the participants responded to the following statement. “Experienced teachers should be expected to obtain a degree.” This statement is similar to *Question 10*, from *Interview One*. The findings show that 28% ( $N=15$ ) of the participants agreed that experienced early-care and education teachers should be expected to return to college/university and earn a post-secondary degree. However, 11% ( $N=6$ ) of the participants disagreed as reflected in the table below.

Table 5-3

*Teacher Demographic Questionnaire Question 11 (N=21)*

Category	L/L	L/H	H/L	H/H
Agree	$N=9$	$N=1$	$N=3$	$N=2$
Disagree	$N=2$	$N=2$	$N=1$	$N=1$

After compiling the above results, I investigated what variable(s) possibly influence the participants’ responses. Since the *Teacher Demographic Questionnaire* is a Likert Scale research tool and the participants did not add additional comments, I was unable to determine what variable(s) did influence their answers from this research tool. Since *Question 10* from *Interview One* is similar to *Question 11* on the *Teacher Demographic Questionnaire*, I was able to use the following quotes represent the “voices” of the entire participant group.

They are qualified to be a teacher and they should go back and get their degree too. We have to get the training anyway. Go take those classes and get that degree and cover both at the same time. I think that a lot of the classes are important to take, even if you have been teaching for many years and you already have your degree. You learn a lot from the classes, whether you have been teaching for many years and you have your education or if you have been teaching for two months, you just have your high school diploma. I think it is a good idea for current childcare centers to send people back to school” (Center 7, Participant 29 H H) April, 2007.

Participant Six from Center One suggested that there should be alternative methods to obtaining a post-secondary degree as shown below.

My opinion would be that I don't feel that they should have to be required to get a degree just because they don't have it. I think that there should be another alternative so they can be certified in something and maybe they should have to do some training. I don't think they should have to go back and get a degree. I think that is just going to turn people away. There are people with a lot of years of experience that might have chosen this profession because they didn't have to have a degree, now they have all this experience, but it doesn't mean anything, since they don't have a degree. I think there should be some kind of certificate that they should be able to obtain, but not jump through hoops (Center 1, Participant 6 H L) June, 2007.

Some participants even suggested that “as long as there is someone in the center with a degree,” it would be acceptable; and as expected there were participants who cited that they understand both sides of the argument.

I feel that someone in the group should have a degree. I feel that your experience should count as something. I think that getting your CDA is important, as long as someone has it. There are times when I wish I knew more about certain things. I think it makes the job easier if they go to school. I don't think it should be a “have-to (Center 5, Participant 21 H L) March, 2007.

I think that it's good. Again, it's something that I see both sides of it. I think that it's important. I think that there is a lot of tools that they can get from that and it would improve their classroom. At the same time, a lot of the people that they want to do this are older people, who are saying, “I am 50 some years old, why do I want to spend my evenings in a CDA class? I am only going to be working here for “x” amount of time, or whatever.” So I can see both sides of it. I think it should depend on the specific situation. I think that there should be some type of reimbursement from the center, whether its paid time off, something likethat. I know that at the place where I used

to work at, there were a couple of teachers who decided to go back and get their CDA and they were not really receiving any support. They were expected to work their 9 hour shift and then go and get their CDA. I see both sides of that (Center 11, Participant 37, H L) June, 2007.

However, several issues did come to light relative to in-service teachers being required to obtain a post-secondary degree. These issues are also mirrored in research and include professional experience, low wage, and age of the professional and financial constraints.

### **Professional Experience**

I think that if you have been in there and you have been doing it, that piece of paper is not going to make any difference. If anything, the classes might bring you up to date on some things that are going on. I think that the true education is the experience; you can get it out of a book or a classroom, you have to been in there and doing it. I think that you have some people who are fifty or sixty years old, who have been doing this forever. To ask them to get a degree now, I think honestly, would be a waste of time and money. If they have shown that they are capable, I think that they should be more able to teach (Center 3, Participant 13 H L) February, 2007.

### **Age of the Professional**

There is someone here at the center that has been doing this for nineteen years. It is a real hardship for some of the older women to go back and take training. I feel that their years should count for something. Maybe not excuse them from all of it. I am not sure there should be a test, maybe an observation of that teacher over a period of time. I feel it should count for something, their years of experience. I understand that they need a starting point, but what is it going to do for the people who have been at it for twenty to thirty years? It seems like a lot, to me that they have to go back and get a CDA or a degree of some sort (Center 12, Participant 49 H H) June, 2007.

### **Financial Constraints**

I feel that it is good, but not everyone can afford it. There should be a program that can help those who can't afford it. I cannot afford to go to college. I have children at home and I need to watch how much I spend. I don't have to have a high degree, I can learn. Caring for children, is much more than a piece of paper" (Center 1, Participant 5 L H) January, 2007.

The lack of finances and family responsibilities have been identified in the existing early-care and education literature as major barriers preventing early-care and education professionals in returning to higher education.

Another barrier that is often cited in early-care and education literature is the salaries that early-care and education professionals earn.

I think that it is wonderful that they have a degree. Unfortunately, the pay is not the best. Is it more important to have someone who does have a degree, who is going to move on in a year, or to have someone who doesn't have a degree, who is willing to stay and work in the field for a while (Center 3, Participant 14 H H) February, 2007

In fact, Participant 46 from Center Eleven (L L), approached the issue of retention within early-care and education. She stated "I am kind of torn on the situation. I guess I think that it is good to have a degree, but to force people to do it, might not be the best idea. I think it will drive a lot of people out of daycare. They might lose a lot of people" June, 2007).

The data also unearthed an issue that I personally did not consider when designing my research study. This issue was "teacher status" within classrooms. It is common in early-care and education to find two adults in a classroom due to state regulations regarding child/staff ratio. The issue of "teacher status" is usually identified by adults, because young children normally identify all adults in the classroom as "teacher." The following quote suggests that "only those in charge" need to have a degree, not all adults in the classroom, even though they provide learning experiences for young children.

Coming from my own personal experience and not having a degree, I would say that it is not fair. I don't think that someone should not be given the same opportunity as others. I think that it is a good idea. It would bring about quality. I think that there could be some happy mediums that maybe some positions would require that, I think that is a good idea. As an assistant, I don't know if it is as important for someone like me. You are just following the lead of the person in charge (Center 5, Participant 20, L H) March, 2007).

Participant 38, Center 11 expressed that she felt like she was 'second-class'," because she did not have a post-secondary degree.

I think that education is very important. There are people who have the desire and if you learn as you go, you go to these classes and you try to pick things up. The onset that you have the experience and you have to obtain a degree; you are going to have to ask the parents to pay more. They aren't going to stay here, with the money they get or the benefits. If you are expected to do a lot of things and you don't receive anything in return, sometimes you feel like second-class citizens, if you have been in the field and have the experience, but don't have the degree. Don't overlook the natural gift that someone has or the willingness to learn. Don't force someone right out the door and it might be someone who would be valuable. Some people without the education can apply their experience better than someone with the education. I would like them to look at experience, talk to the directors and see the experience that someone has. There should be some kind of recognition. Treat them the same as someone with a degree. Don't forget the person, who doesn't have a degree (Center 11, Participant 38 L H) June, 2007.

The final issue that emerged from the research findings was the perceptions often voiced by society, parents and early-care and education professionals. These perceptions are often verbalized by the following questions, "Do young children really need a teacher that has obtained a post-secondary degree?" "Young children need to play. Why do you need a degree to watch them play?" The following quote is an example of this pervasive belief that continues to resound and causes the movement toward educating the field through higher education and post-secondary degrees, to be more difficult.

I think it is kind of silly, because experience is the best teacher. I think That this is my personal opinion. When we get pushed to have a degree, they will lose the help. Good, dependable people who have been here for years and who really care about the children, who just are able to do the extra help. Education isn't everything; it is if you want money. As far as doing your job, experience is the best education. We have girls who come in here and I don't really don't know the exact details of it, but they have been through college or these childcare things. They come in and they are granted head teacher right away. They have no experience. Someone who comes in and has raised three or four kids, has a couple of grandkids, works in the church nursery and is told, that they have to be an assistant because they don't have the education. I think that everything is a little bit backwards. They put too much on that and personally in the daycare system, I am not too sure if teachers need to be educated as much as the state feels, because these are little kids, who really need to be playing and learning how to share and colors and numbers. What do you really need to teach a child something like that" (Center 11, Participant 45 L L) June 2007.

As stated previously in this chapter, the participants expressed mixed opinions regarding the expectation for them to return to higher education and obtain a degree. The following quotes represent the participants who agreed that returning to higher education was important.

I think that it is a big thing. We had some teachers who have been in childcare for many, many, many years and they are wondering why they need their degree now. I think that experience isn't everything; you need to be educated on how to train and how to teach properly. You could have seven years of bad experience and not having what you really need to teach somebody. A degree and training and experience needs to go hand-in-hand" (Center 6, Participant 27 L L) March, 2007.

I don't think it is a bad idea. They may think that they don't have to go back, since they have been in the field for many years. However, educating children has changed so much and it is always changing. They should be up-to-date on what is new and so on" (Center 10, Participant 35 L L) May, 2007.

I think that if I looked at it, if your goal is to create a better atmosphere for the children, it can't hurt them to have people with more education. There is more understanding; there is more ways to handle things that they would know. If I had a center and I could choose to hire someone with an education, I would want to do that. I would want to have as many people I could. As far as asking people to go and get an education who doesn't have it, I think that it is a personal thing for them. I don't think there is anything wrong asking them to do that, if they don't want to do that, they shouldn't have too. I don't think they should lose their job over it (Center 11, Participant 48 L L) June, 2007.

I guess over the years, with all of us being involved in children's lives, we all should have some type of degree. I don't think there is anything wrong with it. I think it is important that you do get the education to be in this field" (Center 13, Participant 52 L H) July, 2007).

However, Participant 34 from Center Ten (H H) reflects succulently, "There is definitely a different caliber, having a college education and an Early Childhood Education. It is amazing how much that stuff actually works. You take all those classes and they tell you a lot of stuff. You come out and you do it and it is amazing how much it really works. I know that I do a lot of the things that I do and I run my classroom in a lot of the ways I run it, seem to be successful not only for the center that I am in, but for the children who are going on and doing other things. I do a lot of the practices and the things that I do, because I learned how to do that. I read the text book and I was told that this is going to work, this won't

work, take a look at how different classrooms are run and choose a style that is going to fit for you. I had a whole class in what your style is going to be. I am very grateful that I have that education. That is why I do this. I am a better teacher and the teacher I am today, is because of the education I received. There is a great value in having an Early Childhood Education background. Therefore, down the line there is value in having some sort of degree in Early Childhood Education. However, I think you can be a quality childcare provider and a quality childhood educator, without having a degree. I don't think that it is mandatory. There does need to be training in how to deal with children. We don't want to be glorified babysitters. Even as something as simple as, if you are having a child that is cross the room being loud, you have to get up from what you are doing and explain to the child that you are being too loud. I learned that, because I read it in a text book twenty years ago. I didn't have to learn that in a text book, somebody could have said: "This is the way we handle these situations at our center: Get up and walk to where the problem is and take care of it quietly, then move on to another group." Therefore, if someone is training a new staff person and they include such things in a training material, they are going to learn that without having a degree. While I don't think that a teacher has to have a degree to be a quality caregiver, I do believe there needs to be training. Whether that is in-house, center per center or in an outside training course. If you want the quality, you just can't have a warm body in the classroom, just watching the kids play. You need to have training for your staff members" (May, 2007).

In this chapter, the primary focus was on the perceptions and beliefs that the participants hold regarding a post-secondary education degree and their years of experience within the field of early-care and education. Research has long shown that the educational level of the teacher directly shows a relationship to high quality learning experiences for young children birth through five years. What research has not made mention of, is if the professionals in the field of early-care and education hold to the same belief. Additionally, early-care and education professionals are passionate regarding the value of longevity or years of experience within the field.

Early-care and education literature points to the importance of stability in the teaching staff as a necessary factor in positive learning outcomes for young children birth through age five years. While the literature identifies experience as an important factor in positive classroom experiences for young children, there is little mention in the literature regarding the perceptions of early-care and education professionals and their longevity or years of experience.

Three research questions were examined through the use of two different research tools, a) *The Teacher Demographic Questionnaire* and b) *Questions Eight and Ten* from *Interview One*.

The findings revealed that 48% ( $N=26$ ) of the participants agreed that a higher level of education is an indicator of high quality learning experiences for young children and 4% ( $N=2$ ) disagreed. The remaining 48% held to the “middle of the road” and chose to somewhat agree/disagree. However, 54% of the participants did agree that having a post-secondary degree does professionalize the field of early-care and education. This belief was also substantiated by data generated from *Question Eight, Interview One*. The responses for this question indicated that 47% of the participants agreed that having a post-secondary degree as expected by Keystone STARS is an indicator of quality. Seven percent of the participants disagreed with the Keystone STARS expectation and 46% either somewhat agreed/disagreed.

Conversely, the participants did stress that the focus of the degree is crucial. From their quotes it should be noted that the post-secondary degree expectation was not whole-heartedly embraced. Concerns, such as family obligations, financial constraints, staff retention, salaries and age of the professionals currently working within the field were given for their reluctance in obtaining a post-secondary degree.

The participants were passionate about their years of experience within early-care and education. They expressed fear that these years will not be seen as valuable if they returned to higher education. Some participants even suggested that they would like to see their years of experience counted in some way at colleges/universities.

The findings also proposed an issue that I personally did not consider in designing this research study. This issue is “teacher status” within the classroom. Normally in early-care and education, each

classroom is staffed with two adults. The responses from the participants seemed to question, who really is the “teacher” in the classroom. While research points to all adults, *i. e.* teachers, assistant teachers, teacher aide, parents, extended family members, as playing an important role in the lives of young children, some of the participants felt otherwise.

Lastly, the findings also revealed the belief as to the necessity of having a post-secondary degree. Questions such as “do young children really need a teacher with a post-secondary degree” or “young children need to play, so why do I need a degree to watch them play” were asked. Unfortunately, these same questions are raised by others, thus making it difficult for early-care and education teachers to truly be recognized as professionals.

## Chapter Six

### CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I discuss the findings from the research study, as well as the lessons learned. I highlighted the strengths and limitations of the study and presented several implications for the field of early-care and education. In conclusion I offered suggestions for future research.

#### Discussion of Research Study Findings

The data in Chapters Four and Five represented my findings for the six research questions. In this section, I used these findings to help answer each research question.

#### *Research Question One: How do early-care and education teachers define and describe a high quality classroom?*

The findings revealed that all of the 55 participants agreed that high quality programming is necessary for young children. The participants also agreed that there is a relationship between the quality of an early-care and education program and the learning outcomes of young children. In analyzing the data from *Interview One, Question One*, I discovered that the participants described high quality early-care and education programming as a) child-centered; b) parent friendly; c) strong teamwork within the center; d) classroom environment; e) use of a developmentally appropriate curriculum; f) education of the teacher, namely the lead teacher and g) the experience of all adults within the classroom. The most cited description of high quality programming was child-centered programming. It was evident that the participants felt that a child-centered program was critical as they spoke of the “needs of the children”, “hands-on learning”, “classroom environments that reflected best practices for young children” and “children playing.” in their descriptions. Below are examples of the participants’ quotes.

The needs of the children, parents and teachers. It gives the children an opportunity to play in many different sensory activities and also gives them teacher guidance and reference. It allows the parents to feel open and be a part of the center itself. The teachers would feel at ease and comfortable with all of the people working with them and with the administration. (Center 3, Participant 16, H L) February, 2007.

There should be good teacher interaction. There should also be a quality curriculum and a quality environment. I think that the teacher interaction and the education of the teachers would be one of the biggest. There should be a lot of hands-on activities for the children. They should be exposed to as much of the outside world, as well as multi-cultural diversity. There should be a lot of literacy activities as well as math activities. The children should also be able to choose activities that they want to do. I think that there needs to be a big balance between teacher-directed and child-directed. (Center 5, Participant 21, H L) March, 2007.

***Research Question Two: What teacher practices do they identify as necessary in a high quality classroom?***

From the *Teacher Practice Questionnaire* and *Interview One, Question Four*, I examined the teaching practices that the participants identified as important in a high quality program. The analysis was modeled based on the work of Cassidy, et.al. (2005) and Bigras, et.al. (2010). Using their definition of structural and process quality, two indicators were apparent for both structural and process quality. Environment and curriculum was most often named for structural quality and communication/interaction and teacher instruction for process quality. Using these indicators and the data provided by the *Teacher Practice Questionnaire*, I conducted a cross-tabs analysis, looking primarily at three factors: a) level of education; b) years of experience of the participants or c) a combination of both years of experience and education.

The participants were divided into groups using two variables, their educational level and their years of experience. Four groups were established: a) Low Education/Low Experience; b) Low Education/High Experience; c) High Education/Low Experience and d) High Education/High Experience. In determining Low and High Education I followed the suggestion of current research that referred to the Bachelors' Degree as optimal. The participants with a Bachelors' in Early Childhood Education/Elementary Education or a Master in Education Degree were assigned High Education. The participants with a High School Diploma, Child Development Accreditation Certificate, other non-education degrees/certificates and the Associate of Applied Science in Child Development Degree

represented Low Education. High and Low Experience was simply determined by averaging the years of experience for the total participant group and finding the median, which was ten years. Eleven years of experience and above typified High Experience. Participants with ten years or less were assigned Low Experience.

After grouping the participants, I discovered that close to half of the participants, 44% ( $N=24$ ) represented the Low Education/Low Experience group and 7% ( $N=4$ ) represented the High Education/High Experience category. Twenty four percent ( $N=13$ ) of the participants, aligned with the Low Education/High Experience group and 25% ( $N=14$ ), with the High Education/Low Experience group. Thus, looking at only the education requirement, 67% ( $N=37$ ) of the participants represented the Low Education group and 33% ( $N=18$ ) represented the High Education group.

These findings were consistent with current early-care and education literature and authentically painted a picture of early-care and education programming as it exists today. Early-care and educational programs within the United States vary widely in their education requirements for teachers. It has only been recently that Head Start, the nation's largest federally-funded program, now requires teachers to have a Bachelors' Degree. Their current goal is to demonstrate that 50% of their teachers have obtained a Bachelors' Degree by 2013. Currently, according to the Head Start Association, only a quarter of Head Start's teachers have obtained a Bachelors' Degree, with the remaining teachers having only some college, such as an Associate Degree and there are still many with only a Child Development Accreditation Certificate (Head Start Association 2010).

In fact, early-care and education teachers in subsidized programs tend to have less formal education than their counterparts in non-subsidized programs. Researchers predominately point to the disparity in teacher salaries and lack of benefits such as health insurance, paid sick leave, retirement and educational reimbursement, as influencing the employment and retention of highly qualified teachers (Barnett 2003, 2005, 2010; Edelman & Grace, 2010; Fuller, Gasko & Anguiano, 2010; Thornburg, Scott & Mayfield, 2002; Whitebrook, Howes & Phillips, 1990). According to Cassidy, et.al. (2005) and Bigras,

et.al. (2010), teachers with a post-secondary degree will more often use process quality teaching practices than teachers without a post-secondary degree. In this research study, the findings revealed that 49 % ( $N=27$ ) of the participants indicated that their teaching practices reflected structural quality. From those 27 participants who cited structural teaching practices, 56% ( $N=15$ ) represented the Low Education/Low Experience group, 11% ( $N=3$ ) represented the Low Education/High Experience group, 7% ( $N=2$ ) represented the High Education/High Experience group and 26% ( $N=7$ ) represented the High Education/Low Experience group. While the Low Education group represented the majority of those participants who identified structural teaching practices, approximately one-third of the High Education group also aligned with structural teaching practices. Further research is needed to identify the reasons why professionals with a Bachelors' or Masters' Degree tend to identify that they use structural teaching practices rather than process teaching practices within their classrooms.

Thirty eight percent ( $N=21$ ) of the participants alluded to teaching practices that are more often found in process quality. Thirty three percent ( $N=7$ ) were from the Low Education/Low Experience group, 38% ( $N=8$ ) were from the Low Education/High Experience group, 10% ( $N=2$ ) were from the High Education/High Experience group and 19% ( $N=4$ ) are from the High Education/Low Experience group. Well over half of the participants who aligned with process quality teaching practices were from the Low Education group. This is a phenomenon that needs further investigation. This certainly is a "push" against the current literature that names the Bachelors' Degree as most optimal. Research that closely looks at the differences between those professionals' who have obtained an Associates' Degree and those who have obtained a Bachelors' Degree is needed before naming one degree as more optimal.

It should be noted that in comparing the participants' responses from the *Teacher Demographic Questionnaire* with their responses from *Interview One*, the data revealed that in some cases the participants' identification with structural/process quality differed between the *Teacher Practice Questionnaire* and their verbal descriptions of quality and all education/experience categories cited process quality practices more often than structural quality practices, as shown in Table 5-5. Interestingly,

when the participants identified with structural/process quality practice statements from the *Teacher Practice Questionnaire*, the common denominator was a combination of education and experience. Additionally, when analyzing the verbal responses of the participants, it appeared that those representing Low Education/Low Experience and the High Education/Low Experience pointed out process quality teaching practices more often. I then compared the two Education categories, not using the Experience variable. Of the 55 participants,  $N=37$  were from the Low Education group and  $N=18$  were from the High Education group. I then individually looked at both the Low Education and High Education groups. I found that the participants from the Low Education/Low Experience group more often cited process quality teaching practices than those from the Low Education/High Experience group. In the High Education group, I found that the participants, who more often represented process quality teaching practices, were from the High Education/ Low Experience category. This leads me to question what other variables influence the use of structural and process quality teaching practices. Research should possibly look at ongoing professional development such as professional trainings and conferences as possible influencing variables. I would like to suggest that further exploration be considered regarding professionals who are also parents and the birth order of the professionals.

I must acknowledge that the Low Education group was represented by more participants than the High Education group. As previously stated, it is quite common to find more early-care and education professionals in the field, who align more often with Low Education than High Education. In the selection of participants for this research study, the educational level, or the years of experience of the participants was not part of my selection criteria. If this research study is replicated, controlling for a specific educational attainment level and experience level should be considered.

As previously stated, in some cases the participants' identification with structural/process quality differed between the *Teacher Practices Questionnaire* and their verbal descriptions of quality. Using Table 4-1 as a reference, I used a frequency count to see how many participants differed between the *Teacher Practice Questionnaire* and their verbal responses from *Question Four/Interview One*. I also

investigated which education/experience group the participants represented. The findings disclosed that a total of 22 participants had changed their position with their verbal responses. Eighteen participants who name structural quality teaching practices on the *Teacher Practice Questionnaire*, verbally cited process quality teaching practices in *Interview One*. Four of the participants who referred to process quality teaching practices on the *Teacher Practice Questionnaire*, now quoted structural quality teaching practices. Of the 18 participants,  $N=12$  were from the Low Education/Low Experience group,  $N=1$  was from the Low Education/High Experience group and  $N=5$  were from the High Education/Low Experience group. The remaining four participants who alluded to structural quality teaching practices in *Interview One*, but lined up with the process quality teaching practices statements on the *Teacher Practices Questionnaire*, were from the Low Education/Low Experience ( $N=3$ ) group and the High Education/Low Experience ( $N=1$ ) group.

***Research Question Three: What influences their description of high quality and their identification of the teacher practices that support high quality: educational attainment level, experience, or a combination of educational attainment and experience?***

In analyzing the data from the *Teacher Practices Questionnaire* and *Question Four* from *Interview One*, I was aware that a combination of both structural and process quality teaching practices are important in providing high quality programming for young children, birth through five years. Yet, research shows process quality teaching practices as being more desirable, because of the inclusion of communication, interaction and building of relationships between the children within the classroom, the children and the teachers and the teachers with other adults such as colleagues, parents and the community. According to research, process quality teaching practices are often found in classrooms whose teachers have, or are currently working on a post-secondary degree. What research has not been clear about is what type of post-secondary degree is best (Apple, 2004; Barnett, 2005; Cassidy, Buell, Pugh-Hoese & Russell, 1995; Early, 2007; Goble, Moran & Horm, 2009; Lutton, 2011 & Phillips, et.al, 2000). Additionally, little is reported in research about the experience level of the professionals working in the field of early-care and education.

For this research study, three variables were isolated, education, experience or a combination of education and experience as possible contributors to high quality early-care and education programming. My hypothesis was that by using the findings from the *Teacher Practice Questionnaire* and *Question Four*, from *Interview One*, I would determine which variable(s) influenced the practices of the participants. In establishing a baseline, I first distinguished how many participants represented each Education/Experience group. Table 4-5 illustrated that over half of the 55 participants, 51% represented the Low Education/Low Experience group. The remaining groups are in rank order with the second largest being High Education/Low Experience, 27%, Low Education/High Experience 16% and High Education/High Experience, 6%.

To determine whether education or experience was the mitigating variable that persuaded the responses made by the participants, or possibly a combination of both, I again turned to Table 4-1 and *Question Four from Interview One*. Research consistently points to the educational attainment level of an early-care and education teacher, in their use of process quality teaching practices. This rationale is based on the work of Cassidy, et.al. (2005) and Bigras, et.al. (2010). Structural quality teaching practices are more basic in nature, such as the way in which the classroom is arranged and maintained and the equipment used within the classroom. Structural quality also consists of materials used in the classroom, the curriculum and program procedures and policies, along with employee and parent handbooks.

Process quality teaching practices includes human interaction and communication. Teacher/child interactions, child/child interactions and adult/adult interactions are examples of process quality teaching practices. Successful communication and interactions found within the classroom, as cited in research, are best accomplished by a teacher who has a strong background in child development and an understanding regarding what constitutes “best practices” for the age group of children that they are currently working with (Cassidy, et.al, 2005 & Bigras, et. al. 2010).

For this research study, I proposed that participants who suggested that they use structural quality teaching practices were in the Low Education group. Those participants, who denoted that they used

process quality teaching practices in their classroom, represented the High Education group. As reflected on Table 4-6, 33% of the participants' responses were structural quality teaching practices and 27% represented process quality teaching practices for the Low Education group. For the High Education group, 16% of the responses represented structural teaching practices and 11% indicated process quality teaching practices. Using these findings, I was curious to see if experience made a difference in the responses for the Low and High Education groups. As shown in Table 4-7, of the 18 participants who identified with structural teaching practices, 15 participants had Low Experience (less than 10 years experience) and three of the participants had High Experience, (10 or more years of experience). In the High Education group, eight participants had Low Experience and only one participant represented High Experience.

My findings for process quality teaching practices were somewhat similar, with ten participants from the Low Education/Low Experience group and five participants from the Low Education/High Experience group. I also found similar outcomes for the High Education group. Four participants were identified as Low Experience and two as High Experience.

As noted in Chapter Four, seven participants cited both structural and process quality teaching practices. Four represented the Low Education group and three represented the High Education group. The above data reflected that these seven participants were not included in the data analysis. As a researcher, I felt that it would be unethical for me to place these participants in either the structural or process quality groups.

Noting that I was finding small differences between the experience levels for each group, I investigated the structural and process quality responses within a subset group. Currently, the field of early-care and education is suggesting that professionals without a degree should begin their post-secondary education at the community college where they will earn an Associate of Applied Science Degree in Child Development/Early Childhood Education. My original analytic strategy placed these participants with an AAS in the Low Education group.

To test my hypothesis regarding the influence of education, experience or a combination of both, I only included those with only a High School Diploma and participants with an Associate of Applied Science (Child Development/Early Childhood Education) in my subset. Looking at structural quality teaching practices, I discovered that six participants had a High School Diploma and eight had an Associate of Applied Science Degree in Child Development/Early Childhood Education degree. Surprisingly, for process quality teaching practices, nine participants had only a High School Diploma and four had an Associate of Applied Science Degree in Child Development/Early Childhood Education. The years of experience for both groups were similar. From the eleven participants with a High School Diploma six symbolized Low Experience and five symbolized High Experience. The participants with an Associate of Applied Science Degree in Child Development/Early Childhood identified with the following groups; eight with Low Experience and four with High Experience.

Unfortunately, my analysis of the data from the *Teacher Practices Questionnaire* and *Interview One Question Four*, looking primarily at two factors: level of education and years of experience of the participants, did not significantly identify one of the three variables, education, experience or a combination of education and experience as a major influence in the participants' responses relative to structural or process quality teaching practices. It was my assertion that there may have been other variables that played a role in shaping the responses of the participants. I would like to suggest that, possibly participation in professional development opportunities, such as trainings, workshops and conferences may have influenced their answers. I would also like to propose that possibly the age of the participant and whether they have children of their own, may have made the difference. I also wondered if my experience range may have been too large. However, I felt that after analyzing all of the data, my findings do support that a combination of education and experience was the major influencer, in the participants' descriptions of high quality teaching practices.

***Research Question Four: Do early-care and education teachers identify a higher level of education as an indicator of quality?***

The findings from the data regarding the above research question were quite surprising. Although, the educational attainment level for most of the participants were one of the following three, High School Diploma, Child Development Accreditation Certificate or an Associate of Applied Science in Child Development/Early Childhood Education, 15 of the participants held a Bachelors' Degree and three held a Masters' Degree. The fact that the majority of the participants had a lower level of education is consistent with current research (Barnett, 2010; Early, 2007; Goffin, 2010, National Association of Childcare Resource and Referral Agency, 2011; Whitebook, et.al. 2008). On the other hand, in this study quite a few were college educated, even graduates of Masters' programs. I questioned whether or not if they and the others identified an advanced education as an important predictor of program quality.

Two statements on the *Teacher Demographic Questionnaire* addressed this issue: a) the education of the teacher is imperative in ensuring high quality childcare programming (see Question 5 *Teacher Demographic Questionnaire*) and b) the acquisition of a degree qualitatively makes the field of early-care and education more professional, (see Question 9 *Teacher Demographic Questionnaire*). In analyzing the data for both of these questions, as well as the following two questions, I only used the responses from the participants who totally agreed and totally disagreed with the statements. My rationale for not using the somewhat agreed/somewhat disagreed responses from the participants was based on the data results from *Interview One, Question Eight*. After reading the participants' responses to this statement, I realized that additional variables such as family responsibilities, personal finances, work responsibilities, fear of not doing well in higher education etc. precluded the participants from responding with total agreement or disagreement. Since these variables were different amongst the participants, excluding the somewhat agreed/somewhat disagreed responses was the only way to control for these additional variables.

As shown on Table 5-1, forty eight percent ( $N=26$ ) of the participants agreed with the statement that the education of an early-care and education teacher does ensure high quality programming and 4%, ( $N=2$ ) disagreed with the statement. When I asked if the acquisition of a degree professionalized the field of early-care and education, fifty four percent ( $N=29$ ) of the participants totally agreed that it does, with no participants disagreeing.

The findings from *Interview One, Question Eight*, regarding the position that *The Pennsylvania Keystone STARS Quality Improvement System* takes regarding teacher education as an indicator of quality, as expected, three answers emerged; those who agreed ( $N= 47\%$ ), those who disagreed ( $N=7\%$ ) and those who both agreed and disagreed ( $N=46\%$ ). My expectation regarding the above responses was due to the fact that some of the participants may have leaned toward agreement or disagreement, but these participants also identified hurdles that may prevent them from obtaining a post-secondary degree. Also in asking this question, I did not indicate that I was looking for a specific level of education. The questions on the *Teacher Demographic Questionnaire* identified the CDA, AAS in Child Development/Early Childhood Education, BA/BS in Elementary Education, BA/BS in Early Childhood Education and Masters' in Education as levels of education. I was concerned that by not being clear as to what level of education I was referring to, may have swayed how the participants responded. With this in mind, however, in reading the participants' responses to this question, I quickly realized that the participants themselves used the education levels of AAS and above, upon which to base their answers.

My findings from *Question Eight/Interview One*, revealed an interesting theme. While 48% of the participants totally agreed that a post-secondary degree influenced the quality of programming, several of the participants indicated that the focus of the degree was critical. They suggested that a post-secondary degree that focused on Early Childhood Education, preferably with children birth through age five years, is most desirable. This raised an issue for the field of early-care and education. Are the colleges/universities adequately preparing professionals to work with young children birth through age five years?

***Question Five: What is the perception of early-care and education teachers, regarding years of experience within the field of early-care and education?***

The participants were very passionate about their experience within the field of early-care and education. Of the 55 participants, 36% ( $N=21$ ) signified that they have worked five years or less in early-care and education and 64% ( $N=34$ ) of the participants have six or more years of experience. In fact, out of the remaining 64%, 9% ( $N=6$ ) reveal that they have been working in early-care and education between 16 and 20 years and 9% ( $N=4$ ) have been working in the field longer than 20 years.

The quotes below demonstrate the passion I witnessed during Interview One regarding longevity in the field of early-care and education.

I am sure that those who have had twenty years of experience, if they are still passionate about the kids and teaching, then I am sure they are doing a good job (Participant 43, Center 11, H L) June, 2007.

I think that there are some very good educators out there, that don't have a degree. If you have been out there doing for a long time and you know what you are doing, then you have what it takes to teach these kids what it is they need to know. I don't think that a piece of paper makes a difference. Yes, there are some things going on when you have a degree, you do get more in-depth stuff, but I think that the true education is being out there and doing it. I think that if you have done it, and you can do it and you get out there and do it, it is just as quality, as someone with a degree. I have been with teachers who have a degree and they are only half of the teacher as someone who doesn't have a degree. I don't agree that not having an education makes you a bad teacher or not a quality teacher (Participant 2, Center 3, H L) February, 2007.

Using the *Teacher Demographic Questionnaire*, I asked them to respond to Question 10 which states, "The experience of teachers is sufficient to ensure quality childcare programming." My findings disclose that 13% totally disagree and 27% of the participants totally agree. The category representation for the participants who agree is as follows: Low Education/Low Experience ( $N=8$ ), Low Education/High Experience ( $N=2$ ) and High Education/Low Experience ( $N=5$ ).

It is my assumption those in the H L and H H categories would disagree with this statement. Nevertheless, five participants from High Education/Low Experience did agree. Only one participant from the High Education/High Experience group disagreed. Of the five participants representing the Low

Education group that disagree, three participants were from the Low Education/Low Experience category and two participants were from the Low Education/High Experience category.

Longevity in the field of early-care and education is vital. The inability to retain teachers within the field has long been identified as negatively impacting the educational outcomes of young children, birth through age five years. Ongoing staff turnover lowers the quality of early-care and education programs, everywhere.

The participants within my study did clearly demonstrate their disappointment that their experience is not recognized by the accrediting agencies such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children and statewide Quality Improvement Initiatives. These teachers are concerned that their years of experience will not be recognized by colleges/universities. This is a valid concern. Degree programs focusing on young children birth through age five years are greatly outnumbered by Early Childhood Education degree programs, where the focus has a much broader age range (pre-k to third grade). The participants also pointed out that it had been their experience that when a childcare center hires a Bachelor degree teacher, it has been the responsibility of the less-educated, but more experienced teacher to, “show them the ropes”. As it were.

Lastly, the participants consistently report that it is their choice to remain in the field of early-care and education. This is commendable, in that the field of early-care and education is one of the lowest paying fields. When the participants began working in the field, having a post-secondary degree was not a requirement. So these participants believe that when they do go back and obtain a post-secondary degree as expected or required they should be given some form of credit for their years of experience.

***Question Six: What is the perception of early-care and education professionals regarding, the current expectation that in-service teachers obtain a degree (Associate or Bachelor)?***

The tide has shifted in the field of early-care and education, regarding the educational attainment level of its professionals. Leading this change is The National Association for the Education of Young Children and the National Head Start and Early Head Start Programs. In the past early-care and education

professionals only needed a High School/General Education Diploma to be a teacher in a classroom. In fact, even as recently as 2011, a teacher in an early-care and education classroom that is not accredited or participating in a *Quality Improvement Rating System*, at best, should have an Associates in Applied Science Degree in Child Development/Early Childhood Education and at the very least, a Child Development Accreditation Certificate. Unfortunately, however, this is not always the case. Currently, the National Association of Childcare Resource and Referral Association (NACCRRA, 2011) notes that 20 % of center based early-care and education teachers and 43% of the assistant teachers had at best, only a high school diploma or less. Forty-seven percent of the teachers and 45% of the assistant teachers had some college, but no degree and only 33% of the teachers and 12% of the assistant teachers, had any type of college degree.

The minimal education requirement of early-care and education teachers has an effect on the quality of programming that can be provided and also on a child's learning. Unfortunately, however, early-care and educational programs within the United States vary widely in teacher education requirements and the current expectation and in some cases requirement, that in-service early-care and education teachers return to higher education and obtain a post-secondary degree, has not been wholeheartedly embraced (Jones, 2010; Tout, Zaslow & Berry, 2006,2009 Washington, Andrews, 2010; Whitebook, Gomby, Bellm, Sakai & Kipnis, 2009a,b).

Working from the assumption that high quality programming and teacher practices link with a post-secondary degree, preferably a Bachelor degree, I was interested in hearing the perceptions of my participants, relative to this issue. Using both the *Teacher Demographic Questionnaire* and *Question Ten from Interview One* I am able to accomplish this task.

As related in Chapter Five, as per the participants' quotes, I detect concerns regarding finances, family and work obligations, their age, as well as a fear of their not being successful in higher education. The quotes below demonstrate some of their concerns.

I think that if you have been in there and you have been doing it, that piece of paper is not going to make any difference. If anything, the classes might bring you up to date on something's that are going on. I think that the true education is the experience, you can get it out of a book or a classroom, you have to be in there and doing it. I think that you have some people who are fifty or sixty years old, you have been doing this forever. To ask them to get a degree now, I think honestly, would be a waste of time and money. If they have shown that they are capable, I think that they should be more able to teach. Participant 3, Center 3, H L) February, 2007.

I agree that it is about time that education is being recognized, that preschool teachers need it. I don't agree that, I think there should be a "grandfather clause" somehow, that states that these people who have been in childcare for twenty years, that they have earned, some sort of respect that they don't have to go through the whole training processes again. I think it is very important for teachers to know what they are teaching and why, but there are some people out there that are just nurturing people and they don't need to go through all the training. I understand why they are upping the standards, but how are they going to pay for it? If I am going to college for a four year degree, it is sure not going to be in daycare. How can you pay the teacher more money, if you can't ask the parents for more money, because the parents are just barely making as it is. It is a real frustrating thing. Where is the funding for it? (Participant 49, Center 12, H H) June, 2007.

I am not surprised by the concerns of the participants. These same concerns are documented by other researchers involved in similar studies such as mine (Washington, 2008; Whitebook, et.al, 2009; Whitebook, et.al, 2010). The literature on adult learners, as well as that concerning non-traditional and returning students, gives useful insights as to why returning to higher education may seem insurmountable to some early-care and education professionals. A great majority of early-care and education teachers are women and many are over the age of 25, classifying them as "adult learners" or "non-traditional students" (National Association of Childcare Resource and Referral Agency, 2011). Many non-traditional students are also "first-generation students" who are the first in their families to attend college (Giancola, Munz & Trares, 2008).

Adult learners or non-traditional students are usually part-time undergraduate students, who, in addition to working full time, have dependents, are financially independent and have the responsibility of their homes (Garavusco, 2007; Giancola, Munz & Trares, 2008; Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002). They

represent approximately 40% of students attending community colleges (National Association of Childcare Resource and Referral Agency, 2010). Non-traditional adult students have been found to have more intrinsic motivation for coursework. These students seem to have an interest in learning for learning's sake and see higher education for self-improvement and personal growth, as compared to traditional age students, ages 18-25, who are more interested in starting their careers and who view higher education as a means toward obtaining that goal (Bye, Pushkar & Conway, 2007; Carney-Compton & Tan, 2002; Karsworm, 2005).

Since approximately 46% of early-care and education teachers have had at least "some college" (National Association of Childcare Resource and Referral Agency, 2011), it implies that they "stopped out" before completing their degree. Typically, women students stop out for a number of reasons, including family commitments, finances or time and work commitments (Dayton, 2005; Plageman & Sabina, 2010). The timing of re-entry to college has been found to be related to family needs, in Plageman & Sabina's (2010) study of undergraduate female students. Various other factors can also influence the re-entry. Family support is especially important to Hispanic students, whereas having a family of origin with strong academic emphasis was most important for African-American women who sought higher education. They also found that having the emotional support of significant others, having financial assistance and feeling that their significant other was proud of them was also important, especially in persistence to stay in school to complete their degree.

The factors of emotional support, acceptance, encouragement, praise and institutional support, which includes financial support, assistance with childcare and household chores, were also found to be very important in an adult's decision to return to school (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002).. The most recent research studies that specifically looked at the motivation of early-care and education professionals, relative to returning to post-secondary education, was Washington (2008) and Whitebook, et.al , 2009; Whitebook, et.al,2010). These researchers propose that early-care and education professionals must see a higher level of education as relevant to their current role in the classroom.

On the *Teacher Demographic Questionnaire*, Question 11, the participants responded to the following statement: “Experienced teachers should be expected to obtain a degree.” This statement was similar to *Question 10, from Interview One*. My findings divulge that 28% (N=15) of the participants agree that experienced early-care and education teachers should be expected to return to college/university to earn a post-secondary degree. However, 11% (N=6) of the participants disagree. It surprises me that participants who themselves held a Bachelor degree supported early-care and education professionals who do not have a post-secondary degree. It has always been my assumption that those with a degree would be a “gatekeeper.” I propose that because many of the Bachelor degree participants lack experience in the field of early care and education, working with those who do have experience, but lack a degree is not an issue. I also put forward that the field of early care and education often hires professionals with a Bachelor in Elementary Education. These professionals often feel overwhelmed in the classroom due to their lack of knowledge and experience with young children birth through five years.

I then decide to view the above responses within the assigned categories found in Table 32. Of the 54 participant N=15 agree and N=6 disagree. I was interested in knowing how the remaining (N=33) participants felt about this issue. Fifteen participants somewhat agree and N=18 somewhat disagree. The following data represents the Education/Experience category these participants represent. For the participants that agree N=9 were from the Low Education/Low Experience category, N=1 are from the Low Education/High Experience category, N=4 are from the High education/Low Experience category and N=1 is from the High Education/High Experience category. The representation for those who disagree is as follows, N=3 were from the Low Education/Low Experience group and N=1 represented each of the remaining groups.

I wanted to learn, who the participants were that kept to the “middle of the road” and somewhat agreed/disagreed. I found that for those who somewhat agree, N=7 participants represented the Low Education/Low Experience group, N=4 represented the Low Education/High Experience group and N=4 represented the High Education/Low Experience group. There was not representation from the High

Education/High Experience group. The participants who somewhat disagree, N=8 were from the Low Education/Low Experience group, N=3 were from the Low Education/High Experience group, N=6 were from the High Education/Low Experience group and N=1 was from the High Education/High Experience group.

After compiling the above results I scrutinized what variable(s) possibly influenced the participants' responses. I turned to *Question Ten Interview One* and examine the participants' quotes. From their quotes, I again noticed that they have concerns such as family obligations, financial constraints, staff retention, salaries, age of the professional currently working within the field and most notably, longevity within the field of early-care and education. The participants suggested that these issues hinder a teacher from obtaining a post-secondary degree.

Suggestions to alleviate this growing concern, relative to longevity or years of experience within the field of early-care and education, are provided by some of the participants. They suggest that universities/colleges should accept experience as college credit. They feel that the director of the early-care and education program in which they work, would document this through annual performance evaluations, a record of the teacher's professional development hours and a letter of reference indicating what the director has observed regarding the experience of the early-care and education teacher. The following comment regarding using "life experience" for credit in higher education, is consistent with the comments of some of the other participants in my study.

I think if someone were to decide to go back and get their degree in Education and they have been teaching in a daycare setting for a number of years, yes I think it should count towards their senior year of student teaching. Life experience is important, since you have already done it, what is the point of doing it again? Give them the credit (Participant 29, Center 7, H H) April 2007.

In light of their responses, I did ask the following question "What measures could be used to ensure that an experienced early-care and education teacher demonstrates high quality teaching practices within their classrooms?" The following quotes are a sample of the responses from all of the participants.

Well, really feel that everyone should have that opportunity. I mean, if it is testing out type of thing, and even if you have a year's worth of experience somewhere, you may have learned a lot in that year. You may have had a mentor who really brought a lot to the table, that you really learned a lot. So why not be able to test out (Participant 9, Center 1, L H) January 2007

Could we test people, could we show people how they are placed, say on a graph, how they are placed, based on their testing as to what they know. How they would handle situations, what do they look for if there is a child in need of extra help. How do they recognized that, how do they see that? I know when you are in school, you learn that, you are taught that. Maybe some sort of a test out, to see where you actually lie. Then you can show t that to that person, and say: "Look these are your strong points and these are your weak points, maybe some classes taken in this would mesh the two together and would give you an Associate's degree? For me, I am in this because I love what I do. I love being with children, I love watching them grow. I am always looking for new ways to help those children progress. As long as I can keep finding those things, I am going to training; I know you have to have a certain amount of hours of training. I never look at the amount of hours. I always go beyond that I am always looking for new things. The only thing I can say, look at what you have, look at a person's experience, look at a person in general. Come and view that person in a classroom maybe that would make a difference. I don't know. Maybe there should be a time-span, anyone with ten years and under, maybe they don't have the kind of experience as someone with ten years and over, those people have been doing it for so long, they have seen so much. Maybe that is a starting point. Test the people with a lot of years see what they know. (Participant 39, Center 11, L H) June, 2007

As seen in the participant comments above, "testing out" is suggested as a way of validating experience within the field. At this time there is little mention in current literature that would support this premise of "testing out." However, the bottom line is that early-care and education professionals value their experience and frequently state that they want to work with young children birth to age five years. This is a choice and not what they have to do, because of their lack of education.

### **Strengths of the Study**

I believe that the greatest strength of the study is the large sample size (N=55) and my use of multiple data sources. The participants are able to respond to my research questions by expressing their perceptions, verbally, through the two interviews per 55 participants. In addition, they are also able to provide written comments through the use of the *Teacher Demographic Questionnaire*, the *Teacher*

*Practices Questionnaire* and the *Reflective Journals*. In this natural context, I was able to not only hear the “voices” of the participants, but read their reflective thoughts. It is my contention that by using multiple data sources, I gained a deeper insight, relative to the perceptions of the participants in my study. I also formulated assertions that not only represent the participants’ perceptions, but also support the assertions made by researchers and other prominent professionals in the field of early-care and education.

The participants themselves are the second strength of the study. All of the participants completed both of the questionnaires within the time limit I had provided. They openly shared their thoughts and perceptions during both of the interviews and were eager to participate in my research study. This is significant, because the only time that was convenient for us to meet for the interviews was during naptime. Normally, this is the time when early-care and education teachers work on lesson planning, changes within the classroom environment and take a lunch break.

Finally, the contribution to the existing early-care and education literature is my third strength. In many ways, my findings mirror previous research that has been done. My research reflects demographics of the early-care and education professional population, such as experience within the field, as well as the level of educational attainment. This directly corresponds with research that indicates that education and retention as being the two most critical variables that greatly impact the establishment and maintenance of high quality programming (Barnett, 2010; Goble Goffin, 2010; Moran, & Horm, 2009; McMullen & Alat, 2002). On the other hand, my research study exposes how passionate the participants are about longevity or their years of experience in the field of early care and education. My research study demonstrates that if early care and education professionals are expected to obtain a post-secondary degree, higher education institutions need to provide degree programs that specifically focus on young children birth through age five. Many of my participants would be non-traditional age students. Current research names funding and time as the top issues indicated by early-care and education professionals across the country, as to why they have to leave college or do not begin in the first place (Barnett, 2003; Bechtold, Peters & Huss-Keeler, 2011; Dukakis, Bellem, Seer, & Lee, 2007; Whitebook, Gomby, Bellm, Sakai, & Kipnis, 2009a;

Whitebook, Gomby, Bellm, Sakai, & Kipnis, 2009b). If this is the case, more needs to be done at colleges/universities to help with these hurdles.

Another connection between my study and the current literature is the idea that seasoned early-care and education teachers have made early-care and education their career choice.

Torquti, Raikes and Huddleston-Casas' (2007) conducted a study of childcare providers in the Midwest, and found that teacher motivation for the early-care and education profession, significantly predicted intention to stay in the profession. The participants' long-term work in the field of early-care and education, points to their commitment to the field. This is important for providing young children and families with a stable teaching staff.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The significant limitation in my research study is diversity in gender ethnicity and educational attainment level. Diversity in gender and race and ethnicity continues to be an issue in early-care and education. While more men are choosing to be early-care and education providers, the field is still dominated by women. The participants in my study are overwhelmingly women (n=54), with only one male participant.

The second limitation of my study is in the development of the *Teacher Demographic Questionnaire*. My participants represent a diverse group of professionals, primarily the African-American, Hispanic and Caucasian ethnic groups. The centers in which my participants worked are also diverse representing urban, suburban and rural areas. This assures me that my study could possibly be generalized across the field of early-care and education, irrespective of the geographical setting. However, when analyzing the data from the *Teacher Demographic Questionnaire*, I realize that I had omitted asking for a response relative to their ethnic identity.

Thus, I was not able to look for any connection between the responses of the participants and their ethnicity.

The third limitation is that my research study had a large number of participants who identified with the Low Education category (N=37) which included High School Diploma, Child Development Accreditation, Associate in Applied Science (Child Development) and other non-education related degrees and certificates. However, only 18 participants held a Bachelor or a Master Degree and represented the High Education category. Of the 18 participants 3 held a BA/BS in Early Childhood Education, 12 participants held a BA/BS in Elementary Education and 3 held a Masters in Education. While my research participants reflect the current field of early-care and education, having unequal groupings, especially in the area of educational attainment, made it difficult for me to analyze my third research question.

In addition, a limitation concerns the interview questions. While I know it is necessary to have the interview questions in place at the beginning of the study, consideration needs to be given to asking additional questions based on the participant responses from the questionnaires. There were several instances, during my analysis of the data when having verbal responses would have provided a more complete picture of the participants' beliefs. Questionnaire item responses concerning school readiness for instance would have benefited from follow-up probes.

### **Implications for the Practice**

From the results of this research study along with the extant early-care and education literature I offer the following implications for practice. The first implication is based on the existing beliefs systems, perceptions and self- efficacy of the early-care and education teachers who are in the classroom every day. While the *National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Early Childhood Standards*, individual state early childhood standards and quality improvement systems such as *Pennsylvania Keystone STARS*, provide the goals and benchmarks in achieving and maintaining high

quality early-care and education programming, this is not enough. As research has clearly demonstrated, the “teacher” plays a critical role in high quality programming. This goes far beyond what standards and quality improvement programs are able to do, through monitoring. The “teacher” needs to understand the importance of high quality programming for young children, as well as be able to describe what high quality programming practices look like. However, this is still not enough. Researchers have clearly indicated that early-care and education teachers must have in place a belief system that supports high quality programming for young children before high quality programming and teaching practices can ever be realized in the classroom (Brousseau, Book, & Byers, 1998; Cassidy, Pugh-Hoese & Russell, 1995; File, & Gullo, 2002; Kagen, 1992; Kagen & Smith, 1988; McMullen, 2003; Vartuli, 2005).

Secondly, higher education must provide degree programs that focus only on young children, birth through five years. The courses must be tailored for those who currently work, or have an interest in working with young children, of this age. Along with relevant Early Childhood Education coursework geared to young children birth through age five years, these courses need to be taught by qualified, professional faculty members who have had experience teaching young children birth through age five years. Early-care and education professionals and the children they currently teach and will teach in the future will certainly be the beneficiaries. It is then possible for the early-care and education programs and the children in them, to reap the full benefits of a high quality early-care and educational experience.

Lastly, if early-care and education professionals are expected to obtain a post-secondary degree, funding needs to be available to support their endeavors. Early-care and education is supported by professionals working at minimum or close to minimum wages. It is impossible for these professionals to find the funding for a post-secondary degree. In fact, currently professionals in the field of early-care and education do not even have the opportunity to have school loan forgiveness, a program that was available in the past, but now has been discontinued.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

It is my desire to see the findings from my research study used in future research and policy and practice. With respect to policy and practice, most recently, I personally have been able to use the findings from my research to implement and grow a new Bachelor of Applied Science Degree program at a university in Texas. With lower state licensing standards, minimal education requirements and high staff turnover, locating high quality early-care and educational programming is very challenging for parents in Texas (Texas Department of Family and Protective Services 2009). Coupled with the fact that early-care and education teachers lack professional status and are often referred to as caregivers, or daycare workers, it is my hope that through this new Bachelor Degree program early-care and education teachers will indeed begin to see themselves as professionals and that they are pivotal in the establishment and maintenance of high quality programming for young children.

However, a significant area that still needs to be addressed in research is in motivating early-care and education professionals to return to higher education and obtain a degree. This research should look at the establishment of degree programs that focus on young children birth through age five years, as well as recruitment for and retention within these degree programs.

More focus needs to be placed on the education of the directors of programs for young children.

Additionally, early-care and education directors need to continually motivate their staffs to go on for higher education, by supporting them and helping them see the personal and professional benefits of higher education as well as obtaining a post-secondary degree themselves.

I also propose that researchers need to examine more closely the concerns that early-care and education professionals have regarding their years of experience in the field. The participants in my research study suggested possible methods that can be used at colleges/universities to include the experience of these professionals into the degree program. I would suggest that researchers need to look at field placements, practicum and internship experiences that are required at colleges/universities. This

will signify to the profession as well as those currently working in the field, that their experience is valuable and an asset in obtaining a post-secondary degree.

To summarize the data uncovered a number of findings. First, through the early-care and education teachers' descriptions of high quality programming, I was able to uncover the following themes: a) child-centered programming, b) parental involvement, c) teamwork within the center, d) environment, e) curriculum as well as the f) education and the g) experience of the teacher. Secondly, the teaching practices identified by my participants as necessary in a high quality classroom, mirrored either structural or process quality.

However, my findings pertaining to the participants' educational level and years of experience often found in early-care and education were mixed. The majority of the participants did agree that some level of education is indicative of high quality programming and teaching practices. This education could be; a Child Development Accreditation Certificate (CDA), Associate in Applied Science/Child Development (AAS) or Bachelor (BA/BS). Conversely, the participants did indicate that the focus of the degree program should be Early Childhood Education, with the focus on young children birth through age five years.

My findings, with respect to longevity or years of experience within the field of early-care and education, were that the participants view their years within the field as highly important. The participants indicated that longevity should be positively recognized and validated at institutions of higher education.

To sum up, the data supported the contention that it is a combination of education and experience that influence the participants' descriptions of high quality programming and teaching practices. This is important, in that the field of early-care and education is on the right track regarding their expectation that non-degreed professionals should obtain a post-secondary degree. However, I do believe that my research study does shine a light on longevity within the field. It is my hope that my research will motivate colleges/universities to consider developing degree programs that focus on young children birth

through age five years. In designing these programs, my study is relevant in the development of curricula such as field experience, practicum's and internship courses. Field experience, practicum and internships should reflect an extension of the early-care and education teacher's existing experience. These students should take a role in deciding their placement and planning what knowledge and skill goals they will accomplish through the field experience, practicum or internship. My study is also relevant for the professors/instructors who may have students such as the participants in my study in their classroom. Time should be given in each class for the students such as the participants in my study to share their knowledge and expertise gained through their years of experience in the field of early-care and education. Professors/instructors should design their course content as a collaborative effort, *i.e.* the professor/instructor provides the theory, research and "reasons" and the students provide the practical application.

In conclusion, I truly believe that my research study acknowledges the contention that high quality early-care and education programming is crucial for young children birth through age five years. In my research study I provided the platform for early-care and education professionals to "voice" their perceptions and beliefs as to what high quality programming and teaching practice should look like. I believe that if the findings from this study are considered by the early-care and education profession, that it can only enhance the educational experiences of young children and their families. Thus supporting the belief of many, that if our children are to compete later, in a technologically advanced and global society, they must be provided with the very best early-care and education, possible-now!

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**Appendix A**  
**Participant Demographics**

Participant	Center	Age	Education	Experience	Education/Experience Level
1	1	41-45	HD	10	LL
2	1	18-25	BA/BS EE	2	HL
3	1	46-50	CDA	10	LL
4	1	31-35	O	8	LL
5	1	41-45	HD	12	LH
6	1	31-35	BA/BS EE	7	HL
7	1	18-25	HD	5	LL
8	1	31-35	BA/BS EE	10	HL
9	1	55-60	CDA	35	LH
10	2	26-30	AAS	6	LL
11	2	31-35	AAS	15	LH
12	3	55-60	HD	15	LH
13	3	18-25	BA/BS ECE	2	HL
14	3	36-40	BA/BS EE	12	HH
15	3	18-25	AAS	1	LL
16	3	51-54	BA/BS EE	3	HL
17	4	26-30	AAS	4	LL
18	4	36-40	AAS	1	LL
19	4	26-30	AAS	7	LL
20	5	41-45	HD	20	LH
21	5	41-45	BA/BS EE	6	HL
22	5	36-40	M.ED	10	HL
23	5	36-40	HD	1	LL
24	6	18-25	AAS	2	LL
25	6	18-25	BA/BS EE	1	HL
26	6	26-30	AAS	12	LH
27	6	26-30	HD	3	LL
28	7	46-50	AAS	18	LH
29	7	31-35	BA/BS EE	18	HH
30	8	36-40	AAS	20	LH
31	8	36-40	CDA	5	LL
32	9	41-45	BA/BS EE	5	HL
33	9	36-40	AAS	21	LH
34	10	41-45	BA/BS ECE	23	HH
35	10	26-30	HD	6	LL
36	11	18-25	HD	1	LL
37	11	31-35	BA/BS ECE	10	HL
38	11	65+	HD	14	LH
39	11	55-60	CDA	22	LH
40	11	61-65	HD	8	LL
41	11	26-30	BA/BS EE	2	HL
42	11	18-25	AAS	7	LL
43	11	18-25	BA/BS EE	2	HL
44	11	51-54	O	8	LL

45	11	51-54	HD	7	LL
46	11	18-25	HD	2	LL
47	11	18-25	HD	1	LL
48	11	26-30	HD	3	LL
49	12	41-45	BA/BS EE	19	HH
50	12	46-50	O	12	LH
51	12	26-30	AAS	11	LH
52	13	51-54	HD	20	LH
53	13	55-60	M.ED	13	HH
54	14	18-25	AAS	4	LL
55	14	18-25	BA/BS EE	3	HL

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*Education Level Key*

HD=High School Diploma/GED

CDA=Child Development Accreditation

O= Technical Certificates

AAS= Associate of Applied Science in ECE

BA/BS EE= Bachelor Elementary Education

BA/BS ECE=Bachelor Early Childhood Education

M.ED=Masters in Education

## Appendix B

### Participant Recruitment Initial Letter

September 1, 2006

Dear Colleague:

I was an Assistant Education supervisor with the Lancaster County Head Start Program for 15 years and am presently a doctoral student at The Pennsylvania State University. My focus area is Early Childhood Education. I am now at the research level of my doctoral program and am presently recruiting participants for my research study.

I am interested in researching the relationship between teacher practices, education, and the experience of childcare staff. Classroom teachers are consistently identified as one of the most important influences on quality education for young children. Childcare centers provide an ideal place to gather data for my research study; and I would like to invite you and your teachers to collaborate with me on this important research project.

My research will focus on teachers who work with three, four, and five year old children. I recognize that your time and the teacher's time is valuable, and anticipate that the amount of time needed for participation will be no more than an hour and a half. My study will include two short questionnaires (i.e. 15 minutes for each questionnaire), two teacher interviews (i.e. 30 minutes for each interview), and classroom observations. Teachers will have the option to withdraw from the study if necessary, and no identifying information will be collected.

I believe that this project could be influential in how teacher education programs, specifically those involving in-service childcare teachers design their coursework and field experiences. I look forward to collaborating with you and your teachers.

Sincerely,

Joy Marie Bechtold

[jmb705@psu.edu](mailto:jmb705@psu.edu)

717-330-3705

Please complete the following and return in the self-addressed stamped envelope:

\_\_\_\_\_ My center is willing to participate in the research study

\_\_\_\_\_ My center is unable to participate in the research study

\_\_\_\_\_

Center name and address

\_\_\_\_\_ Director/Assistant

Director Signature

\_\_\_\_\_

Phone number and e-mail address

## Appendix C

### Participant Recruitment Follow-up Letter

October 1, 2006

Dear Colleague:

A few weeks ago, I sent you the enclosed informational letter and self-addressed stamped envelope regarding my research study. I am presently recruiting childcare centers located in Lancaster County and would be pleased if the teachers of your center would agree to participate. As noted in my previous letter, the time involved for the participants will be minimal and I am willing to work within the schedules of the teachers.

Please take a moment to fill out the form at the bottom of the enclosed letter, and thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Joy Marie Bechtold  
543 Hand Ave.  
Lancaster, Pa. 17602  
717-330-3705  
jmb705@psu.edu

## Appendix D

### Participant Consent Form

The Pennsylvania State University

**Title of Project: Teachers' Perceptions of Quality of Early-care and education in Relation to Teachers' Education/Experience and Practices**

**Principal Investigator: Joy Marie Bechtold**

207 B Garban Hall

University Park, Pa. 16802

[jmb705@psu.edu](mailto:jmb705@psu.edu)

717-330-3705

**Dissertation Advisor: Dr. James Johnson**

The Pennsylvania State University

145 Chambers Building

University Park, Pa. 16802

[jej4@psu.edu](mailto:jej4@psu.edu)

- 1. Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of this research study is to identify professional understanding and perception regarding quality early-care and educational experiences for young children in relation to teachers' educational attainment levels and/or experience.
- 2. Procedures to be followed:** You will be asked to complete two questionnaires (Demographic Questionnaire and Teacher Practices Questionnaire), participate in two 45-minute interviews, and complete a simple journal. The researcher will also be conducting classroom observations. The interviews will be audio-recorded. The procedure for the two interviews will be as follows:

- a. **Interview One:** During this interview you will be asked to define and describe your perceptions of quality early-care and education programming. You will also be asked to describe teacher practices that you currently use in your classroom. The interview will conclude with a discussion regarding your viewpoint of educational attainment (i.e. credentials and degree programs), educational workshops, and experience in the field.
  - b. **Classroom Observations:** After the first interview, the researcher will be conducting classroom observations. The focus of these observations will be to identify the teacher practices used in your classroom.
  - c. **Interview Two:** The purpose of this interview will be to discuss the practices used in your classroom that were identified during the classroom observations. You will be asked to elaborate regarding these practices, and reflect on when and why you incorporated these practices into your classroom.
- 3. Discomforts and Risks:** There are no risks in participating in this research study beyond those experienced in everyday life.
- 4. Duration:** Participation in this research study will consist of two interviews of one hour each and at least two one-hour classroom observations (additional classroom observations may be needed based on the uniqueness of each observed classroom), and maintaining a simple journal. Journal documentation should take no longer than a half hour daily for five days.
- 5. Benefits of Participating in this study:** This research project could be influential in how teacher education programs, specifically those involving in-service childcare teachers design their coursework and field experiences. The research study may also help inform teacher education programs regarding the importance of previous education and experience of childcare in-service teachers who are presently returning to higher education and are enrolled in degree programs.
- 6. Statement of Confidentiality:** Your participation in this research study is confidential. The questionnaires, audiotapes, and data transcripts will be stored in a locked cabinet, and will be accessible only to the researcher. The Pennsylvania State University Office for Research Protections, the Social Science Institutional Review Board, and the Office for Human Research Protections in the Department of Health and Human Services may review records related to this project. In the event of

a publication or presentation resulting from this research study, no personally identifiable information will be shared.

**7. Compensation:** Your participation is voluntary and compensation will not be provided.

**8. Voluntary Participation:** Participation in this research study is strictly voluntary. You can refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer or withdraw from the research study at any time. Refusing to participate or withdrawing early from the study will involve no penalty or loss of benefits you would be entitled to otherwise.

**9. Permission for audio/video recording:**

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not give permission for my recordings to be archived for future research projects. I understand the tapes will be destroyed on September 2008.

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not give permission for my recordings to be archived for educational and training purposes. I understand the tapes will be destroyed on September 2008.

\_\_\_\_\_ I give permission for my recordings to be archived for use in future research projects in the area of Early-care and education.

\_\_\_\_\_ I give permission for my recordings to be archived for use educational and training purposes.

**10.** You must be 18 years of age or older to consent to participate in this research study. If you agree to take part in this research study and the information outlined above, please sign and date below. You will be given a copy of your signed consent form for your records.

\_\_\_\_\_

Participant Signature

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

---

Person Obtaining Consent

Date

You can ask questions about this research study. Please feel free to contact Joy Marie Bechtold (717) 330-3705 with questions. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or you have concerns or general questions about the research, please contact The Pennsylvania State University's Office for Research Protections at (814) 865-1775.

## **Appendix E**

### **Meeting Agenda**

#### Meeting Agenda

- 1) Research Introduction
  - a) Teachers' Perceptions of Quality of Early-care and education in Relation to Teachers' Education/Experience and Practices
  - b) Projected outcomes
  
- 2) Research Timeline (January-August 2007)
  - a) Consent form
  - b) Demographic Questionnaire
  - c) Teacher Practice Questionnaire
  - d) Interview One
  - e) Observation
  - f) Informal Journal
  - g) Interview Two
  
- 3) Participant Expectations
  - a) No preparation is required of the participant
  - b) Complete two questionnaires (should only take 15-30 minutes)
  - c) Two 45 minute interviews
  - d) At least one or two classroom observations
  - e) Journal documentation for five consecutive days
    - 1) Simple statement documenting a teaching practice/practices used that day that were successful
    - 2) Simple statement documenting a teaching practice/practices used that day that were not successful
- 4) Contact Information

Joy Marie Bechtold

The Pennsylvania State University

207 B Garban Hall

University Park, Pa. 16802

717-330-3705

## Appendix F

### Teacher Demographic Questionnaire

#### Teacher Demographic Questionnaire

The purpose of this questionnaire is to gain an insight regarding the perceptions of teachers relative to young children and quality childcare. Please circle the answer to each question that best describes your perceptions. The last two questions are for demographic purposes.

4= agree    3=somewhat agree    2=somewhat disagree    1=disagree

#### Part A

- |  |               |
|--|---------------|
| 1. Quality childcare programming is important for young children.  | 4   3   2   1 |
| 2. The quality of childcare influences the learning of young children.   | 4   3   2   1 |
| 3. Young children are more ready for kindergarten if they attend a quality childcare program.                                      | 4   3   2   1 |
| 4. The classroom teacher is the person most responsible for implementing quality childcare programming for young children.         | 4   3   2   1 |
| 5. Teacher education is imperative in ensuring quality childcare programming.  | 4   3   2   1 |
| 6. Teachers should be aware of the current research within Early Childhood Education.  | 4   3   2   1 |
| 7. Teachers in childcare should be considered as professional as their colleagues in K-12  | 4   3   2   1 |
| 8. Early childhood education is as important for success in later life as all other education.                                     | 4   3   2   1 |
| 9. Teachers' acquisition of a degree professionalizes the field of Early Childhood Education (i.e. CDA, Associates, Bachelors/ECE) | 4   3   2   1 |
| 10. The experience of teachers is sufficient to ensure quality childcare programming.  | 4   3   2   1 |
| 11. Experienced teachers should be expected to obtain a degree (i.e. CDA, Associates, Bachelors) if they don't already have one.   | 4   3   2   1 |

12. The director of a childcare program is more responsible for ensuring classroom quality than the classroom teacher. 4 3 2 1
13. Society does not identify teachers who work in childcare as professionals. 4 3 2 1
4. Collaboration between early childhood teachers and elementary teachers will ensure seamless educational experiences for young children. 4 3 2 1
15. Research and theory in child development influences the practices of teachers. 4 3 2 1

### Part B

The following questions relate to your experience within the field of childcare:

1. How long have you worked in childcare? \_\_\_\_\_
2. How long have you worked at your present childcare site? \_\_\_\_\_
3. How long have you worked in your present position? \_\_\_\_\_
4. How long has it been since you attained your current highest level of education as marked on item 2 below? \_\_\_\_\_

2. Please circle your highest educational level:

GED/High School Diploma

Child Development Associates (CDA)

Associates Degree/Early Childhood Education

Bachelors Degree

Bachelors Degree/Early Childhood Education

Masters Degree/Early Childhood Education

Other \_\_\_\_\_

How many hours of educational workshops did you attend in the past year? \_\_\_\_\_

How many hours of educational workshops did you attend in the past two years? \_\_\_\_\_

Are you a parent? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Did you have younger siblings growing up? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

. Please indicate your age:

a. 18-25 \_\_\_\_\_

b. 26-30 \_\_\_\_\_

c. 31-35 \_\_\_\_\_

d. 36-40 \_\_\_\_\_

e. 41-45 \_\_\_\_\_

f. 46-50 \_\_\_\_\_

g. 51-54 \_\_\_\_\_

h. 55-60 \_\_\_\_\_

i. 61-65 \_\_\_\_\_

j. 65 and above \_\_\_\_\_

Please identify your self-perceived teaching strength:

Please identify your self-perceived teaching weakness:

Do you plan to continue working in childcare? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

How long: 2 years \_\_\_\_\_

5 years \_\_\_\_\_

10 years \_\_\_\_\_

More than 10 years \_\_\_\_\_

If you are planning to leave childcare what are your future plans?

Please indicate all that apply as your reasons for leaving childcare:

a. wages \_\_\_\_\_

b. working conditions \_\_\_\_\_

c. lack of staff development \_\_\_\_\_

d. staff benefits \_\_\_\_\_

e. lack of support from parents \_\_\_\_\_

f. lack of support from director/supervisor \_\_\_\_\_

g. lack of support from other teaching staff \_\_\_\_\_

h. lack of teaching resources within the childcare center \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix G

### Teacher Practice Questionnaire

#### Teacher Practices Questionnaire

The purpose of this questionnaire is to gain an insight of the perceptions of childcare teachers regarding classroom/teacher practices. When answering this questionnaire please consider young children as three to five year olds. Please circle the answer to each question that best describes your perceptions

4=very important    3=somewhat important    2=somewhat unimportant    1=not important at all

- |  |               |
|--|---------------|
| 1. Teachers' planning innovative activities that will challenge young children to try new experiences.           | 4   3   2   1 |
| 2. Teachers' making available a variety of activities during free play.  | 4   3   2   1 |
| 3. Teachers' determining the choices children make during free play.   | 4   3   2   1 |
| 4. Teachers' providing resources and activities that promote cultural and diversity awareness in young children. | 4   3   2   1 |
| 5. Teachers' providing a literacy-enriched classroom environment.  | 4   3   2   1 |
| 6. Other teachers as role models influence the practices of teachers.  | 4   3   2   1 |
| 7. Teachers' using teaching practices that support the individual developmental levels of young children.        | 4   3   2   1 |
| 8. Teachers' providing daily writing experiences.  | 4   3   2   1 |
| 9 All children need to remain in group-time.   | 4   3   2   1 |
| 10. Writing or pretend writing ( invented spelling or drawing) should be included in all learning centers.       | 4   3   2   1 |
| 11. Books and other printed materials should be included only in the book corner/area.                           | 4   3   2   1 |
| 12. Teachers should not talk with young children about their play?   | 4   3   2   1 |
| 13. Teachers' planning should reflect whole group instead of individualization.                                  | 4   3   2   1 |

- |  |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|
| 14. Teachers' always show children the appropriate way to use play materials.                                      | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 15. Teachers' plan daily numeracy experiences for young children.  | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 16. Communication with teachers and peers enhances language development in young children.                         | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 17. Teachers' directing all learning activities of young children.   | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 18. When a child takes a toy from another child, teachers' should always become involved.                          | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 19. Teachers' sharing learning activities and experiences occurring within the classroom with the parents.         | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 20. Teachers' do not need to play with young children.   | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 21. Teachers providing art experiences that focus on product.  | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 22. Teachers' involving young children in daily creative activities (i.e. music, movement, art, and dramatic play. | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 23. Teachers use open-ended questions to enhance the learning of young children.                                   | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 24. Teachers' should correct grammar rather than restate the comment made by the child.                            | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 25. Research and theory in child development influences the practices of teachers.                                 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 26. Teachers' are the most important influence in the lives of young children.                                     | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 27. Planned gross motor activities both indoors and outdoors should be offered to young children everyday.         | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 28. Teachers' are only responsible to maintain safety during playground time.                                      | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 29. Parent-teacher collaborations enhance the learning experiences of young children.                              | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 30. Teacher observations are not important in the planning for young children.                                     | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

## **Appendix H**

### **Reflective Journal Guidelines**

Dear Participant:

I would like to thank you again for your participation in my research study. The time you have feely donated towards this project is deeply appreciated. Your input throughout this research study will give voice to childcare professionals who work diligently to provide excellent care and education for young children.

The journal is the fourth phase in my research study. Directions for the journal are as follows:

- Please make entries in your journal for five consecutive days
- Please date each entry
- Please indicate teacher practices that you used throughout the day that you felt were successful or positive
- Please indicate teacher practices that you used throughout the day that you felt did not produce positive results and/or practices that you used that you wished you did not use

## **Appendix I**

### **Structural and Process Quality Statements**

#### **Structural Quality Statements:**

1. Teachers' planning innovative activities that will challenge young children to try new experiences
2. Teachers' making available a variety of activities during free play.
  
4. Teachers' providing resources and activities that promote cultural and diversity awareness in young children.
  
5. Teachers' providing a literacy-enriched classroom environment.
  
8. Teachers' providing daily writing experiences.
  
9. All children need to remain in group-time.
  
10. Writing or pretend writing (invented spelling or drawing) should be included in all learning centers.
  
11. Books and other printed materials should be included only in the book corner/area.
  
13. Teachers' planning should reflect whole group instead of individualization.
  
15. Teachers' plan daily numeracy experiences for young children.
  
21. Teachers providing art experiences that focus on product.
  
25. Research and theory in child development influences the practices of teachers.
  
27. Planned gross motor activities both indoors and outdoors should be offered to young children everyday.
  
28. Teachers' are only responsible to maintain safety during playground time.
  
30. Teacher observations are not important in the planning for young children.

#### **Process Quality Statements**

3. Teachers' determining the choices children make during free play.
  
6. Other teachers as role models influence the practices of teachers.
  
7. Teachers' using teaching practices that support the individual developmental levels of young children.
  
12. Teachers should not talk with young children about their play.
  
14. Teachers' always show children the appropriate way to use play materials.
  
16. Communication with teachers and peers enhances language development in young children.

17. Teachers' directing all learning activities of young children.
18. When a child takes a toy from another child, teachers' should always become involved.
19. Teachers' sharing learning activities and experiences occurring within the classroom with the parents.
20. Teachers' do not need to play with young children.
22. Teachers' involving young children in daily creative activities (i.e. music, movement, art, and dramatic play).
23. Teachers use open-ended questions to enhance the learning of young children.
24. Teachers' should correct grammar rather than restate the comment made by the child.
26. Teachers' are the most important influence in the lives of young children.
29. Parent-teacher collaborations enhance the learning experiences of young children.

**Curriculum Vitae**  
**Joy Marie Bechtold**  
**2892 Milano Lane**  
**League City, Texas 77573**  
**bechtold@uhcl.edu**

**Education**

The Pennsylvania State University-University Park, Pennsylvania  
 Ph.D Curriculum and Instruction

Millersville State University-Millersville, Pennsylvania  
 M.ED Elementary Education

Southeastern University-Lakeland, Florida  
 BA Elementary Education/Early Childhood

**Experience**

University of Houston-Clear Lake- Houston, Texas  
 Assistant Professor Early Childhood Education

Bloomsburg State University-Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania  
 Assistant Professor Early Childhood Education

**Grants**

Early Childhood Education Program-to Program Articulation Project  
 Bloomsburg State University

**Publications**

Bechtold, J., Huss-Keeler, R., Kirkwood, D. & Peters, M. (2010). University of Houston Clear Lake.

Technical Report Collaborative for Children. Houston Texas

Bechtold, J., Peters, M. & Huss-Keeler, R. (2011). *The effects of returning to higher education from the perspective of early care and education professionals*. Paper Presentation, American Education

Research Association.

**Service**

The Association for the Study of Play-Board Member  
 College of the Mainland Advisory Committee-Chairperson  
 Academic Honesty Council-University of Houston-Clear Lake  
 Nominations and Elections Committee-University of Houston -Clear-Lake  
 Keystone STARS Advisory Committee