EDUCATING EARLY EDUCATORS: VOICES OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS PARTICIPATING IN FORMAL EDUCATION AS PART OF A STATEWIDE QUALITY RATING IMPROVEMENT SYSTEM

A Dissertation in
Curriculum and Instruction

by

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

December 2012
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ABSTRACT

Early childhood education has gained national attention as a tool for increasing outcomes and reducing risks for young children and their families. In an effort to ensure that early childhood programs are of high quality, many states are implementing systems that identify levels of criteria that denote excellence. Pennsylvania has adopted such a system, and one quality indicator relates to the educational qualifications of teachers in childcare settings. As a result, many Pennsylvania early childhood practitioners are enrolling in formal education programs. Although ongoing professional development and nontraditional students are not new phenomena, the circumstances surrounding early childhood teachers’ return to formal education are unique. This dissertation addresses the need for a qualitative inquiry of early childhood teachers’ experiences returning to school and how they make meaning of those experiences. Drawing on narrative inquiry, the study details the experiences of four early childhood practitioners who have recently completed or are currently pursuing further education in response to a state quality rating improvement initiative. Through semi-structured interviews, participants describe their life history, their experiences related to going back to school, and their efforts to piece together their personal, professional, and academic lives. Participant interviews were crafted into profiles that capture the uniqueness of each participant’s experience as well as highlight similar experiences among participants. Multiple analyses of the profiles yielded four themes evident in each participant’s discourse. Themes included TEACH funding, Exiting the field, Teacher education and quality teaching, and Appropriate coursework. An additional theme, Program difficulty, was limited to one participant’s experience but was significant enough to warrant inclusion in the write-up. Study results illustrate the perceived benefit of credentials as useful and relevant for early childhood teachers and administrators. Findings also indicate that participants find higher education coursework as less relevant to their roles and duties. Noteworthy are participants’ beliefs regarding the usefulness and relevancy of their courses. In the study, terms are not used interchangeably. However, the dialogue brings to light participants’ tension between the content
of coursework and the degree to which learners perceive it is applicable to their professional roles and responsibilities. Overall, formal education and training programs are found to be valuable for maintaining early childhood education’s status as a profession and for increasing the quality of young children’s everyday experiences. Discussion addresses participants’ individual and shared experiences in relationship to the larger context of early childhood teacher qualifications.
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Early Childhood Education as a Social, Moral, and Economic Focus

The field of early childhood education (ECE) has a rich history of providing settings and experiences that enrich the lives of young children and their families. From the charitable *Nursery School for the Children of Poor Women* in New York City in 1854—to the federally-sponsored daycare centers of 1939 during World War II that allowed women to work while men served in the armed forces—to the 1942 employer-sponsored 24 hour daycare on site at the Kaiser Shipyard in Portland—to the creation of Head Start in 1965, society has recognized either a practical need or a moral responsibility to care for and educate its youngest children.

The landmark success of the Perry Preschool Project (Barnett, 1985) and the Chicago Parent-Child Study (Reynolds, 2000) document that when children are enrolled in high-quality early childhood programs, there are both immediate and future benefits to children’s well-being and cognitive, language, social, and physical development. Researchers have evidenced that such programs prepare children to perform well in the early primary grades, reduce instances of grade retention, reduce the number of placements in special education classrooms, reduce the likelihood of incarceration, and increase the likelihood that the child will attend college, marry, own a home, and earn a live-able wage (Barnett, 1985; Campbell, Ramey, Pungello, Sparling & Miller-Johnson, 2002; Whitebook, 2003).

Regarded as perhaps the most meaningful and promising model of early childhood education is the longitudinal Abecedarian Project. Not only did this study document significant gains for children similar to those of the Perry Preschool and the Parent-Child Study, but there were meaningful benefits for their families as well. Fifteen years after children graduated from the Abecedarian Project, mothers of children who participated in the high-quality programming for five years had more education and higher-level jobs than those not in the treatment (Campbell et al., 2002).
Beyond the educational and social benefits imparted to children and families, high-quality early childhood education benefits communities economically (Warner & Liu, 2006). Not only does ECE undergird a community by allowing parents to work and by providing employment opportunities of its own, analysts view high-quality childcare as providing a high rate of return on investment (Rapson, 2003; Rolnick & Grunewald, 2003). Specifically, in Pennsylvania a 2007/2008 public sector study found that for every one dollar spent on state-sponsored early childhood programs as much as $2.17 was rolled back into the state’s economy (ECE multiplier, n.d.). Although at first glance this amount may not appear significant, when one considers the 2009/2010 state budget for early learning was just short of one million dollars (Investing in, 2009), the potential return is sizeable.

**Early Childhood Education as a Governmental Focus**

With all of these factors in mind, it is not surprising that ECE has steadily been gaining state and national attention by policy makers, child advocates, institutes of higher education, teachers, administrators, and families. In fact, concern for high quality ECE has received public attention at the highest political office, the White House. Just months after being elected, President Obama went on record with a commitment to young children as part of his education agenda. Since that now-famous speech in which he “committed to providing every child access to a complete and competitive education, from cradle through career” (Obama, 2009a, para. 14), early childhood education has been a more central focus of the federal administration.

The *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act* as well as the *Early Learning Challenge Fund* have invested billions of dollars in improving the quality of early childhood education. These funding streams have established systems at the state level that address standards, professional development, family engagement, curriculum and assessment and other issues (United States Department of Education, 2010b). Early childhood professionals appreciate these efforts but contend that much more funding is necessary for all programs to be of high quality.
Long before the White House joined the crusade for systematic improvement of the quality of ECE, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) developed a voluntary accreditation system. In existence since 1926, NAEYC introduced an accreditation program in 1985 that encourages childcare programs to participate in an in-depth, rigorous self-assessment of the program’s ability to meet ten standards related to programming and to meet specific educational qualifications for staff. This self-assessment is validated by a visit from a specially-trained assessor and includes classroom observations and document review. Successful completion of the self-assessment and validation visit results in receiving Accreditation, a nationally-recognized award for high quality. Over the years the standards and processes have gone through revisions reflecting new research. The most current version of NAEYC Accreditation was rolled out in 2006 and is by far the most rigorous set of standards. For example, the new standards include adult/child ratios lower than required by the state and require all teachers to hold a minimum of an Associate’s degree and at least 75% hold a Bachelor’s degree in an appropriate field (“All Criteria”, 2011). At least 50% of assistant teachers and teachers’ aides must hold a Child Development Associate (CDA) credential or equivalent, and 100% of those who do not must be enrolled and actively working toward earning a CDA or the equivalent (“All Criteria”, 2011).

Although NAEYC Accreditation is held by many ECE professionals as the gold star standard for quality, participation rates across the country are considerably low. In 2011, 10% of the childcare centers and one percent of the family childcare homes were nationally accredited (Child Care Aware, 2012). Reasons for lack of participation differ, but most reasons relate to three concerns. One, the process places extreme time demands on staff and administrators who are already over worked and under paid. Second, the out-of-pocket costs are relatively high for most programs that are already functioning with a limited budget. Lastly, although the status of “NAEYC Accredited” is highly regarded in the professional community, most consumers of our
practice (families) are unaware of its existence, of the rigor to obtain it, and/or its significance. This fact, combined with the first two realities seems to offer little motivation to participate.

Therefore, in competition with or to complement national accreditation, many states have begun to develop their own systems for achieving and recognizing high-quality programs. The competition or complimentary nature of the systems is much debated and lies outside the scope of this document; however, it is worth noting that this dilemma exists against the backdrop of a field that is actively attempting to unify and promote itself on a national level. NAEYC publically supports state systems and published a Public Policy Fact Sheet identifying the benefits of linking state systems with national accreditation (NAEYC, 2010b). However, many childcare staff members, administrators, and state system advocates anecdotally question the practical benefits of national accreditation, considering it does not come with the financial rewards and local support that the state systems provide.

Presently, 35 states have developed Quality Rating Improvement Systems (QRIS) to address a variety of programming goals (NAEYC, 2010a). QRIS vary from state to state, but in general they are intended to help center-based and home-based group providers improve quality and measure improvements along a tiered scale. The scale addresses factors such as staff qualifications and professional development, the learning program including the physical environment, family and community partnerships, and leadership and management.

Pennsylvania has been named as one of five states described as an “early adopter” of a QRIS initiative (Steinberg, 2008) and received special mention by President Obama:

And we should raise the bar when it comes to early learning programs... Today, some early learning programs are excellent. Some are mediocre. And some are wasting what studies show are – by far – a child’s most formative years.

That’s why I have issued a challenge to America’s governors: if you match the success of states like Pennsylvania and develop an effective model for early learning; if you focus reform on standards and results in early learning
programs; if you demonstrate how you will prepare the lowest income children to meet the highest standards of success – then you can compete for an Early Learning Challenge Grant that will help prepare all our children to enter kindergarten ready to learn. (Obama, 2009b, para. 2)

ECE professionals in Pennsylvania have a great sense of pride in the strides the Commonwealth has taken to become a leader within the field, yet it is difficult to be a leader – charging new ground with many unknowns, living through countless revisions of expectations, and witnessing the success (or failure) of policy and practice decisions made by well-intentioned committees and leaders over time.

**Early Childhood Education as a Public Education Focus**

The early childhood years are defined as birth through age eight (NAEYC, n.d). With this in mind, the early primary grades of kindergarten through grade three (for most children) fall under the auspices of ECE. However, for a host of reasons, early childhood has become synonymous with *daycare* and the antithesis of public school. In fact, the two *camps* of early childhood education and public education have historically found themselves at odds. Although both camps hold the same children at the center of their work, the approach and philosophy of caring for and educating these children often differs. Some believe the camps have more in common than it may seem at first, but the sentiment exists that ECE and public education are in stark contrast. Consequently, this tension must be overcome since in the current political and policy context, the camps are being asked to “circle their wagons” and settle new territory in the *cradle to career* era.

Evidence of this need for a more shared approach to providing appropriate and effective settings for young children can be seen in the move toward enveloping preschoolers in the public education setting. Rather than ECE professionals pulling kindergarten through grade three under their wings, the current trend is to nest preschoolers in the public education arena (Barnett, Carolan, Fitzgerald, & Squires, 2011). Not only are more and more preschool classrooms housed
in public school buildings, there are increasingly more efforts to align and coordinate curriculum and implementation of preschool through grade three (Barnett, Carolan, Fitzgerald, & Squires, 2011; Kostelnik & Grady, 2009). Although not an all-together bad idea, it raises concerns about which camp will be influencing and making the policy that governs these programs. Pennsylvania has moved in this direction by passing legislative Act 49.2 which changed teacher certification from Nursery-3rd grade and Kindergarten- 6th grade to PreK-4th grade and 4th-8th grade bands. What at first appears to be a win for young children and their teachers is currently unproven, and time will tell the benefits and costs of this legislative change.

The current federal administration has plotted a “Blueprint for Reform - The Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act” (United States Department of Education, 2010a) that promises to provide a “world class education” through focus on five key areas:

- College- and career-ready students
- Great teachers and leaders in every school
- Equity and opportunity for all students
- Increased expectations and rewards for excellence
- Focus on promoting innovation and continuous improvement

Although the online document is linked through a heading of “P-12 Reform,” there is very little focus on the early years of learning. A more hopeful piece of legislation comes from Pennsylvania Senator Robert Casey who introduced to the House the: 

**Supporting State Systems of Early Learning Act**, which would establish an Early Learning Challenge Fund of $350 million to help states build and strengthen early learning by raising the bar on program quality, improving workforce qualifications, and creating a seamless system of early care and learning that working families and children can rely upon. (Duncan, 2011, para. 1)
Although discourse at the governmental level is about a “seamless education” from the
“cradle to career,” the reality of how public and private institutions bridge these
transitions is seemingly under developed at the federal government level.

At the state level however, Pennsylvania emerges again as a leader. In an attempt to bring
to reality a seamless education, Pennsylvania has taken several steps to partner public and private
preschools with the K-12 public school system. Under the leadership of Ex-Governor Rendell and
then Deputy Secretary Harriet Dichter, Pennsylvania merged the Department of Public Welfare
and the Department of Education in 2007, forming the Office of Child Development and
Learning (OCDEL). The first in the nation to marry childcare oversight with public education, the
state is demonstrating a commitment to provide a more coordinated educational system across
program types by reorganizing into OCDEL.

One outcome of OCDEL is a widely-promoted “Transition Tool Kit” that is embraced by
public schools and early childhood programs alike. Using evidenced-based research, the toolkit
provides the rationale for the statewide approach and practical tips for a year-long process of
transitioning the child to school, the family to school, school to school, and community to school.

Additionally, the well-respected National Institute for School Leadership (NISL)
partnered with Pennsylvania in 2009 to pilot an “Early Childhood Leadership Institute.” A major
focus of the initiative is to bring childcare center directors and public school principals to the
same table – literally. Paired by geographic location, administrators from both camps sit and learn
side-by-side in hotel conference rooms across the state. The professional development event
includes workshops and discussions focusing on “application of the latest brain development
research; effective program design and strategies; family engagement and multi-generational
services; [and] action learning projects that improve classroom quality, strengthen family
engagement, and integrate birth through third grade systems” (“Early Childhood”, n.d.). Although
no reports on the outcomes of these institutes have been made public, there is general support for
the conceptual framework. Anecdotal stories of participants and facilitators include positive moments alongside of challenges that are expected with pilot or emerging programs.

The bottom line is that as classrooms for three- and four-year-olds begin to open in traditionally K-6 public schools in Pennsylvania and many other states, it is crucial to ensure that teachers and administrators are well prepared for these young learners. A recent “Policy Brief: Penn State Study of Early Childhood Teacher Education” (Johnson, Fiene, McKinnin & Buba, 2010a) documented variety in the types of teacher education programs offered for early childhood teachers. The study brought to light that the preparation of teachers of young children across the country differs widely in faculty allocation, course delivery, and program organization. However, documentation also shows that programs studied are meeting or exceeding all national and state requirements (Johnson et al., 2010a). These findings are encouraging and demonstrate the commitment of ECE leaders to be responsive to the changing times. However, report recommendations also suggest there are significant opportunities for improvement in ECE teacher education.

The Local Context of ECE and QRIS

Pennsylvania’s Quality Improvement Rating System

In 2002, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania piloted an early childhood quality initiative program named Keystone STARS, which was fully integrated into the childcare landscape in 2003. The initiative is designed to improve childcare quality through “Standards,” “Training/Professional Development,” “Assistance,” “Resources,” and “Support” which define the STARS acronym. Specifically, the QRIS is intended to help center-based and home-based group providers improve quality and measure improvements along a four-tiered scale. The scale addresses indicators such as staff qualifications and professional development, learning programs, family and community partnerships, and leadership and management. Each tier is identified as a “STAR level.” Participating programs represent profit, non-profit, and school-age childcare as well as Head Start, Early Head Start and PreK Counts (“Welcome to,” n.d.). As of November
2010, 51.4% of Department of Public Welfare regulated programs were voluntarily participating in the initiative (Sirinides, 2010). This percentage is a slight decline from the previous year’s participation of 56% (Sirinides, 2010) and it’s the first decline in participation since the initiative began, a drop which is worth keeping an eye on to see if this becomes a trend. More recent data is not available at the time of this document’s submission.

Participating programs and their STAR designation are available to the public online at the state department website (http://www.humanservices.state.pa.us). Participating programs also post a certificate in a public place within the childcare facility and are given the logo to use in their marketing materials and on their website. In addition, public service announcements informing families about the STARS system air on the local affiliates of the major television networks. When a facility increases STAR level, individual staff members benefit in the form of cash bonuses, and the facility is eligible for grant money to be used for things such as building improvements, classroom supplies, and professional development. Programs that maintain the highest STAR level (four) receive the same monetary benefits. Financial rewards are also tiered so that the higher a program progresses through the STAR levels, the greater the awards.

Programs are assessed annually through document review and onsite observation. Examples of items included in the review are the number of low income children served, staff qualifications, administrative policies, family involvement, curriculum, and physical environment (WS4-02 STAR 4 Worksheet – Center.doc available at http://www.pakeys.org/pages/starsDocs.aspx).

Pennsylvania’s Teacher Qualifications

In 2007, Keystone STARS finalized a Career Lattice (Appendix A) for practitioners that outlines educational achievements necessary for recognition at each STAR Level. The matrix was last updated in late summer of 2011 and includes guidelines of qualifications necessary for each staffing position. The Career Lattice evidences Keystone STARS’ preference for practitioners to obtain credentials and degrees as a method of improving quality in early childhood and out-of-school classrooms. ECE teachers in programs participating in the QRIS are eligible to receive a
90% tuition refund toward an appropriate associate’s, bachelor’s, or master’s degree or free access to a state provided credentialing program. A major component to advancing STAR levels is teachers’ progress on the career lattice which requires attainment of credentials and degrees.

**ECE Teacher Education Qualifications Generally**

Most ECE professionals are familiar with the research driving the QRIS’s focus on staff qualifications. It is well documented that when teachers have higher levels of education they have higher quality classrooms (Barnett, 2003; Early et al., 2007; Hyson, 2003; Whitebook, 2003; Zaslow, Tout, Maxwell & Clifford, 2004). These studies and others show that when teachers of young children are formally educated, the teachers demonstrate more positive and sensitive interactions, create more engaging environments, facilitate more creative activities, provide more in-depth language experiences, and engage children in higher-level thinking activities (see discussion in Barnett, 2003). In short, the better the teacher is prepared to work in preschool classrooms, the better the overall experience is for the children, resulting in better outcomes for those children (Pianta, Howes, Burchinal, Bryant, Clifford, Early & Barbarian, 2005). Numerous research reports (Barnett, 2003; Early et al., 2007; Tout, Berry, & Zaslow, 2005; Whitebook, 2003) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (Hyson, 2003; Lutton, 2012) support the connection between higher teacher education credentials and higher quality early childhood classrooms. This fact is reflected by improved teacher-child interactions, consistent use of developmentally appropriate practice, and stronger family partnerships (Barnett, 2003; Hyson, 2003).

On the flipside, common sense and personal experience tell us that formal education does not guarantee higher quality classrooms. Advocates of alternative approaches to teacher certification argue that a teacher’s educational qualifications are only one of a myriad of variables that impact classroom quality. In addition, many ECE professionals attest to being in classrooms that are models of high quality and textbook examples of good practice that are led by a teacher with minimal formal higher education credentials.
ECE Teacher Education Qualifications Specifically

All of these conflicting viewpoints were present and debated in initial discussions by Pennsylvania ECE leaders when developing the state’s official stance on qualifications for its early childhood workforce. At the time the Career Lattice was created, the development committee (of which I was a member), was concerned that if formal degrees were required the potential for excluding highly effective practitioners from the field existed. This concern was due to a) many practitioners’ status as non-traditional students with, b) limited funds for participating in educational opportunities, c) perceived lack of motivation to commit time to furthering their education and d) projected notions that these practitioners also lacked the confidence to re-enter the classroom and perform successfully. Committee members held discussions regarding the necessity of credentials and degrees versus clock hours of instruction. Ultimately, the committee concluded that as a participating program in a quality improvement initiative, credentials and degrees would be the benchmark.

Since the roll-out of the Career Lattice, many practitioners have returned to the formal classroom in pursuit of a state- or nationally-recognized credential or degree. Although it is difficult to determine the exact number of Pennsylvania early childhood practitioners who are participating in formal learning due to the QRIS, some idea can be generated based on scholarships and reimbursements awarded. In 2009-2010, 4,644 individuals received financial assistance for formal learning (Pennsylvania Departments, 2010). In addition to these individuals, thousands of others are participating in programs sponsored by the state at no cost or are paying out-of-pocket. The majority of these practitioners are non-traditional students (over age 24), who have minimal educational attainments thus far (high school diploma or GED) and who are engaging in their schooling under a host of personal and professional demands. Another important consideration is that for many of these practitioners, their jobs are dependent on earning the credential or degree.
In a previous study I conducted (Griess, 2009), a small sample of early childhood center-based practitioners from all four STAR levels was interviewed to document practitioners’ understanding of and feelings about the Career Lattice. Participants represented programs at each STAR level (one through four), were teachers of infants through school-age children, and ranged in educational achievements from a high school diploma to completion of a four-year degree. Participants represented programs located in urban and suburban settings. All 14 participants were female, a consequence of the gender-biased nature of the field, and ranged in age from 23 to 60 years of age. Three participants were African-American, one participant was Hispanic and ten were Caucasian. Participants’ experience ranged from six to 28 years of formal employment in the field of early childhood education. Hourly wages ranged from $8.30 to $13.18.

Key findings indicate that participants had limited knowledge of the Career Lattice, although they were aware of the need to go back to school for their program to advance to the next STAR level. The majority of participants value their early childhood coursework and believe it had a positive impact on their own practice. However, there is a great deal of anxiety related to general education course requirements. The resounding theme of all interviews is the difficulty of balancing personal, professional, and student responsibilities. Following closely to this concern are issues related to funding their education beyond tuition (travel, textbooks, childcare, etc.).

**Recommendation**

Considering both the thousands of practitioners in Pennsylvania and practitioners in states following the Commonwealth’s lead, developing a deeper understanding of ECE teachers’ experiences with continued education is important for policy makers, institutions of higher education, employers, and practitioners and their families. Stakeholders can increase the likelihood of greater results from mandated education by learning from practitioners’ narratives what they perceive as successful, challenging, effective supports, and unmet needs related to returning to school.
The greatest risk to QRIS initiatives is failing to see improved outcomes. One such possibility occurs if teachers do not internalize their education and improve their practice. If this situation occurs, two obvious problems arise. First, and foremost, is the potential for wasted funding that is difficult to secure in the first place and will be even more difficult to renew without measurable positive outcomes. Second is a practical concern: the level of quality in early childhood classrooms has the potential to remain status quo, and young children will not realize the benefits of high quality settings.

The early childhood workforce in Pennsylvania stands on a career lattice that it believes will ultimately raise the quality of classrooms and provide young children high quality care and education. For as many practitioners as there are in the field, there are nearly as many reasons that the workforce does not have the desired academic achievements at the present time. From time constraints to perceived lack of program value, some individuals are highly resistant to furthering their education. However, there is also a population of practitioners that is highly motivated and has a strong internal desire to return to formal education but is impeded by legitimate obstacles. If the Pennsylvania field of early childhood is committed to increasing the quality of its classrooms and maintaining the current workforce, with all of its diversity, then it must take measures to assist all practitioners who are willing to continue their education with supports beyond tuition assistance.

**Research Goals**

The goal of this research is to deepen understanding of the impact of being mandated to formal schooling from the perspective of the early childhood practitioner. Policy makers, higher education instructors, and employers hold assumptions and perhaps anecdotal knowledge about the experiences of practitioners, but an account of the realities that these individuals lived holistically is undocumented. Considering the myriad of men and women who find and will find themselves in a similar context as QRISs expand nationally, extending the knowledge base on this topic is likely to prove useful to all stakeholders.
Research Questions

This research study intends to answer the following questions: How does an experienced South Central Pennsylvania center-based early childhood practitioner working full-time and going to school as a result of a quality improvement rating system describe his or her experience? What successes, challenges, supports, and needs does this practitioner describe? What value does this practitioner place on quality improvement systems and teacher qualifications?
Chapter 2. THEORETICAL AND RESEARCH CONTEXT

When comparing the child care workforce and the PreK-12 public school workforce, significant differences exist among teacher preparation requirements. There are also significant differences between preparing the child care workforce and typical non-traditional students. The first section of this chapter is divided into two main categories: The Profession and The Professionals. The first section outlines the characteristics of a profession with a focus on ECE and its legitimacy as documented in the literature. Next, the focus is on ECE professionals and briefly describes what makes early childhood practitioners returning to school as a result of participating in a QRIS unique. This focus is followed by highlighting the ways in which ECE practitioners are at-risk in formal learning settings. The second section closes the chapter with a discussion of how the field has studied this context to date, demonstrating the value of this study.

The Profession

Defining profession.

Arguments regarding what constitutes a profession are pervasive in the literature. As far back as 1915, Abraham Flexner (2001), a New York City education reformist, argued the validity of a profession based on conditions such as requiring some form of higher intellect, involving practical application, members organize and engage as a community, and members are altruistically motivated. In 1932, E. B. Wilson (1932), a Harvard University professor, described the tensions between theory and practice and art and science that permeate many occupational fields.

Years later, Cogan (1953, 1955) attempted to present a more concrete way of thinking about and understanding a profession. However, he acknowledged that the definition is not unilaterally agreed upon. Cogan (1955) stated, “To define a ‘profession’ is to invite controversy” (p. 105). The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines the term profession as “a: a calling requiring specialized knowledge and often long and intensive academic preparation; b: a principal calling, vocation, or employment; and c: the whole body of persons engaged in a calling” (“Profession”,

This definition seems to be an adequate generic one. However, this simple definition aligns with more scholarly work. Over the course of the last half century and into the new millennium, scholars have landed upon some common ground as to how society defines and considers the work one does as being a profession.

Cogan (1955); Greenwood, Suddaby, and Hinings (2002); Habenstein (1963); and Morris, Crawford, Hodgson, Shepherd and Thomas (2006) share similar constructs of a profession:

- Is based on an agreed upon moral code or code of ethics,
- Is identified by a discrete and technical body of knowledge which is both theoretical and practical,
- Requires formal training and education for entry into the profession, and
- Is governed by a regulating body or organizational community.

In addition to these general requirements, many individual fields have attempted to support the legitimacy of their unique occupations. For example, Schwartz (1904) argued for the conscientious usage of the term profession when referring to nursing rather than occupation. In 1961, Goode questioned if Library Services and the position of Librarian had elevated its status of occupation to profession. Peterson (1976) grappled with whether psychology is a science or if it is a profession or a combination of both. In 1979, Perrier inquired as to whether policing had developed from an act of civil service to a profession. In 1993 (Orlikowski & Baroudi), the growing field of Information Systems struggled with its professional status, and in 1994 (Sørensen), new models of military operation challenged the view of armed forces as a profession. Struggles by the Human Resource Development field to develop a definition of their profession are described by Chalofsky in 2006, and an argument for the field of journalism as a profession is articulated by Davis as recently as 2010. These examples demonstrate there are a
number of diverse fields that have given consideration to the nature of their practice and standing as a profession.

**Education as a profession.**

In addition to this small sample of literature on the definition and development of a profession, a plethora of books, articles, and commentaries on the field of education as a profession over the past century have been published. As far back as Dewey (1903), scholars have been writing about professional issues central to teachers and education administrators. Suzzallo (1926) called for organization of the field of teaching; Darling-Hammond (1984) drew attention to issues of teacher ability, preparation, and retention; Larbee (1992) feared education reform would result in increased standardization and decreased teacher autonomy; Noddings (2003) argued a case for teaching as better labeled as a practice over profession; and Wise (2005) framed teaching as a profession through participation in accreditation measures. It is clear that what has been written regarding the field of education covers a wide array of topics addressing its professional status.

Furthermore, there is literature considering individual components of education and their professional roles such as physical education (Broekhoff, 1979); health education (Hochbaum, 1982); special education (Birch & Reynolds, 1982; Pugach, 2001); teaching English language learners (Freeman & Johnson, 1998); and technology education (Sanders, 2001).

**Early Childhood Education as a profession.**

The field of early childhood education has a long-established footing as a profession when applying the previous mentioned criteria: agreed upon moral code, discrete and technical body of knowledge - theoretical and practical, formal training and education required, and governance by a regulating body or organizational community. Next, each of the four tenets of a profession is addressed as embodied by early childhood education in the historical order that the field has evolved.
Governance.

The Kindergarten movement began in 1855 and continued for 20 years as a private endeavor (Gelb & Bishop, 1992). By 1873, public Kindergartens emerged and were taught by teachers with specialized training, although they were still not universally available (Gelb & Bishop, 1992). In the early 1900s, nursery schools were formed by researchers and educators, and the quick growth of nursery school programs spawned the need for a public conference in 1926. That conference led to the formation of the National Committee on Nursery Education which organized itself in 1929 as the National Association for Nursery Education (NANE) (“Our History”, n.d.).

After thirty-five years of advocacy, conferences, and publications, the all-volunteer NANE network reorganized into the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) in 1964 (“Our History,” n.d). Currently, NAEYC membership exceeds 80,000 individuals represented by more than 300 state and local affiliate groups (“About NAEYC,” n.d.). Within the field of ECE, NAEYC is a recognized leader in the areas of professional development, conferences, institutes, and expos; advocacy and public policy; accreditation; and publication of scholarly articles, books, and position statements. Participation in NAEYC is voluntary, and membership is available to individuals only. NAEYC also offers a national accreditation system for child care programs and institutions of higher education.

One criticism of NAEYC which is important to disclose is its open membership policy. Any individual may join the organization through membership dues. Other professional organizations, such as the American Medical Association, require members to meet eligibility requirements. Eligibility is often determined by earning a specific degree or actively working in the field. The open membership policy of NAEYC is a double-edged sword. On the one side, it welcomes all like-minded individuals and attempts to decrease status differences. However, the converse argument is that there is no standard by which the organization can qualify its members.
While the private sector of ECE was growing under the auspices of NAEYC, the federal government in its *War on Poverty* launched the Head Start program in 1965 (Gelb & Bishop, 1992). President Lyndon B. Johnson advocated that early education would mitigate and compensate for the “cognitive deficiencies” (Gelb & Bishop, 1992, p. 508) caused by families living in the poorest conditions. Head Start emerged under the Economic Opportunity Act as a tool for reaching seven specific outcomes to combat poverty (see Gelb & Bishop, 1992, p. 509 for a full listing of the outcomes). Despite critics of the program, it is the only initiative of Johnson’s *War on Poverty* that remains intact today.

In more recent times, both public and private interests contribute to an abundance of early childhood education options across the United States. As of the most recent data available, nearly 11 million children under the age of five are enrolled in licensed child care facilities, state-funded prekindergarten programs, and Head Start (“National Association,” 2011). Licensed child care facilities are governed in all 50 states, and state-funded prekindergarten programs are overseen by either the state department of education or division of the state’s department of public welfare. Head Start programs are accountable to the national office, their state association, and local administration.

*Body of knowledge.*

The theory that undergirds the practice of early childhood professionals is both deeply rooted in the past and informed by modern science. Some individuals claim guidelines for educating young children originate in Biblical times with both Old and New Testament instructions to parents on how to raise their children. Less contested are ancient philosophers such as Plato, Comenius, Rousseau, and Pestalozzi (for a thorough of the contribution of each see Wolfe, 2002) who have impacted how many early childhood professionals approach teaching young children. And from the mid-1800s to the turn of the century, individuals such as Bronfenbrenner, Bruner, Dewey, Erikson, Kohlberg, Maslow, Montessori, Piaget, and Vygotsky have influenced much of what we know about how young children develop emotionally, socially,
and cognitively. Most recently, new technology has expanded our understanding of the interplay of the physical and social environment on brain development (Shonkoff, 2000).

Several large-scale empirical research projects document strong benefits of high quality early education experiences for young children and their families (Schweinhart & Weikart, 1985). These studies have been the backbone of advocacy efforts and the defining of effective practices for early childhood education. Seven studies in particular (see Schweinhart & Weikart, 1985 and Barnett, 1995 for a succinct, but full review) focused on providing substantial services to children and their families living in poverty. Highly-trained teachers, researchers, and staff provided intentional, structured experiences in small group-size ratios in center-based settings and through home visitation. The projects included quality health care and a range of other wrap-around services to support children’s development and family well-being.

Strengths of the interventions were not just the improved outcomes for children and their families at the time of treatment, but also long-lasting benefits. In particular, the Carolina Abecedarian Project that began in 1972 (O’Brien & Sanders, 1974), the 1962 HighScope Perry Preschool Study (Schweinhart & Weikart, 1997), and the 1967 Chicago Longitudinal Study (Reynolds, 1999) followed-up with participants at regular intervals through adulthood. Results showed that participants in the treatment groups had fewer referrals to special education, fewer grade retentions, and a higher overall IQ. Participants were also more likely to attend a four-year college or university and hold a skilled job, slightly less likely to have had children by the age of 21, and significantly less likely to be engaging in illegal drug use (Clarke & Campbell 1998; Gorey, 2001; Schweinhart, 1985).

Recently, these studies and others have come under criticism (Anderson, 2008; Lowenstein, 2011; Vandell, 2004). Critics argue that modern early childhood advocates hold steadfast to the benefits of these programs for garnering funding and political support, yet the majority of ECE settings today do not replicate the curriculum, staff qualifications, and wrap-around services of the original projects.
A second criticism is coined the *fade out effect*. Some studies show that for many children, benefits of early childhood programming provide little if any benefit beyond the middle elementary grades. Although these findings are difficult to dispute, ECE leaders have attempted to reframe the cause to be one of *difference in programming* that leads to *difference in results*. The argument contends that if programming and services similar to what is provided in the early years are continued into later childhood and adolescence, the positive effects would endure (Barnett & Belfield, 2006; Currie, 2001; Lee & Loeb, 1995).

The field of ECE has combined what has been learned from ancient philosophers, modern theorists, and longitudinal researchers into a body of knowledge that is meaningful in both theory and practice. One outcome has been the emergence of a variety of curriculum models, each with strengths and weaknesses. Models such as the *Program for Infant and Toddler Care* (PITC), the *Head Start Model*, the *HighScope Model of Early Childhood Education*, the *Bridging Approach*, the *Project Approach*, and the *Montessori* approach (see Roopnarine & Johnson, 2009 for chapter discussions of each) utilize specific practices for supporting child development and engaging with families. Other approaches rely more on theoretical underpinnings and allow professionals to implement the theory either through a previously mentioned model or in a more interpretive framework by the individual practitioner. Approaches such as this in ECE are the *Vygotskian Approach*, the *Reggio Emilia approach*, and *Emergent Curriculum*.

**Formal training and education.**

Currently, the context of ECE as a profession can be seen by field leaders (NAEYC and state policy makers) changing training and education requirements. In the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, basic entry requirement into the field is minimal. The Department of Public Welfare identifies four positions. Their titles and minimal requirements are:

- **Aide:** Minimum of a high school diploma or GED or an eighth grade education and enrollment in a training program or an eighth grade education and two years’ experience working with children.
• Assistant Group Supervisor: a high school diploma and a combination of 30 credit hours, 600 training hours, or completion of a training program (i.e.: Child Development Associate (CDA) credential).
• Group Supervisor: a Bachelor’s degree with a minimum of 30 credits in ECE or an Associate’s degree with two to three years of experience working with children depending on the degree earned.
• Director: a Bachelor’s degree with a minimum of one to two years of experience working with children depending on the degree earned or an Associate’s degree with three to four years of experience working with children depending on the degree earned (Pennsylvania code, 2008).

Over the past two decades there has been a movement toward increasing the minimum teacher qualifications and competencies. This movement has in part been a result of the aforementioned research studies and the rising awareness of the importance of the earliest years of a child’s life. Evidence of this movement can be seen by ECE leaders calling for intentional career lattices that outline educational goals and potential career paths (Ackerman, 2004a; Fleet & Patterson, 2001; Horm-Wingerd, Caruso, Gomes-Atwood & Golas, 1997; Johnson & McCracken, 1994). Germaine to most of these conceptual frameworks is moving away from standalone workshops as a form of professional development and moving toward well-organized courses of study, either provided by a post-secondary institution or an approved training organization.

Other issues paramount to the training and preparation of early childhood practitioners, that support the field’s legitimacy as a profession, are evident in the literature. Stakeholders are interested in not just identifying qualifications, but also in what is required and how best to meet those requirements. Winton (2000) encourages Learning Communities as a method of professional development, and Hedges & Cullen (2005) call for as expertise in subject content knowledge. Fifteen other issues are discussed in “Critical Issues in Early Childhood Professional Development,” (2005) ranging from cultural considerations to a cost-benefit analysis of professional development.

When it comes to training and preparation, one area in which the field seems disconnected relates to what counts as knowledge and pathways of preparation that are deemed acceptable. Tension exists between the value of professional knowledge and skills acquired
through professional practice and knowledge and skills that are garnered in a formal classroom. Fenstermacher (1994) outlines issues in the field of teaching related to how knowledge is thought of through a variety of paradigms. Central to his review and the field of ECE is the value stakeholders place on *formal knowledge* (that which is learned in formal setting and based on theory) and the value placed on *practical knowledge* (that which is learned from practice and based on experience).

Fundamentally, the issues stem from what is considered the “knowledge base of teaching” and who determines that base. Some scholars have attempted to take a scientific approach to teaching; see Medley (1977) for a review of eight teacher behaviors and teaching strategies deemed effective as a result of process-product research. Others, such as Coles (1989) and Connelly & Clandinin (1985), argue that teachers’ stories and narratives of their experiences are valid forms of knowledge. Advocates for teacher-based inquiry such as Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) promote Teacher Research as knowledge contributing to the research base and informing practice. Therein lies the struggle between knowledge which comes from scientific research that can be imparted in a formal setting versus knowledge that comes from hands-on experiences and can only be learned clinically.

Most would accept that both forms of knowledge are valuable and necessary, yet public education has historically required teachers to be formally trained and to demonstrate their knowledge through successful completion of a standardized test. In fact, Pennsylvania was the first state to require prospective teachers to pass a reading, writing, and arithmetic test in 1834 (Ravitch, 2003). Now, teacher education is a main-stay of virtually every institute of higher education whether public, private, or religious. Certifying who is eligible to teach is overseen at the state level with each state requiring some sort of preparation program, testing, and clinical experience (“Become a teacher”, n.d.).

Challenging the traditional route of teacher preparation is the alternative certification movement that began in the 1980s. Alternative certification is a state-approved method for an
individual who has at least a Bachelor’s degree to receive certification without completing the traditional coursework. As of 2010, 48 states and the District of Columbia offered alternative certification methods (http://www.teach-now.org/intro.cfm). Supporters for and against alternative certification exist and the topic is widely debated.

Although the field may lack unity regarding minimum educational qualifications and methods for obtaining them, the field stands as a profession in the dimension of requiring some sort of formal training and education. This research study targets this tension directly as will be presented and discussed in subsequent chapters.

Agreed upon moral code.

In the United States, the Code of Ethical Conduct and Statement of Commitment (2005), a position statement of NAEYC is the guiding force in ethics and moral decision-making. It is endorsed by the Association for Childhood Education International and adopted by the National Association for Family Child Care (Code of Ethical Conduct, 2005). The National Association of Early Childhood Teacher Educators has also endorsed the document and created a supplement with ethical guidelines for early childhood adult educators (http://www.naecte.org/docs/ethics.pdf). Since its creation in 1994, there have been numerous publications based on the code and its use (Brown & Freeman, 2001; Clay, 2004; Freeman, 2004; Ungaretti, Dorsey, Freeman, & Bologna, 1997) and countless presentations about using the code at the national, state, and local level.

The Code of Ethics is routinely revised to reflect the current social context and is organized by Core Values, Ideals, and Principles. These concepts are applied to professional practice as it relates to children, families, colleagues, and the community. Although all codes of conduct have areas of grey and at times seem to contradict themselves, the NAEYC code attempts to provide guidance based on the theoretical and practical body of knowledge described in previous sections of this document. Interpretation and implementation of the code may differ
slightly among settings and staff; however, it has provided a common language and a common framework for thinking about how to best handle moral dilemmas.

The Profession in summary.

Although the field of early childhood education has many areas in which improvement can be made, it also has many components of which stakeholders should be proud. It has evolved and grown to meet the criteria set forth in the literature for being a legitimate profession. The field of ECE has organized itself, held itself to empirical scrutiny, increased workforce qualifications, and unified itself on a foundation of morality and high ethical standards. As the field continues to respond to social, cultural, and economical change, its professional identity will also change—at times with ease and fluidity and at times with stress and resistance.

The Professionals

Mandated, but not really.

At the onset of this discussion, it is important to highlight the unique and precarious position in which ECE practitioners find themselves when they are employed by a program that is participating in a QRIS. Anecdotal experience indicates that the decision to participate in the QRIS is initiated by administration, and employees are encouraged to view participation positively. Lack of support for participation is subtly (and sometimes not so subtly) discouraged. In the Workforce Development study (Griess, 2009), none of the participants viewed returning to school as a mandate. However they all acknowledged that not going back to school would result in demotion or the inability to be promoted. Therefore, although they understood that they were technically not mandated to go back to school, if they wanted to keep their present jobs or increase rank, they had to go back to school.

Consequently, some practitioners returning to school are willfully choosing to do so, but their motivation seems misplaced. As loyal employees, with attachments to children and families of their centers, they are willing to increase their educational qualifications. What seems to be missing from their dialogue, however, is recognition of the inherent value in increasing their
education and knowledge. Without the QRIS they would not be enrolling in classes, writing papers, creating portfolios, etc. They are doing this for someone or something else. Participants in the Workforce Development study (Griess, 2009) initially discussed benefits to their program if they returned to school. When probed about what they were learning and its applicability to their workplace, comments arose regarding the benefits of understanding child development, learning theory, and effective practices. This is in stark contrast to the majority of non-traditional students who are returning to school motivated by an internal desire to better themselves or so that they may transition to a new career.

Typical non-traditional students are individuals who delayed college while in the military, have been victims of company down-sizing or for some other reason are unemployed, or are choosing to make a career change (Benedetti, 2010; Rash, Skinner, Cline, & Blanch, 2008). The fact that early childhood practitioners, for the most part, have very different reasons for going back to school raises new questions. In short, policy makers, institutes of higher education, and employers need to know and understand how this context varies from the typical non-traditional learner.

**Mandated continuing education practices across disciplines.**

Continuing education in many professions is common, expected and purposeful. Medical professionals, accountants, social workers, information technology specialists, dentists, psychologists, nursing home administrators and a host of other professionals have clear guidelines for continuing education in order to maintain certification/licensure (Brissett-Chapman, Apgar, Bailey, Galbreath, Hansen & Shearer, 2003; Griscti & Jacono, 2006; International Federation of Accountants, 2009; Marinopoulos, et al., 2007; Pennsylvania Code Title 49, 2000; Pennsylvania Code Title 49, 2002a; Pennsylvania Code Title 49, 2002b; Pennsylvania Code Title 49, 2006). What sets these disciplines apart from ECE practitioners in a QRIS initiative is that ECE practitioners did not know when they entered the field (some over twenty years ago) that this requirement would be imposed in order for them to maintain their
For the professions identified above, it was clear at the onset that if an individual chose this career path, continued formal education would be required. Until 2007, Pennsylvania ECE practitioners were only required to obtain six clock hours of professional development per calendar year. Clearly, this is inadequate. The point to be made is that the rules have changed part way through the game, raising the question: do policy makers, institutes of higher education, and employers fully understand the implications of changing the rules?

In the national literature over the past ten years, only one profession could be identified that shares the game-change plight of ECE and inquired about the effects. Pennsylvania mandated continuing education for psychologists’ license renewal in 1992. Sharkin and Plageman (2003) surveyed Pennsylvania psychologists regarding participation in, effectiveness of, and feelings about mandated continuing education. The major findings indicated that participants supported mandatory continuing education for re-licensure, took classes beyond the mandated number required, and had little difficulty obtaining the necessary credits, but many felt the required number of credits was too high. Of note is the fact that the study was unable to determine from participant responses if continued education actually improved practice (Sharkin & Plageman, 2003).

**The ECE workforce and “at risk student” parallels.**

When one considers how much time the early childhood field spends researching, planning for, discussing, and learning about young children who are considered “at risk,” it is valuable to think about how practitioners entering professional development programs may be at risk in similar ways. Swail (2009) identifies the following subgroups as being at risk:

- older,
- females,
- minorities,
- low-income,
• single-parent/dependent children or parents,
• working,
• from a family without an educational legacy, and
• individuals with a [dis]ability.

Indeed, with the exception of disability, the list is reflective of the early childhood workforce.

**Nontraditional Age & Gender.**

A wealth of literature relates to the needs and challenges faced by nontraditional students (Argyropoulou & Sidiropoulou, 2003; Coogan & Chen, 2007; Hughes & Menmuir, 2002). A nontraditional student is identified as any individual over 24 years of age participating in educational programs. The early childhood workforce is clearly nontraditional in that the median age is 39 years (Goffin, 2007). Following closely behind the age factor is the most obvious characteristic of the workforce, its gender. Ninety-seven percent of caregivers in childcare centers are women (Child care, 2009; Goffin, 2007; Saluja, 2002). Characteristically, many of these practitioners are mothers with children still living at home, a reality which serves as another deterrent to pursuing ongoing education (Fairchild, 2003; McGivney, 2004). These reports and numerous others describe the conflicting struggle for time and attention of middle-age mothers who are attempting to meet their family obligations, work responsibilities, and in the case of the early childhood workforce, quasi-mandated continued education.

Also, a growing concern for these women is the aging population. Some of these women find themselves to also be primary caregivers of their parents or in-laws, known in the literature as *Intergenerational Caregiving* (Lingler, Sherwood, Crighton, Song & Happ, 2008). Beyond the time commitment this requires, watching loved ones age and deteriorate is emotionally exhausting, and depending on the type of care needed, it can by physically demanding.

An additional risk factor combines both parenting and intergenerational caregiving. Coined the *Sandwich Generation*, the potential exists for both one’s own children and own
parents to be dependent. One startling report states that in 2001, 44% of adults, ages 45-55 had aging parents or in-laws as well as children under 21 (Donnell, Kim & Kasten, 2007). Experts also report that the majority of the Sandwich Generation caregivers are women who have given up career opportunities because of their family caregiving responsibilities (Donnell, Kim & Kasten, 2007).

Diversity.

Although the field is rather homogeneous in terms of gender, it is widely diverse in terms of racial, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds (Goffin, 2007; Saluja, 2002). Research indicates that minorities such as are present in ECE are underrepresented in post-secondary educational settings (Pizzolato, Chaudhari, Murrell, Podobnik & Schaeffer, 2008), and according to the National Center for Educational Statistics, minorities totaled only 32% of students in degree-granting institutions in 2007 (http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=98). The challenges minorities face when pursuing post-secondary education range from often being a first-generation student, academic under-preparedness, and climate or diversity acceptance on the campus and in the classroom (Bridges, Holmes, Williams, Morelon-Quainoo, Laird & Thomas, 2004; Maton, Hrabowski, Ozdemir & Wimms, 2008). Additionally, relationships with faculty (Cole, 2010), as well as to the degree they see themselves represented in the faculty (Harper & Quaye, 2009), have significant bearing on how minority students perform.

Income.

Another characteristic of the ECE workforce is the low threshold for wages (Ackerman, 2006). As of August 2012, federal labor statistics for 2011 were not available. Therefore, the 2010 data and guidelines will be used to demonstrate the socioeconomic status of the average early childhood practitioner. According to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (2010b), in 2010, preschool teachers made an average of $23,870 annually, and the middle 50% earned $18,840 per year. Childcare workers, who are also in this population, earned an average of $18,969 annually (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010a). Considering that the Federal Poverty
threshold for 2010 set the income level for a family of three as $18,310 (United States, 2009), it is likely that there are members of the workforce who are single parents raising two children (or caring for aging parents) and who are making just $659 a year above the poverty line. Norman and Hyland (2003) reported that the “lower the social group or class, the lower the participation rate” (p.262) in post-school learning. Therefore, the fact that the workforce is poorly paid creates another risk factor for participation in professional development.

Not only is the workforce underpaid, they also fail to receive significant pay increases to improve their income levels. Fuller and Strath’s (2001) summary of the workforce brings to light that childcare providers’ annual earnings increased less than one percent from a decade ago. Their summary gathered data using nationwide averages of median incomes, and they reported that across zip codes of differing wealth, the income level of the workforce only varied by $1,500 (Fuller & Strath, 2001). This data is significant because it tells us that even if a program is in a wealthier community and the perception is that families pay a higher tuition rate, workforce salaries do not benefit drastically from these increased fees.

**Education Background.**

It is well documented that the early childhood field allows drastically different staff entry requirements by program type (Early et al., 2007; Kagan, 2006; Torquati, Raikies & Huddleston-Casas 2007; Zaslow, 2005). In Pennsylvania, practitioners can enter the field with as minimal as an eighth grade education (Pennsylvania Code, 1992). This fact is best understood by looking at the history of the field. One intention of Head Start at its conception (that is still in practice) was to incorporate mothers of the children they served into the program as volunteers and to eventually transition them into paid employees (Part 1304, 1998). Children served were living in poverty, and mothers were likely to have lower education achievements. Consequently, a population of the existing early childhood workforce that holds minimal education qualifications was welcomed into the field with open arms. These minimal academic achievements are also a predictor for lack of participation in continued education (Norman & Hyland, 2003).
Ziegler, Bain, Bell, McCallum and Brian (2006) state that “lack of education has an enduring impact on women’s poverty; the less education women have, the more likely they are to be poor” (p. 59). This profile then, of the underpaid workforce holding minimal education achievements and minimal educational achievements leading to lower income is a vicious cycle with its grips on the early childhood field.

Summary.

Mandated continuing education, licensure, and credentialing are widely-debated topics for many professions. However, the early childhood field is unique in this area for several reasons. The first is that the early childhood mandate is not to continue education for the purposes of renewing existing qualifications; rather, it is requiring individuals who have been in practice for many years to obtain specific qualifications for the first time. In addition, unlike many of the examined disciplines in which continued formal education expectations were known at the time of employment and understood as a part of ongoing work requirements, the early childhood field is unique in the sense that continued formal education was not expected at the time of career choice for many practitioners. The early childhood field has historically required minimal clock hours of professional development, and the requirement to obtain credentials and degrees is a newly-implemented concept that was not a part of the picture when the majority of practitioners chose the profession.

Many early childhood practitioners possess inherent characteristics that put them at risk for success in formal learning settings. Possessing any of the characteristics of minority, middle-aged, mother, low income, and low current educational achievements increases risk levels for negative academic experiences. Having more than one of those characteristics only serves to lessen the likelihood of a positive educational experience. With all these considerations in mind, in the next section I will review what has been written to date on this topic.
Review of the Literature

Initial review of the literature is encouraging in that scholars are indeed interested in early childhood teacher preparation, and funding has been available to look at the subject from a variety of angles. However, several concerns are worth noting up front. All studies reviewed with one exception were either mixed method and/or relied on secondary data. This context is not problematic in and of itself, yet it points to what is missing. And curiously, studies I found that held the most promise for moving ECE teacher preparation forward were completed on the West Coast. Overall, what exists in the literature is an etic perspective, and what is lacking is a crystal-clear teacher voice that is best heard through a qualitative study.

Several studies provided a comprehensive, retrospective look at the results of state-driven early childhood teacher preparation initiatives thus far. Fuligni, Howes, Lara-Cinisomo and Karoly (2009) studied “patterns of teacher preparation” (p.1), support, and how these patterns relate to teachers’ beliefs and practices in programs serving low-income children in California. The study utilized questionnaires and classroom observations. It did not gather information about teachers’ experiences during professional development; rather, the focus was on the method of professional development.

Lobman (2004), Ryan and Ackerman (2004, 2005), Saracho and Spodek (2006), and Whitebook, Bellm, Cruz, Munn, Jo, Almaraz, and Lee (2004) reported quantitative studies of types of teacher preparation programs that exist nationally or regionally for preparing early childhood teachers. Perceived challenges were reported from the institution or scholar’s point of view. Whitebook, Bellm, Less and Sakai (2005) outline the condition of California early childhood teacher education programs and quantify the challenges facing students and programs. However, data was collected from the colleges/universities only. Whitebook, Gomby, Bellm, Sakai, and Kipnis (2009) provide a much more comprehensive report of both what makes an effective teacher preparation program and the differences between K-12 teacher preparation and ECE teacher preparation currently. In a more recent study, Johnson, Fiene, McKinnin and Babu
(2010b) survey 42 early childhood teacher education programs across the United States and outline variances in coursework, field work, and faculty resources.

Ackerman (2004a) provides an overview of what states were doing at the time related to teacher training in response to federal and state initiatives and relies on public data to gather information. Her report includes an overview of perceived challenges that align with non-traditional students across the disciplines. A later study (Ackerman, 2005) provides an overview of the context of preparing early childhood teachers and reiterates the challenges; however, the article is based on existing studies which are generic in overtone and lack specific detail of personal experiences.

The most comprehensive reports on the process and results of increasing early childhood teachers’ education are the Year 1 (Whitebook, Sakai, Kipnis, Almaraz, Suarez and Bellm, 2008), Year 2 (Whitebook, Sakai, Kipnis, Bellm and Almaraz, 2010), Year 3 (Whitebook, M., Kipnis, F., Sakia, L., & Almaraz, M., 2011), and Year 4 (Kipnis,F., Whitebook, M.,Almaraz, M., Sakai, L., & Austin, L. J. E., 2012) reports titled “Learning Together: A Study of Six B.A. Completion Cohort Programs in Early Care and Education.” The five year study documents outcomes of six programs in California, and participants include students, college/university administrators and faculty. It is a comprehensive report of the specific challenges and specific supports that promote success in the teachers’ experience in formal learning. The Year 1 report is rich with detail in table format and direct quotes, but disappointingly, the Year 2 through 4 reports have omitted the personal quotes, which carried the narrative of participants.

One article used qualitative methods to gain understanding of early childhood providers’ perceptions of professional development. Ackerman (2004b) interviewed two New Jersey teachers impacted by the state-mandated preschool teacher qualification increase. The study focused on three issues: path of entry, teaching experience and participation in professional development that have impacted practice, and opinions about the mandate. Participants’ voices are woven throughout the results, discussion, and findings. In many ways, their experiences and
opinions align with the previously-identified concerns. What is missing from the study is the broader context of the participants’ lives and viewpoints of relevant stakeholders.

Finally, “Using pressure and support to create a qualified workforce” (Ryan & Ackerman, 2005) recounted the short-term and long-term effects of the court-mandated increased level of teaching credentials for preschool teachers in New Jersey as a result of the 1998 Abbott vs. Burke court ruling (see Supreme Court clerk documentation of the rulings at the Education Law Center, http://www.edlawcenter.org/ELCPublic/AbbottvBurke/AbbottDecisions.htm). The article is well researched, well written, and makes a strong case for the benefits of enacting sweeping reform through legislation. It also outlines well the challenges associated with such reform under a deadline and discusses the unintended consequences of newly-credentialed preschool teachers leaving private centers and Head Starts for public school teaching positions.

An examination of the literature shows that there does not seem to be an existing published study designed to bring to light in rich detail the experience of individuals who are experienced, currently working within the field, newly mandated to increase qualifications, and at high risk in the formal learning environment. As is too often the case when policy is considered and then enacted, those who it will affect the greatest are not part of the discussions.

It is easy for advocates and leaders in the field to move swiftly and deftly with good intentions but to never garner the perspective of those who will ultimately live the reality of the decisions. Consequently, this qualitative study of the early childhood workforce utilizing interview methodology captures their unique perspective regarding mandated education and its implications. As we continue to move forward with increasing early childhood teacher qualifications and improving the delivery of early childhood teacher preparation programs, it is valuable to make sure the voices of those who are the heart of our work are heard.
Chapter 3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

The intent of this study is to gain a detailed understanding of early childhood practitioners’ experience working full-time and going back to school. In this section I describe the qualitative methods utilized and the rationale for choosing those methods. A brief background of qualitative research opens the section. From there, the genre of narrative research is introduced, and research strategies are presented. The chapter closes with a description of the specific protocols and tools used along with methods for data analysis, interpretation, write-up, and validity.

Qualitative Research

Field research is a preferred methodology when the researcher desires to learn intimate details of a particular population up-close and in-depth (Neuman, 2009). Observing and interacting with participants in their natural setting, through direct contact and personal engagement allows the researcher to learn of a particular phenomenon, context or experience and react to the data differently from what is possible when utilizing quantitative measures.

Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials – case study; personal experience, introspection; life story; interview; artifacts; cultural texts and productions; observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts – that describe the routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals’ lives. Accordingly, qualitative researchers deploy a wider range of interconnected interpretive practices, hoping always to get a better understanding of the subject matter at hand (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3).

Because the purpose of this study is to gain deep understanding of a particular experience, qualitative methodology is appropriate. The use of a particular set of qualitative approaches leads to answers to each of the research questions focusing on practitioners’ experiences, successes, challenges, and values placed on those experiences by participants.
Reframing Validity in Qualitative Research

Lincoln and Guba (1985) provide a framework for considering tenets of quantitative research which are incongruent with qualitative studies. Validity in particular is recast with a call for scholars to scrutinize a study for its trustworthiness or goodness. The intent is not to look for external validity and reliability in the traditional sense, but to ensure that the results of the study can be trusted and are authentic. The authors define trustworthiness as being credible (the data is believable and the findings are logical), confirmable (in agreement with two or more evaluators), and transferable (has applicability to others in similar contexts) (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This can be achieved by long periods of interaction with the participants, member checking, data triangulation, intentionally looking at the data through a variety of lenses, and discussing results with known experts and colleagues (Marshall & Rossman, 2010).

Guba and Lincoln (1989) added authenticity as a measure of validity. To achieve authenticity the study must represent a range of experiences, provide a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, develop beyond understanding to appreciation of the participants’ experience, and call for a form of action.

Ways of Knowing

Bruner (1985) argues that a participant’s discourse (or story telling) demonstrates two ways of thinking or knowing: paradigmatic and narrative. In the paradigmatic mode, an individual arranges his or her thinking into categories or classifications. Through his or her discourse, the participant conveys experiences and how those experiences are constructed and organized. In the narrative mode, the paradigm of the person’s experience still exists; however, as he or she retells the experience, he or she forms a rich story complete with plot, setting, and characters. It typically portrays not only the actions and behaviors of a phenomenon or experience, but also includes the “emotional and motivational meaning connected with it” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 11). An individual moves in and out of both modes of thinking, and in
both forms the stories told communicate the uniqueness and complexity of an individual’s experience.

Discourses that portray a participant’s paradigmatic and narrative ways of understanding result in “trustworthy and valid knowledge” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 9). From this perspective then, studying participant speech establishes itself as able to generate new knowledge and a valid contribution to the field of research when it produces new ways of understanding a context or situation. In the words of Polkinghorne (1995), “Stories express a kind of knowledge that uniquely describes human experience in which actions and happenings contribute positively and negatively to attaining goals and fulfilling purposes” (p. 8). This qualitative research strategy is commonly known in the field as Narrative Research.

**Narrative Research**

This study is situated in the field of narrative research and is influenced by key scholars such as Bruner (1985), Connelly and Clandinin (1990), Miles & Huberman (1994), and Polkinghorne (1995). As posited by Bruner (1985) and Polkinghorne (1988), the narrative constructed by an individual is a storied telling of his or her experience in pieces and brought together as a whole that “culminates in an outcome” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 5). The value of narratives is that written or spoken language as reported by a participant is sometimes the only way to come to know or understand an individual’s experience.

Narrative research relies on participant discourse which can come in several different forms (journals, oral statements, interviews, etc.) and is then transcribed into text for analysis. In narrative research, the stories people tell about their experience become the researcher’s data. Polkinghorne (1988) posits that narrative inquiry has two research possibilities: *descriptive* and *explanatory*. Descriptive narrative research intends to use the discourse constructed by participants to understand the meaning they make of an event (Polkinghorne, 1988). The purpose of explanatory narrative research is to explain through narration why something happened (Polkinghorne, 1988). The questions central to this study focus on developing a deep
understanding of a particular context, and the research questions align with the goals of descriptive narrative research.

Polkinghorne identified two forms of analysis appropriate for narrative research and which are congruent with the types of cognition identified by Bruner (1986) earlier (paradigmatic and narrative). Analysis of Narratives relies on paradigmatic reasoning and processes (Polkinghorne, 1995). It considers the chronological and sequential sets of events, when and why events occurred, and outcomes. An interviewer prompts the reporter with certain categorical questions, and when questions are crafted well, participants begin to tell about their experience in storied form. When studying the data, the researcher looks for categories and themes within the narrative and either generates new knowledge in light of existing theory or inductively develops new theory within a case and across multiple cases. Narrative Analysis, by contrast, is a design which attempts to create a full account of experience of one participant or across many participants. The analysis itself results in a plot, oftentimes a story of how a phenomenon occurred and its resulting outcome.

This study utilizes strategies congruent with the Analysis of Narrative approach. The research questions relate to deepening understanding about what participants have experienced—descriptive narrative research (Polkinghorne, 1988). As will be discussed later, data were gathered through the use of focused interviews. The focus of each interview was pre-determined by the researcher and prompted informants to tell about their experiences in a chronological and sequential manner. However, it was implicit in the design of the interviews for participants to expand on the questions asked and to contribute stories they intuitively felt as relevant or of interest. Analysis of narrative draws on such “diachronic data” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 12). Diachronic data goes beyond just straightforward answers to questions, what Polkinghorne (1995) describes as “synchronic data” (p. 12), but, it also includes the relationship of events as understood by the participant. The interview questions are designed to encourage participants to tell not only what happened and when, but also how those experiences relate to one another.
Therefore, utilizing an analysis of narrative approach was most congruent with the design of the study.

**The Appropriateness of Narrative Research**

Determining the appropriate method(s) for a study is directly linked to the question(s) being asked. In this case, the questions directly link to human experience and how the individuals reporting understood, organized, and interpreted that experience. Narrative research has been promoted as a paradigm particularly useful for documenting and understanding a particular phenomenon, context or experience. Narrative research is useful for building theory to inform a variety of disciplines and issues (Ochs, 1979; Ochs, Taylor, Rudolph & Smith, 1992). It is common in nursing (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004; Holloway & Freshwater, 2007; Overcash, 2004), psychology (Josselson, 2003; Morrow, 2007), psychiatry (Coles, 1989), and social work (Padgett, 2008; Riessman, 2005). Stories are also used to inform and advocate on feminist issues in anthropology (Behar, 1996; Behar, 2003; Patai, 1987).

The field of education has embraced narrative inquiry for understanding teacher development (Carter, 1993; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Knowles, Cole & Presswood, 1994) and practice (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Fenstermacher, 1994; Paley, 1989). Heath (1983) spent years documenting the experiences of adults and children in two communities during the early years of school desegregation in the South. She records their words to help readers understand the complexity of the experiences of both black and white citizens during a critical time in the history of public schooling.

Collins (2003) documents through audio, video, artifact, interview, and journaling an 18-month experience working with one elementary student. The study demonstrates the ways in which the student was positioned as either able or [dis]abled in a variety of educational and social settings. The behaviors and words of peers, teachers, family members, community members and the researcher herself were collected and analyzed. The resulting narrative portrays an inquisitive learner, a child with a caring disposition, and a child vulnerable in his educational setting. It
refutes societal undertones that children of color and those who come from lower socio-economic classes are considered less capable than their white middle- and upper-class peers.

Studying one’s own words through the use of written records is a common form of Teacher Research. Strieb (see Chochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, p. 121-130) utilized journaling to study her teaching practices both independently and in collaboration with a colleague (see Chochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, p. 140-149).

Bowne, Cutler, DeBates, Gilkerson and Stremmel (2010) recorded and analyzed the words of researchers and pre-service teachers to study the facilitation of early childhood pre-service teachers’ learning and teaching. They utilized video, audio, written reflections, and interview to not only strengthen their students’ learning and teaching practices, but to inform their work as university faculty as well.

Hill, Stremmel and Fu (2005) advocate for teacher inquiry as a professional stance toward teaching. Chapter nine of their textbook is dedicated to the discourse of one teacher and administrator as the two educators recount decisions and actions taken to support one struggling child. Interwoven through the story is commentary provided by the authors at teachable moments. Readers can develop new or strengthen existing knowledge based on the actual experience of practitioners revealed in story.

From even this short review, narrative research within the field of education is clearly a widely adopted practice. It promises strong benefits to the field in general and individual practitioners where relevant.

**Responding to Critics of Narrative Research**

Narrative research, like all forms of research, must meet agreed upon high standards for rigor and quality. Those exact standards have been developing and debated as narrative research has grown in popularity in the field of teacher education. This section is not intended to be a full review of all criticisms but is intended to address a few of the most prevalent concerns related to narrative research.
One criticism concerns the “truth” of narrative inquiry, especially when the result of its publication has high stakes such as policy recommendation or cultural influence. The debate is not centered on concerns regarding intentional fabrication by participants. Rather, much of the discussion focuses on *rightness* which considers participants’ perception of the truth situated against reality. Perhaps the clearest example of this concern is Phillips’ (1994) discussion of the *truth* held in medieval times that the world was flat, when that is very much not true. In light of this stance, the researcher is responsible for going beyond mere acceptance of participants’ “truth” as ultimate “Truth.” Phillips (1994, 1997) and others suggest that narrative researchers do well to accept that the result of careful inquiry is intended to go beyond “the appearance of truth or reality” (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 176), but to be “true (or close to the truth)” (Phillips, 1994, p. 19). Carter (1993), Casey (1997), and Phillips (1994) advocate that researchers need to engage in critical reflection, peer review, personal transparency, and consideration of the cultural context of the report in order to meet the standard of truth in narrative research.

Another popular criticism of qualitative work in general and narrative research specifically is the relevance of a small number of personal accounts to the broader public. It is important to recognize that within this paradigm, issues of the ability of the study to be generalizable are recast as transferable.

**Transferability.**

This study is meant to be transferable to individuals who recognize themselves to be in similar contexts as the participants. It is not designed to result in generalizable findings. Rather, drawing on the tradition of qualitative work—naturalistic, constructivist, phenomenological, and ethnographic—it makes no claim to generalize. This is a study about distinct individuals and their experience. Within teacher research in particular, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) argue that we need to understand the “particulars” (p. 15) of a context. Stories that are valuable are those which can educate, inform, inspire, correct, motivate, and/or challenge another human being (aka: be transferrable).
In Stake’s (2005) work regarding case studies, he goes so far as to advocate for not making generalizability a priority. He writes, “I will emphasize designing the study to optimize understanding of the case rather than to generalize beyond it” (Stake, 2005, p. 443). This does not mean that pieces or the whole of a study do not hold relevance for others. Indeed, qualitative work has the potential to be widely transferrable. Although each reported life experience is unique, it is often times relevant to a broader group (Shenton, 2004). Patton (1980) summarized Cronbach’s (1975) stance on generalizability of qualitative research: “Cronbach concluded that social phenomena are too variable and too context-bound to lend themselves to generalizations. He places particular emphasis on the importance of interpreting data in context rather than reducing the context to arrive at generalizations.” Erikson (1986) supports this line of thinking by suggesting comparing carefully-analyzed stories one to another. Within this type of analysis there is intent to find details that might “transfer to a similar situation” (Keat, 2004, p. 69). What results is a “case-to-case transfer” (Tobin & Begley, 2004, p. 392).

It’s important to remember that the researcher cannot (and does not) determine the level of transferability. The ability to transfer meaning, knowledge, or understanding from one story to another is completely up to the reader who must judge for himself or herself to what degree it transfers (Hoepfl, 1997). Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to this as the “fittingness” (p. 124) between the two contexts or experiences.

In order for a reader to determine appropriateness or potential for transferability, there must be enough detail, credibility, authenticity, and validity so that “knowledge produced in a specific interview situation may be transferred to other relevant situations” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 262). Reaching back to early work of Stake (1978) and Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993), there is value placed on the “particulars” of a qualitative inquiry that is transferrable.

Respected scholars of narrative research (Barone, 2007; Carter, 1993; Polkinghorne, 1996) suggest two important caveats of this discipline. One, the intent of narrative research is to look deeply into a few specific cases, rather than to widely study great numbers of cases. Second,
the intent of deeply studying a phenomenon, context or experience through participant discourse is to tease out the particulars of the case. The case will be intrinsically powerful and relevant to readers based on nuances of the story that are relatable to each reader.

In the area of narrative inquiry, researchers characteristically study smaller sample sizes with a focus on deep understanding. Any attempt to transfer this study will be based on the “thick description” (Geertz, 2003) of participants and their experience within the context (Chase, 2005). The stories voiced are not intended to be representative of all practitioners’ experiences but to provide an example of the range of possible stories: “What is possible and intelligible within a specific social context” (Chase, 2005, p. 667).

Furthermore, small-scale narrative inquiries have the potential to inspire and influence change. In the words of Gamson (in Chase, 2005), “storytelling ‘promotes empathy across different social locations’” (p. 668). It can also inspire others to tell their stories and to build community among participants sharing similar stories. This thick description which promotes transferability can be just the mechanism for catching the attention of decision makers or challengers. It is in this way that although this is a small study in terms of the number of participants, it may lead to meaningful change.

**Qualitative Interviewing**

In review, the purpose of this study is to gain a deep understanding of the experiences of teachers who are working full-time and going back to school as a result of a QRIS. It is important to understand the complexities of their experiences so that future ECE practitioners, professors, employers, and potentially policy makers may assist in the same successes occurring and/or in avoiding challenges when possible. In order to document this experience, I conducted, recorded and transcribed interviews so that practitioner discourse could be analyzed to reach the described purpose.

The *Qualitative Interview* is a tool for coming to know an individual’s experience through his or her stories (Chase, 2005; Seidman, 2006). The art of interviewing goes beyond
asking questions and recording answers. It requires honed skills, including gaining access, building rapport, crafting the questions, probing, redirecting, and confirming—and these are only a listing of skills applying to the actual process of interviewing. Additional skills are needed for analyzing, interpreting, and sharing the interview. Interviewing is a complicated process and goes beyond dialogue to an experience in which “knowledge is constructed in the inter-action between the interviewer and the interviewee. An interview is literally an *inter view*, an inter-change of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 2). Coming from a stance that individuals can tell the *what* of their lives and also the *how* and *why*, interviewing is a widely-accepted tool for gaining individual perspective (Fontana & Frey, 2006).

This study, which is described as documenting paradigmatic knowledge (Bruner 1986) within the field of narrative research and is intended to garner diachronic data (Polkinghorne, 1995), is well suited to gather this data through interview methodology.

**Semi-structured Interviewing**

The semi-structured interview is a protocol for a participant to verbalize his or her experiences and understandings around a focused topic so that the researcher can transcribe and then study the narrative reported. Bruner (1986) suggests that a participant’s discourse reveals the “vicissitudes of human intentions” (p. 16) or the complexities of human experiences. As a participant retells his or her experiences, it is important to not overlook the cultural, historical and social context. Polkinghorne (1996) expands on this with the notion that participants use these contexts to construct their personal identity when telling their life stories.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) write that within narrative research, participant recounts of experience are also influenced by being a part of the research study itself. Chase (2006) describes this transaction as having particular functions that serve as a lens to inform understandings and interpretations.

- Narrative is retrospective meaning making (Chase, 2005).
In contrast to positivist researchers who may strive for an exact understanding of what a participant was thinking or feeling at a specific time or during a specific experience, the “contemporary narrative researcher” (Chase, 2006, p. 656) understands that human beings reorganize, interpret, shape, and reshape their experiences and their meanings in the act of retelling. The discourse is not a single-shot in time but an accounting over a span of time and includes the moment of the interview. The researcher chooses not to tell a participant’s story as a chronology of life events but as a complete picture featuring the thoughts, feelings, interpretations, and the humanity of the participant.

- **Narrative is contextual (Chase, 2005).**

  The story of each participant is both supported and hindered by the socio-historical and socio-cultural contexts in which it originally occurred and in which it is told. Within the narrative, a participant constructs identities based on settings, culture, location, and a host of other factors. As those factors change, identities change. As a participant retells his or her stories, the context and contexts of those experiences shape the meaning making. Using this lens, the researcher is assisted in accounting for similarities and differences across multiple interviews of one participant and interviews of multiple participants.

- **Narrative is socially situated and interactive (Chase, 2005).**

  Stories told of lived experience can be seen as a performance – crafted either in the moment or in advance for the particular audience (in this case the researcher), based on the setting and the believed purpose. Researchers are not so naïve as to believe that a participant’s story would not vary depending on the situation. The researcher accepts that the participant is not attempting to be deceptive or manipulative but that he or she is a social human being who is influenced by the social context. Methods for assuring that the narrative is trustworthy will be discussed in a later section. However, at this point it is important to note that as an individual tells and retells his or her story, it changes as it reflects the surrounding context. This makes it no less true to the genuine participant.
Understanding Practitioners’ Experiences

Believing that a) people construct their own truth, b) that their truth is relative to their own experience, c) that they can be trusted to accurately portray their truth, and d) that as a researcher I can respectfully make their truth visible to others, I now come to a discussion of how this is accomplished.

Looking deep.

The purpose of this particular study is to come to a thorough understanding of practitioners’ experiences working full-time and going back to school under a quasi-mandate. The goal is to develop such a deep understanding that it is as if I experienced it myself (Stake, 1994). My assumption is that participants are capable of genuinely articulating their experience within the frameworks previously described.

Interviewing is a prime qualitative method for engaging in narrative research (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Sediman, 2006). To achieve the deep understanding sought in this study, a series of intensive yet comfortable interviews was chosen to truly understand how practitioners lived this experience, what their successes and challenges were, and what could be learned from their narrative.

The in-depth research interview (McMillan, 2008; Neuman, 2009; Seidman, 2006) is an effective tool for looking deeply into a specific issue confronting a population, learning from the richness of the participants’ experience, analyzing the interviews for recurring themes or unique phenomenon, and drawing conclusions and/or new directions for future research. Interview is also an effective tool for allowing participants to become the narrators of their own stories. When using an in-depth interview process to collect and analyze the data, the researcher can glean both how individuals make meaning of their lives and what meanings result (Chase, 2005).

Holding multiple in-depth interviews over a series of time provides several advantages. First and foremost is the likelihood of building a positive rapport that will result in trust and authenticity between researcher and participant. In addition, participants are sent a subtle message
that their story has worth when they become aware from the outset that we will be dialoguing about their experience for many hours over several days. Lastly, interviews spread across several weeks allow participants the opportunity to further reflect and deepen their own understandings of their stories between interviews.

In-depth interviews maximize the researcher’s opportunity for deep understanding and rich analysis. In studying the discourse, the researcher’s desire is to become so familiar, so connected, and so understanding of the subject matter that they “develop an intuitive, tacit knowing of the complexity of the subject, so that they know without being able to say precisely how they know until further reflection points to the logic of the conclusion” (Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2007, p. 75). This knowledge is difficult to acquire without vast amounts of time as a participant observer or without in-depth interviews. A desire to tell the story with such “thick description” (Geertz, 2003) that the “reader comes to know some things told as if he or she had experienced it” (Stake, 1994, p. 442) necessitates in-depth interviewing.

Well-designed interviews vary on a continuum from highly structured with limited, closed responses to highly unstructured, open and conversational (McMillan, 2008). During an interview, the researcher sets out to gather information from participants around themes of a particular context and to construct deeper meaning from the responses given (Kvale, 1996). Careful attention must be given to the crafting of questions and in particular to the themes of the questions. Consideration must be given to the interviewer’s subjectivities that creep in when making decisions about what questions to ask and whose answers should be given. Additionally, the power relationship between interviewer and interviewee must be carefully navigated.

Interview questions for this study are crafted with an attempt to open the door for personal story telling with limited leading by or influence from the researcher. Questions prompt participants to tell about their personal history, focusing on family, social and professional experiences. They also draw out participants’ current context of working full-time and going to
school part-time and the impact of these on the participant. Appendix B includes the specific starter questions utilized in each set of interviews.

The interviewing method necessitates that the researcher navigate the social relationship so that he or she has enough control to direct the flow of conversation, build rapport yet remain neutral, illicit honest feedback, convey a feeling of safety, and be articulate enough to redirect or continue a line of questioning when clarification is needed (Neuman, 2009). The entire process of the interview must be carefully crafted and executed, from initial contact, introduction, entry, interview, and exit. A skilled interviewer is adept at using probes to gather additional detail when a response is vague or further clarification is needed; however, it is highly important that the probing questions are not leading questions (McMillan, 2008; Neuman, 2009). As a result, questions are worded carefully and intentionally. There is a purposeful attempt to use plain language and a conversational tone. Each question is limited to one topic or focus area, and questions are ordered to lead participants in a certain direction. However, there is sufficient open-endedness to allow participants to drift in other directions throughout the process. This drift is not discouraged as sometimes it results in useful information and may contribute to building rapport.

Looking wide.

Just as the in-depth interview allows the researcher to look deep into a single participant’s experience, conducting in-depth interviews with multiple participants allows the researcher to look at a range of experiences. The intention of the dual approach is to avoid the problem of a study being “a mile wide and an inch deep.” It is a strategy for attempting to understand the problem posed or the question asked through multiple experiences and perspectives.

This study voices the stories of practitioners from a variety of viewpoints. Recruitment methods had an eye to not only look for discrepant cases, but also for a range of demographic criteria. The study documents shared themes and unique peculiarities among people from a variety of characteristics such as age, gender, socio-economic status and legacy, ethnic background, race, and employers. The study is strengthened by looking deeply into each
individual’s story and looking wide across all stories. The particulars that make each story interesting and valuable increase from studying the discourse both in terms of depth and breadth.

**Listening well.**

Although by the very nature of interview, the first focus is on questions being asked, an argument could be made that of greater importance is the researcher’s role as listener. The listening requires active engagement and a careful attention to when to prompt, redirect, or remain quiet. As Chase (2005) describes, amidst the ramblings and seemingly off topic talk, rich data can emerge:

Thus, narrative interviewing involves a paradox. On the one hand, a researcher needs to be well prepared to ask good questions that will invite the other’s particular story; on the other hand, the very idea of a particular story is that it cannot be known, predicted, or prepared for in advance. (p. 662)

**Research Relationship**

Researching in one’s “backyard” (Glesne, 2006, p. 31) is replete with potential benefits and potential risks. Familiar settings and people may contribute to ease of access and trust-building. However, it may also lead to researcher bias, differing expectations, and/or participant discomfort with the findings. However, oftentimes a researcher’s *backyard* is lush with stories that, although unique to each teller, are common to many readers and other tellers. I was and remain committed to a conscious self-awareness of the nature of relationships with my participants and the potential concerns.

Creating a rapport marked by confidence, trust, and even “mutual liking” (Glesne, 2006, p. 110) is the foundational goal. With this goal comes an understanding that how participants define and obtain rapport may be culturally different than my background and is taken into consideration. Balancing the research relationship requires an active self-awareness of my subjectivities. Aligning with qualitative research forefathers and mothers (Peshkin, 1988; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Wolcott, 2005), I consider subjectivity as potentially a positive force in my
research. Subjective responses to participants alert me to directions to pursue or to avoid along
with a host of other decisions that need to be made in the moment. On the other hand, unregulated
subjective responses can lead to negative results. Therefore, I was and am committed to
monitoring personal subjectivity and engaging in reflective practices that bring subjectivities to
light and account for them in appropriate ways. These methods are further described in the
section titled Validity.

Finally, I see my role as part biographer, part interpreter, and wholly constructivist
(Stake, 1995). The life histories of participants are certain to bear weight on their meaning
making. My interpretation of those experiences can create new connections for readers.
Encircling both of these roles is a core belief that knowledge is not discovered, but rather
constructed and co-constructed by the experience and on the experience. As a researcher, my role
is to tease out how these components interplay with one another to create meaning which requires
a certain amount of intuition balanced by rigorous practices.

Conceptual Framework

All researchers approach a study with biases and intuition. The necessity and challenge of
accounting for and mitigating bias is well documented in the literature (Angrosino, 2005; Fontana
& Frey, 2005; Glesne, 2006, Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Without minimizing this issue, however,
there is also significant value placed on the intuition a researcher brings to his or her study
(Harry, Sturges, & Klinger, 2005; Stake, 2005). It is impossible to complete this or any other
study without personal experiences and values affecting the work in some way.

It is worth noting that although I recognize personal assumptions and biases, I
intentionally chose to refrain from designing the study based on theories that are hallmark to
qualitative inquiry (for example: behaviorism, critical theory, grounded theory, etc.). Although it
can be beneficial to begin a project with a clear theoretical framework, certain contexts lend
themselves to a seemingly more open-ended approach. Further, it is possible that pre-identifying
a lens through which to collect data (e.g.: feminism theory) might be another form of bias.
Not identifying a theoretical framework during the research design phase may present a concern for some readers. They may be concerned that the study will result in an “anything goes” (Smith & Deemer, 2003) approach that positions the study relatively, without plausibility and credibility. However, the study is designed to hold to high ethical standards of trustworthiness and authenticity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) which will be further described in following sections.

The approach allows the participants’ stories to reveal the framework to the researcher, and the researcher allows the “case to define the concept” (Becker, 1998, p. 123). Becker (1998) argues for this approach and describes it under the heading “Let the Case Define the Concept” (p.123). The working theory is that when a researcher approaches a study with a specific category for which it may fit (e.g.: this is a case of a lack of self-efficacy), there is a temptation for the researcher to look for and see only that issue and to stop with that one issue. With this in mind, therefore, the stance utilized in this study is that by identifying upfront a theoretical lens (such as critical theory, self-efficacy, positivism/post-positivism, etc.), there is risk of limiting the findings. Out of respect for the uniqueness of each participant’s experience and the converging factors that bring the participant to this place and time, I chose to refrain from deciding beforehand the theoretical paradigm.

However, within my conceptual framework is the belief that knowledge and experience is co-created (Guba & Lincoln, 2005), and as I participate in the act of research, I bear influence on the data itself (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, Polkinghorne, 1989; Smith & Deemer, 2003). As participants share their stories, I cannot devoid myself of human characteristics which may influence the data collection. In an effort to confront personal biases and assumptions, I wrote a memo before and after each interview. The memo writing was intended to be a metacognitive exercise in which I dealt with personal topics apart from the participant so that they were both documented and separated from the data collection. A sample page of my journal is included in Appendix C.
With that said, this study draws on the work of Becker (1998), Denzin (1989), and Geertz (2003) to collect data based on “substantive theories” (Glesne, 2006, p. 28). Substantive theories inform the design of the study in general ways. Substantive theories typically come from the results of other studies and raise new questions. In keeping with this definition, the substantive theories held are that participants’ experiences are unique and that this uniqueness can inform policy makers, employers, and institutions of higher education in meaningful ways.

Recruitment

Eligibility criteria to participate in the study included the following: working full-time in a Keystone STARS facility, a minimum of ten years of teaching experience, active enrollment in a credential or degree program or graduation within the past six months, ability to commit to three 120-minute interviews over the course of four weeks and a minimum of one 60-minute follow-up meeting.

Recruitment occurred in the South Central Region of Pennsylvania. The South Central Region as defined by Keystone STARS is comprised of the following counties: Adams, Chester, Cumberland, Dauphin, Franklin, Lancaster, Lebanon, and York. The South Central region held great potential for finding a variety of participants, considering that it geographically contains urban, suburban, and rural settings and a full assortment of program types (for-profit, non-profit, Head Start, etc.).

Recruitment included an invitation to participate letter disseminated electronically through the South Central local affiliates of the National Association of the Education of Young Children and the Pennsylvania Key. In addition, hard copies were distributed to classroom teachers and directors through my network of professional relationships. The invitation collected basic demographic information as well as survey responses to ten questions designed to identify participants’ experiences of going back to school and some basic feelings about those experiences. At the conclusion of the invitation, participants were asked if they were interested in
a follow-up phone call to discuss their survey responses. Appendix D includes the initial recruitment letter and survey. Appendix E outlines the script for the follow-up phone call.

**Participant Selection**

Seventeen individuals responded to the recruitment flyer representing each qualifying criteria indicator (Table 1). Five respondents were either ineligible or opted-out of further participation. Twelve respondents indicated interest in further participation.

**Table 1**

*Respondents by Program Types*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Type</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Respondents</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Selected Out</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Selected In</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currently Enrolled</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recent Graduate</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDA</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AA</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BS</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEd</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Responses to the survey were analyzed in three ways. First, responses to each question were tallied as raw data (Table 2). Responses were mostly positive (Agree, Totally Agree) to questions that describe the experience of going back to school (questions one through three) which were targeted toward research question one. Conversely, answers were most diverse and scored the lowest ratings for questions five, eight, and nine which targeted the value practitioners place on teacher qualifications (research question three). The most intriguing responses were for items seven and eight. To question seven, respondents indicated four “Agree” and six “Totally Agree” to children being deserving of a teacher with a credential or degree, yet when asked in question eight if one needed a credential or degree to be a good teacher, only one response was that of “Agree.” Research question two was targeted in survey questions four and five. Respondents seemed to indicate adequate levels of support, but reported a range in the ease of which they experienced returning to school.
Table 2

*Item Analysis – Raw Data*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Totally Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Totally Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Going back to school has helped me in my job.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Going back to school has made me a better caregiver/teacher.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I have learned a lot as a result of going back to school.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I have (had) a lot of people supporting me in going back to school.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Going back to school has been (was) easy.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. It's good that Keystone STARS requires caregivers/teachers to have credentials or degrees.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Children deserve to have caregivers/teachers who have a credential or degree.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. In order to be a good caregiver/teacher you need to have a credential or degree.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I am interested in being a public school teacher.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Going back to school has been a goal I've had for a long time.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data was analyzed a second time, looking at responses by credentials and degrees earned. Little could be interpreted from this activity due to the small sample size and the inequity of their distribution by program type. Of note is that the greatest range of responses was to questions 5, 9, and 10 relating to ease of going back to school, desiring to be a public school teacher, and fulfillment of long time goal. Respondents varied from “Totally Agree” to “Totally Disagree” across these questions. For all other questions, respondents were within a three-column spread in the “Disagree,” “Neutral,” and “Agree” range.

The third round of analysis was to consider respondents individually by credentials and degrees earned. Responses to survey questions were studied with an eye toward inconsistencies in
responses and comments left in the “optional” field. Six participants (respondents 1, 4, 5, 7, 8, and 11) were selected primarily on the perceived ability that their experience holds an intuitive uniqueness, and from that experience, learning can be maximized (Stake, 1995). Item analysis of their survey responses were then filtered from the complete data set and demographic criteria were added. The pool was then narrowed to provide representation of all of the following characteristics:

- For-profit, Non-profit, Faith Based
- Urban, Suburban
- Substitute, Teacher, Director
- CDA, AA, BS, MEd

Based on the above criteria, four participants were selected to receive a follow-up phone call intended to screen for further potential. The choice to study four individuals was based on an assumption that although the sample size is small, their experience holds an undeniable uniqueness, yet sameness across the field of early childhood practitioners. Respondents 1, 4, 7, and 11 seemed to have survey responses that indicated a unique context or viewpoint that warranted follow-up. See Appendix F for each participant’s responses to all survey questions.

- **Respondent 1:** Brenda was the only individual who responded through hard copy in the mail. She indicated that she had personally been encouraged by a co-worker to go back to school, and that she was happy that she did it, but she also marked “Totally Disagree” in response to the question “going back to school was easy.” Other items of interest included a “Neutral” response to having a credential or degree being necessary to be a good teacher, but a “Totally Agree” response to questions regarding the value of the requirement and children deserving teachers with credentials/degrees.

- **Respondent 4:** Sarah provided more neutral responses in comparison to the entire group. She did not “Totally Disagree” nor did she “Totally Agree” with any statements. She indicated “Neutral” in response to having learned a lot by going back to school, the value of the STARS requirement and returning to school being a long-
time goal. Her response to “Agree” that children deserve teachers with credentials or
degrees, but “Disagree” response to these being necessary to be a good teacher
indicated some level of conflict worth pursuing. My background knowledge that
Sarah worked at a company that placed high value on formal degrees and the fact that
she was the only respondent from the narrowed pool to have earned an associate’s
degree led me to select her for a follow-up phone call.

- Respondent 7: Natalie is a director earning a bachelor’s degree in a faith-based
program. Her degree type and program type provided a unique context from other
respondents. In addition, her “Agreement” that she had a learned a lot by going back
to school coupled with a “Disagree” response to the notion that a credential/degree
was necessary to be a good teacher and “Neutral” response to children deserving
credential/degree bearing teachers was perplexing to me.

- Respondent 11: Ann had both strong reactions and more neutral responses to many
survey questions which indicated to me a likely complexity to her experience. Of
note, the only respondents within the narrowed pool to indicate “Neutral” to question
one regarding schooling helping with their job were individuals earning a Master’s
degree which included Ann. That information coupled with an “Agree” response to
having learned a lot seemed interesting considering her context as a director. Lastly,
her “Totally Agree” responses to the value of credentials/degrees (question seven)
and children deserving more educated teachers (question eight), but a “Neutral”
response to needing a credential/degree to be a good teacher was intriguing.

Follow-up phone calls were placed to all four respondents on the same day. I spoke with
everyone with the exception of Ann, with whom I left a voice mail message. Brenda, Sarah, and
Natalie each communicated remembering completing the survey and indicated they had time to
speak with me to answer a few more questions. Based on our conversation, I believed that each
individual’s participation would benefit the study. Ann returned my call by nine-thirty a.m. the following business day and also seemed to have a perspective worth pursuing. At the conclusion of each call, either an initial meeting date was set-up or in one case, all three interviews were scheduled. All interviews were scheduled to begin within the next two weeks. Appendix G includes notes from the phone calls and the memo written after the conversation.

Data Collection

The primary form of data collection was in-depth (Yin, 2009), semi-structured, open (Glesne, 2006) interviews. Participants engaged in Seidman’s (2006) “model of in-depth, phenomenological interviewing” (p. 16) that is designed to occur in three phases. Each meeting was scheduled for two hours over a maximum of four weeks. The interview portion was allotted 60-90 minutes, and the remaining 30 minutes were devoted to pleasantries and logistics. Appendix B includes the three interview scripts. Each instrument was piloted with three practitioners in an abbreviated manner prior to formal research.

The first interview focused on life history in light of the topic. The intention was to reconstruct how participants have come to this place in their lives and to build my understanding of how they construct their context. The second interview focused on the details of their experience working full-time and attending classes. The intent was to document the concrete details of the experience and to refrain from opinion to whatever extent possible. The third interview allowed participants to reflect on the experience and to relate how they make meaning of their experience. “It addresses the intellectual and emotional connections between the participants’ work and life….Making sense or meaning requires that the participants look at how the factors in their lives interacted to bring them to their present situation” (Seidman, 2006, p. 18). Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Every interview was transcribed verbatim with the exception of side bar conversations. At those points in the transcript, notes were added regarding the nature of the conversation, and the digital time stamp within the recording was included.
Interviews were completed in settings and time tables chosen by the participant over the course of four weeks (Table 3). Interviews were originally scheduled with at least one week in-between. This protocol was kept for Sarah and Natalie. However, shortly into Ann’s second interview, it became apparent that her experience was so vastly different from expectation that it would be difficult to complete the predetermined interview questions. An alternate set of questions had not been prepared, and in the moment the decision was made to move into the third interview question set immediately. Brenda’s first interview was rescheduled due to holiday conflicts and consequently was held only 24 hours prior to the second interview. Pushing all interviews back one week was not attempted because Brenda’s preference was to begin and end the interview process while her center was closed for the holiday. Although it is desirable to space interviews one week apart to allow the opportunity for reflection, it seemed better in this case to honor the participant’s wishes and meet within a shorter time frame.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Interview #1</th>
<th>Interview #2</th>
<th>Interview #3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ann</td>
<td>Workplace Office</td>
<td>12/14/11</td>
<td>12/29/11</td>
<td>12/29/11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Workplace Cafeteria</td>
<td>12/14/11</td>
<td>12/20/11</td>
<td>12/30/11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie</td>
<td>Workplace Conference Room</td>
<td>12/20/11</td>
<td>12/28/11</td>
<td>01/03/12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brenda</td>
<td>Panera Bread</td>
<td>12/29/11</td>
<td>12/30/11</td>
<td>01/02/12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Analysis

The first step of data analysis was to bracket the innately interesting dialogue (Seidman, 2006). In keeping with the Seidman approach, it is acknowledged that the researcher exercises a form of judgment as to what he or she perceives as interesting, and this instinct is based upon his or her experience with the topic, the research project, and a host of other tangible and intangible factors. Two rounds of bracketing were completed using NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software, resulting in twenty-one themes.
Table 4

*Themes Sorted by Number of Times Coded, n = 4*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Coded</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiences with education</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevancy</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value in general</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiences with education\Emotions about education</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juggling</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandate</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future\Exit the field</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEACH</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coursework difficulty</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiences with education\Desire for education</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevancy\Relevancy - BS</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supports</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiences with education\Pathway to education</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevancy\Relevancy - DC</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevancy\Relevancy - AA</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wages</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevancy\Relevancy - CDA</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value in general\Value - CDA</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5

*Coding Sorted by Number of Interviews Containing Theme, n = 4*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Coded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiences with education</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevancy</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value in general</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juggling</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandate</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future\Exit the field</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEACH</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coursework difficulty</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wages</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiences with education\Emotions about education</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiences with education\Pathway to education</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiences with education\Desire for education</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In keeping with the Seidman protocol, the next step was to determine if data was to be further analyzed and presented as a profile or through categories. Although there was sufficient depth and breadth to study the narratives through shared categories, my sense was that each participant’s uniqueness was greater than her similarity. And since Seidman (2006) himself postulates that portraits are more “consistent with the process of interviewing” (p. 119), I chose to move forward with creating profiles.

Profiles were created through cutting-and-pasting the most interesting and meaningful parts of the interview, in the first person, and in the participant’s own words (Seidman, 2006). Determining what was *most interesting* was based on a number of factors. First, dialogue that contained a theme similar across all four participants was included. Next, any theme consistent within the interview and directly related to a research question was kept. Lastly, dialogue that innately perked my interest as a researcher embedded within the field of early childhood education was also included.

Only when necessary were comments added for clarification or words for transition. These additions are enclosed in curly brackets { }. Places where significant dialogue is omitted are indicated through the use of ellipses (...). To determine what sections of the narrative to use, I spent several hours reading each participant’s transcript and my memos over the course of three weeks. A Microsoft Word version of the interview was created that highlighted text previously coded. The initial step was to delete all other text with the exception of non-highlighted (non-coded) text that was critical for context and flow. The next step was to edit for readability; such
as removing stammers, editing run-on sentences, etc. The final step was to use a cautious eye to
determine if any parts of the interview would benefit from reordering.

After a final read of each profile, the profile document was emailed to each participant.
The body of each email contained four brief paragraphs. After my initial greeting and update, one
paragraph described the process of coding and creating the profile. The third paragraph addressed
pseudonyms and other changes to details made to protect their identity. The fourth paragraph
asked the participants to read the profile and respond to three questions: “Please let me know if
you think this is an accurate recording of our conversation and yourself. Is there anything that I
left out that you think should be included? Do you feel misrepresented in any way?” (See
Appendix H for sample email)

All four participants responded within 48 hours of the sent email. Ann and Brenda were
satisfied with the profile. Natalie indicated three details which she felt may divulge her identity. I
reworded those passages and emailed my edits back to her. She was then content with the profile.
Sarah responded that she felt that she sounded as though she were “talking in circles” as a result
of my questions being stripped away. I indicated that I would review the document again and
look to see if it could be crafted in a more articulate manner. Within 24 hours I reread the profile
and agreed with Sarah’s concern. I then reordered some of the interview so that similar topics
were presented together, even though they were not recorded in that order. In keeping with
Seidman’s (2006) guidelines, the reordering of the narrative did not “wrench it out of context and
distort its meaning” (p. 122).

Data Interpretation

The final step was to interpret the data. As Seidman (2006) argues, “Researchers must
ask themselves what they have learned from doing the interviews, studying the transcripts,
marking and labeling them, crafting profiles, and organizing categories of excerpts” (p. 128). It is
at this time of interpretation that the previously-mentioned strategy of letting the “case define the
concept” (Becker, 1998, p. 123) emerged. Utilizing the profile accepted by each participant, I
allowed the data to speak. I created a legend of themes (Appendix I) based on the original round of coding and added placeholders for new themes. I then read each profile and hand coded using a highlighter and pen. Each profile was read and coded twice over a 72-hour time period. Themes previously identified in coding of the interviews were highlighted in yellow and coded in the left margin. New themes were underlined in green pen, and coded in the right margin, and new codes were added to the legend. On a final reading, new themes were highlighted in purple. Appendix J includes an example of the outcome of coding in this manner.

Each narrative seemed to keep coming back to a central theme of its own. To confirm my sense of their story, I generated a chart depicting the percentage of the transcript that was coded for each theme (Appendix K). I then analyzed and interpreted the meaning of their individual narrative themes (looking deep). Consequently, data collected in this study is presented in profile form, allocating a chapter to each participant. Chapter 8 will discuss the findings that emerged across the profiles (looking wide) and their significance to the field.

Profiles are presented in ascending order of credentials and degrees earned. Table 6 summarizes participant demographics.

**Table 6**

*Participant demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Position Held</th>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>County</th>
<th>Program Type</th>
<th>STAR Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brenda</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Assistant Group Supervisor/ Floater</td>
<td>Child Development Associate (CDA)</td>
<td>Earned</td>
<td>York</td>
<td>Faith-based</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>Group Supervisor</td>
<td>Associates Degree, Early Childhood Education</td>
<td>Earned</td>
<td>Dauphin</td>
<td>For-profit</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Center Director</td>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree, Early Childhood Education, PreK-4th grade Certification; Director’s Credential</td>
<td>In Process</td>
<td>Dauphin</td>
<td>Faith-based, Non-profit</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Center</td>
<td>Master’s Degree, In Process</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lancaster</td>
<td>Non-profit</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Validity

Although strategies have been identified for triangulating the data to support validity, I considered potential threats to the validity of the data and the findings. This section will identify potential threats and actions taken to mitigate them.

**Threats against the study – Was participant selection right?**

As potential participants responded to the recruitment strategies and purposeful sampling was completed, an eye was kept for the “negative case” (Glesne, 2006, p. 37; Patton, 1980, p. 328). Although I bring certain intuitions and subjectivities about what makes a participant’s story valuable, there was an openness that there may be other criteria of which I was not yet aware that may be valuable to the study. As participant selection was in process, I was open to individuals who brought sparks of interest outside the expected – those that might present a *negative case* or discrepant case. I used memos to articulate why participants were or were not chosen. I was specifically looking out for participants who presented a *negative case*. In some ways, Brenda and Ann both represented counter-balancing experiences.

**Threats against the data – Did the participant get it right?**

Two possible threats to the trustworthiness of the study go hand-in-hand. I have coined these threats “sensationalize potential.” There is concern that participants may *sensationalize* their story to either tell me what they think I “want to hear” or to exaggerate their experience for personal and/or professional reasons. Kvale (1995) describes this validity in terms of *truth* and *correctness* of their statement. This threat is not realized as each participant presented her experience with a sense of restraint, authenticity, and sincerity as perceived by the investigator. None of the participants present what a reasonable person would consider a sensational story.

Another potential threat, common in virtually all research, fits under the “sensationalize potential” concern and is related to self-selection. When informants self-select to respond to a
recruitment strategy, most likely they believe they have a unique story worthy of telling (Chase, 2005). Therefore, there can be stories of experiences that are not perceived as unique or extreme which are not included and therefore missing from the study. This threat was handled through the assertion that the study is not intended to be externally generalizable to all early childhood teachers returning to school for credentials and degrees in the state as a result of Keystone STARS. Rather, it is internally generalizable to the specific group studied and transferrable to those who closely share their context.

**Threats against analysis and interpretation – Did the researcher get it right?**

The largest threat to all issues of authenticity in this study is my own bias as a non-traditional student along with my current and past experience teaching non-traditional students. I entered this project with a great deal of anecdotal and personal experience relative to the stories I intended to document. In order to ensure that this subjectivity did not overpower the study, I engaged in several activities intended to enable me to see the data with a clear lens. First, I engaged in the act of “memo-ing” (Maxwell, 2005) before and after each interview. The purpose of each memo was to document my thinking, feelings and/or reflections related to the study. I found the memos to be cathartic. I arrived at each interview site early and sat in my car to handwrite the memo. The pre-interview memo seemed to cleanse my mind and emotions and allow me to engage in the interview with more openness. The post-interview memo was typically written within 24 hours, but not immediately after parting. This time between interview and memo-ing allowed me to reflect on what I heard, process words and body language, and consider how I contributed to the interview itself. (Sample memos are included as Appendix C)

A second measure used by scholars for reducing researcher bias is the use of multiple participants with varied demographics. Interviewing individuals from different backgrounds and settings increases the confidence of validity—that these stories are not just limited to a very narrow population, specifically a population in which the researcher also belongs. Table 6 outlines the wide range of demographics of participants in this study.
The third attempt to ensure that bias is not the driving force is the use of member checking or “respondent validation” which Maxwell (2005) claims to be the “single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do” (p. 111). As presented earlier, each participant read her profile and affirmed that she is accurately represented.

Another procedure for achieving trustworthiness and authenticity is to analyze findings with intent to look for “rival explanations” (Patton, 1980, p. 327). After coding, analyzing, interpreting, triangulating, arriving at findings and member checking, the researcher asks, “Are there any other logical possible explanations that have not been presented?” The goal is to determine if the data supports common sense, logical alternative findings. After several weeks of reflection on the data collected in this study and consideration of alternate explanations, I did not have sufficient evidence to provide a clear-cut “yes” to this question.

Another way in which validity is supported is the tight alignment between the questions, the answers, and the findings. Patton (1980) describes this as credibility. Eisenhart and Howe (1992) speak of this in terms of the “fit” (p. 657) between questions, procedures and techniques, and Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) categorizes it as “Quality of Craftsmanship” (p. 248). At the heart of this internal validity is the extent to which the questions asked were answered, if the answers were credible, and if the analyses of the answers hold up under scrutiny. Appendix J contains an organizer of research questions to interview questions.

Returning to my theoretical assumptions and theories, I rely on the Guba and Lincoln (2005) construct of “Validity as Authenticity” (p. 207). In this framework, constructivist studies consider validity in terms of “fairness” (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 207). Fairness is achieved when all perspectives are included, omissions are not made, deliberate attempts are made to avoid marginalization, and stories are balanced. Supported in this measure of validity is Howard Becker’s recounting of what results when certain concepts are excluded from research (see discussion in Becker, 1998, p. 116-120). Here, Becker unpacks a researcher’s choice to omit
certain types of crime (White crime) from a study so that what remains is a correlation between all other kinds of crime and poverty. *Fairness* is achieved in this study through careful attention to ensure credibility, and that nothing is left out.

Finally, the use of rich data (Maxwell, 2005) and thick description (Geertz, 2003) are the best weapons against invalid data interpretation. By using participants’ own words and including the nuances of their body language, emotional expressions, non-verbal cues, and (when appropriate) the environment, validity is strengthened. As Patton (1980) mentions, an intangible yet vital feature of qualitative work is the “intellectual rigor” (p. 339) of the researcher. The constant revisiting of the data, persistence, perseverance, creativity, and insight all serve to demonstrate a valid study with meaningful findings.
CHAPTER 4. BRENDA: PROFILE AND THEMES

Context: Office Assistant, Classroom Substitute, Floater; Earned a Child Development Associate Credential (CDA); Experience working with children: 17 years; Experience working in childcare: 1 year, 6 months

Brenda is a petite, mother of a preschool-aged daughter and wife of her high school sweetheart. She was born late in her parents’ lives and has an older brother with whom she has become closer to over recent years while starting their own families. She regularly attends church and places a high value on living a Christian lifestyle. She is unassuming and exudes an authentic kindness. She did not intend to work in childcare, to be a teacher, or to earn a credential. Her story is one of opportunity.

I struggled through school because I have a hard time. I’m a hands-on learner versus a book person. So I had a hard time with learning different things because I couldn’t understand it without teachers teaching me hands-on. In high school I had to be tutored a lot, especially with math, in order to graduate. I just had a hard time in high school. I knew where I wanted to be and I was just trying to get there. It was a lot more difficult because teachers didn’t do things that made it easy for me to learn. So, I struggled. I liked my teachers and I liked learning. I just had to put the time in. And it was stressful at the time, but I wanted to do it because I wanted to pass… I didn’t really have any idea what I wanted to do because I really didn’t know what was out there. I never really had a desire for a career. I did enjoy Home Interiors when I was in school. I enjoyed that class a lot and I did take a Child Development class, but nobody ever told me how to pursue them as far as going to college.

I tried radiology for a couple of years. I was coming right out of high school so I struggled with that a lot. And those teachers and professors would not help me to get where I needed to be. That was through the county hospital. So, I just ended up quitting halfway through because I couldn’t take the stress of it anymore and I wasn’t getting the help. So, I ended up quitting and from that point I didn’t get into anything else… I worked at Starbucks — my brother got me in — he was in the warehouse and I worked as a barista in the coffee shop for a while. Then my husband started working at Supply Line, along with my mom. He’s been there for 17 to 18 years… He got me in at Supply Line and I worked there for 13 years. I started off in the factory and I was in customer service when I left.

My husband and I had sat down and crunched numbers to figure out if I could stay at home with my daughter, April. And we found out we could afford to do that so I ended up quitting in January. I stayed home with her and at the time the Center was still under the old directors – the director and assistant. And I had some problems at the daycare, too, and they weren’t willing to address those issues so it worked out that I got to stay home with April. But, I also said to the directors, “If you need a substitute at any time, I can substitute if you need me to.” I had talked to them about coming back with April for different activities, like when they did their water play. I wouldn’t drop and go, but I would be there with her. And they said that was fine. So, I got all my paperwork put in and my first day was on April’s 2nd birthday – June 28th was my first day there. I just worked a couple of days filling in when the teachers were out.

So, then eventually the directors had left and the Pastor came in from the church. It was the Pastor and the financial person of the church who came in and the two of them would go through things and run the center. Well, at this point they brought me into the office since I had office experience. They had me help them find different things that they needed until they could get a director hired for the center. It went two months before they were able to hire a new director.
So, most of the time when everybody comes to work I’m in the office. I’m helping do the fundraisers and I help with some of the teachers with their newsletters and different things like that. I’m in charge of the Campbell soup labels… So, the little petty stuff is what I do so that way the director can focus more on her work.

The three-year-old teacher, she’s 67, and she’s the one who came to me about classes because she had just gotten her CDA a year or two before I came in the picture. She came to me and said, “You should really do this CDA.” And I would talk to her about what it is, what’s involved, and she didn’t go into detail. She just said, “It’s a really good program, you’ll better yourself as a teacher, you’ll learn more things that will help you if you ever become a teacher.”

So, I thought, “Ok”, but I really didn’t know what I was getting myself into. I just knew a little bit from talking to her. So, our financial person from the church came in. He said to me that if I was willing to do this then they were willing to pay for it. So, he wrote a contract up and I went ahead and did it.

And so I was nervous and scared because I haven’t been in school for so long. I was hoping I could do this because I didn’t know what I was getting myself into. The first half seemed to be pretty good, but as time went on and it got harder with the papers I needed to write up. But, my director was also my mentor. So, she helped me out as much as she could. And the preschool teacher – the 4 and 5 year old teacher – she learns like I do – she has to be a hands-on person, she can’t learn from lectures. So, I would go to her and I would say, “I don’t understand what this means. Can you put it in my language?” And she was excellent. She would tell me what I needed to know. She’d give me examples and that’s what helped me to get through.

I just knew that (the CDA) was going to help me with children and it was more education on children, state regulations, and what is expected in daycare centers. I didn’t really know anything else. I was nervous because I kept thinking am I doing the right thing because I did have a hard time with school before. But, I knew I had the support back at the center – my director had reassured me that she would help me in any way she could and so did the one teacher. Most of the teachers said they would help me anyway that they needed to. So, I had that reassurance. I wasn’t regretting anything at that point because I knew that I had that support. So, it was a little better. But, I still was nervous because I was facing the unknown. I didn’t know what I was getting myself into. And the first six months weren’t real bad. I thought, “Yeah, I can do this. This is pretty simple.”

I had Janice as my CDA teacher and she was alright, but I don’t feel like I got enough from her. She would lecture a lot and we would watch video — we would do different things. She would mix it up, but I didn’t feel like I was getting enough. Some days I would leave there and think, “I don’t think I learned anything.” Sometimes when she would explain things I would think I have it and then it was completely wrong. There are some parts of it that were challenging for me and hard and I kept thinking, “Oh, what did I get myself into?” But it doesn’t last very long. It is very rewarding. At the end I feel like I’ve learned a lot. But, it is amazing that since I have my CDA and I can go in classrooms and be like, “Oh, my goodness. That’s all wrong!” Not that I’m trying to nit-pick, but you can just see that.

I just wish I could use what I learned more. I think I could if I have {my own} classroom. But, I do use what I’ve learned when I’m {the substitute or floater} in the classroom. I try to remember the different steps or different ways of doing things and trying new things with the kids. It’s a lot based on the age, too. Because I’m with so many different ages I have to stop and think if it’ll work with this age group. And if I’m not sure I try it and then I can see if it works and if it doesn’t work then I just move on to something else. I understand that they might be too little and they don’t understand it yet. But, what I’ve learned I can use a lot in the classroom. But, with the CDA, towards the end it all clicked because then everything that we learned from the beginning of the year until the end came together. And I could use them {in an integrated way} rather than just one thing here and one thing there.
Some of my readings I did when I was in the nap room or I would try and get my competency goals started and write them out. Then I would talk to the preschool teacher on my lunch because she had the same lunch break as I did and she didn’t mind helping me very much. So, she would give me a few points and ideas and then I would take it from there. I would stay up a lot of nights until ten o’clock or on Friday nights up until eleven o’clock writing papers and trying to get it all ready so that the next week I could turn them into my director on Monday. And if she had time – it might take her two days to look at them – so if she had them by Monday then I would definitely have them back by Wednesday. And then Wednesday I could retype them. Sometimes I was able to retype them at the daycare if I had all my work caught up. She felt like the CDA had something to do with the daycare so she allowed me to use my computer to type stuff up. So a lot of times if I was caught up in my everyday work I would sit and type up my competency statements {in the office}, then I was already to go for Thursday’s class. So, I did have to juggle a lot, but it helped that my husband was able to be with my daughter a good bit and with him making dinners I didn’t have as much. So, he alleviated some of the stress because he’s right there in there helping me.

{Waiting for my assessor to come out I was} anxious. I was very anxious because I just wanted to get it done and over with. And then I was very nervous when the time came. I was very nervous. She would ask me questions and she told me not to be nervous… I told the Director, “I’ll probably get a letter saying I didn’t make it!” And she said, “It’s really hard not to pass it unless you’re telling her that you’re beating the children and putting them in closets!” (Laughter) She said, “It’s very difficult not to {pass}.” And I was like, “Well, she was telling me all I need to do – the different steps I had to take in order to redo it.” I just kind of felt anxious. I was nervous the whole time. It was supposed to be for three hours and it was actually two and a half or right under two hours. It wasn’t long at all so I was happy because when were done we were able to leave!

And eventually I got my certificate in the mail. And that took a month after I talked to her for me to get it. Well, my husband got the mail and when I came home from daycare he said to me that there was a package on the table but it was big envelope. As soon as I saw “CDA Council” and then I was all excited. So, I just ripped that open in no time and I was very excited! I was happy! My director gave me a little goodie bag with gift cards and stuff in it. I told her that I had a surprise and the next morning I had it on her desk and then she was very excited. Everybody was screaming through the center! (Laughter) They were happy that I got it. At home, my husband was very happy that I got it, too!

This kind of fell into my lap, but I feel like I can use it for everything. Whether I’m at this center or I go to another one — which this one is good. But, I’m really opened minded about things. As far as, if it’s going to benefit me and I’m going to get something out of it then I’m not afraid to try it because I don’t know where my future is going to take me from here. I don’t know if I’m going to stay at the daycare once my little girl moves on and into school. I don’t know if I’m going to move with her and get into helping out at the elementary school or if I’m going to stay here. Right now, I’m planning on staying at the daycare because I’m not sure what’s involved with getting into the schools as far as policies and what you need to do as far as that goes. So, that’s something I would a have to look at.

I think I’m still going to be at the daycare in the future just because it’s a lot less stressful then going into the schools… unless I help in the kitchen or as an aide on the playground or something like that. I like the daycare, however when I left my other job, Supply Line, they had told me that I could come back at any point. But, I feel like I can’t go back and get a real fulltime job – not that this isn’t real – but outside of where my daughter is until she’s self-sufficient enough that I can leave her at home and not worry because something could happen or she can’t get something for herself. But, I like it at the daycare right now so I probably will stick it out for a little while. But, I don’t know where I will end up or what my future will hold when she goes to school.
I like knowing that I have the CDA because I’ve learned a lot and it helps me no matter where I go because it’s an education that I will have forever and I can remember what I’ve learned. If I do stick this out and stay here at the daycare for a while I feel like the CDA has really helped me a lot. And if I continue to take these trainings I feel like I’ll be building off of the CDA.

I think the CDA is very valuable. I really think that if I can get the other teachers to go and do it, I think they would be so much better in the classroom and they would have so many more answers to questions that they have. We have four teachers that don’t have the CDA and if they were to change their minds – and I told them that I would help them in any way I can and it’s a really good thing and they really need to do it. And I think it would almost be an a-ha if they were to go through it because they could understand the children better. And they would be able to come up with other ways of handling the children then their normal routine and way of doing things. They would learn other things so that way it would make their classroom more interesting. And they’d have a better relationship with the children because they would be meeting the needs and they would know how to meet the needs that they’re lacking in. I just think with all of them if they would take on and go to the CDA they would learn so much more and be able to use it in our classrooms.

I don’t feel that we’re ever too old to learn to new things and the schooling is going to make a teacher even better. Even though I could be the best teacher in the world, if they’re coming to me and saying, “Hey, we need you to go back to school.” Then they’re telling me that there’s more out to learn than what I already know. And a teacher has to question herself – how good am I if I can’t meet this child’s needs as a teacher? So, if she does go back to school she will learn more techniques and more education on how to meet everyone’s needs. She might not have a challenging child right now, but you never know when they’re going to walk through the door. I know that’s how I look at it. I just feel like you’re never too old to continue to learn and if somebody’s coming to you and saying that you need to go and get this then there’s obviously more out there that I don’t know and I need to go. I am open-minded and I am willing to learn whatever I can if it’s going to make a difference with me or people that I’m around. I’ve always been open-minded. Our director will come to me first before she goes to anyone else because the rest of them will put up resistance when it comes to a certain training or something else. I tell her – if it’s going to make me a better person – whether a better parent or a better teacher or something – if I’m getting something out of it, which I am then why not do it? I have nothing to lose. And if the center’s going to pay for it then I feel it’s a win-win.

What I am up in arms about is the whole state budget! Because if our children are learning – if they are saying that their most crucial time in their life for learning is in their early childhood education which is daycare and they’re learning then – then I feel it’s our state’s job to come forth and pay our teachers to go back to school and get more education — especially if these teachers want to... Because once children hit {public} school they’re taking away everything – all {children are} going to know is the book stuff. The math and the history and all of that kind of stuff. They’re not letting them be children anymore when they hit Kindergarten. And I just feel like if that’s the case, then why not cut the funding for the regular schools and give more of it to the daycare? {For} the teachers for the daycares and let them do the best they can with the education and teaching our children before they hit {public school}. I just get really upset because I feel like the state needs to be doing more for the daycare workers. Because the teachers who are in the daycare – you can go for the schooling, but you’re not going to get paid the big bucks like the teachers in the district. We’re underpaid and overworked, I feel. I just think that they need to know that if they’re cutting our funding and the teachers aren’t getting the education they need to be able to teach our children then what does our future hold? We don’t have a future president or anybody else because they weren’t taught at such an early age.

I used TEACH funds to pay for my assessor to come out... I’m going to wait a little bit before I decide to go back for my Associate’s. I wanted to wait because I didn’t know how the
funding was — I don’t want to be halfway in and then be told that TEACH has no more money… Because my husband and I don’t have the money right now to {pay for college}. I’m sure I could get a student loan, but I just didn’t want to go through all of that either. I just got my bonus from TEACH. TEACH helped me get a $200 bonus, but that was it. I haven’t gotten a raise since I started there and I’ll have been there a year in June and there’s nothing coming. I’m still making minimum wage. I took over a $3/hour pay cut when I left Supply Line. My husband struggles with that. I had to sign a contract to get my CDA so I know I’ll be at the daycare at least until my daughter goes to school and then I’ll have to see.

Brenda

Brenda indicated on her recruitment survey that she had been in the field of early childhood education for ten years or more. During the first interview, however, she shared that she had included babysitting in her work history. Her experience working in a childcare setting was approximately 18 months. Although, 10 years of experience was a criterion for inclusion in the study, I chose to continue the interview for several reasons. Several things indicated to me that her story would be relevant to the study: she had the highest positive responses to the survey questions (seven “Totally Agree” rankings on ten questions), on the phone she identified a motivation to further education not mentioned by any other respondents (improve her skills as a mother), and she was the only individual to mail a hard copy of the survey which indicated strong interest.

Her status as being new to the field gave a different viewpoint in response to the research questions. Although one might counter that her newness to working in early childhood education gave her a “honeymoon” perspective, it is important to place her status in the context of her pathway into the field. She had not set out to be a childcare teacher. She had no long-term plan to remain a childcare teacher. Moreover, she had, in fact, resigned a well-paying job in customer service to be a stay-at-home mother. However, a series of events occurred, and she found herself working full-time again, this time in early childhood education. In addition to being back to work, she was enrolled in a credentialing program simply because one teacher convinced her of the benefit. That scenario intrigued me as a researcher, and I wanted to pursue how she made meaning of her experiences and what the field might learn from her.
Brenda’s Experiences with Education

Brenda’s story is rooted in her prior experiences with education. She describes herself as a “hands-on learner” (Brenda Interview 1, 2011, p. 1) and as someone who “struggled” (Brenda Interview 1, 2011, p. 1) in high school and previous career training. Consequently, when she was hired as a part-time substitute at her daughter’s childcare program, the highest academic rank she had achieved was a high school diploma. Considering how much difficulty she had in school, it is interesting that she did not express negative emotions about learning itself. Her dissatisfaction was related to the ways in which she was taught and the lack of support she felt from teachers during her secondary and post-secondary education. Her experience with her CDA instructor fell in line with these past experiences evidenced by her statement:

I don’t feel like I got enough from her. She would lecture a lot and we would watch video — we would do different things. She would mix it up, but I didn’t feel like I was getting enough. Some days I would leave there and think, “I don’t think I learned anything.” Sometimes when she would explain things I would think I have it and then it was completely wrong” (Brenda Interview 1, 2011, p. 9).

Because of this disconnect with her instructor, she utilized co-workers to help her understand the content of her coursework.

But, my director was also my mentor. So, she helped me out as much as she could. And the preschool teacher — the 4 and 5 year old teacher — she learns like I do — she has to be a hands-on person, she can’t learn from lectures. So, I would go to her and I would say, “I don’t understand what this means. Can you put it in my language?” And she was excellent. She would tell me what I needed to know. She’d give me examples and that’s what helped me to get through… Sometimes when [the CDA Instructor] would explain things I would think I have it and then it was completely wrong. There are some parts of it that were challenging for me and hard and I kept thinking, “Oh, what did I get myself into?” (Brenda Interview 1, 2011, p. 9).

Brenda’s previous negative experience with instructors may have influenced her choice not to seek assistance from her instructor. However, what seems important is the network of support that Brenda’s early childhood community provided her. Her co-workers did not perceive her efforts to increase educational qualifications as a threat. Rather, they coached her throughout
her academic pursuit. A portion of the interviews not included in the profile further demonstrates how Brenda’s co-workers supported her learning:

We weren’t supposed to do this either so you may not want to put this in your paper, but the 3 year old preschool teacher who is the one who brought it to my attention about taking the CDA. She gave me her notebook. You’re not supposed to do that of course. But, she gave me her notebook. I didn’t use it as far as cheating off of her. I used it to see how to put my binder together. That was one thing we never really went over in class – how you had to have your binder set-up. So, I used hers as a reference guide. Her competency goals – I had them to look at, but my viewpoints were different than hers. So, it didn’t do my any good to use hers. It would have been obvious if I would have copied her, but I’m just not the type of person to cheat like that, either (Brenda Interview 2, 2011, p. 9).

Despite concern that this type of sharing of information could lead to issues of academic integrity, it highlights the ways in which practitioners support one another’s learning. Brenda also struggles orally and in writing with grammar and word choice. Consequently, her supervisor was also a willing participant in helping her achieve her goal. During our second conversation, she shared the following sidebar which is not included in her profile:

{The CDA instructor} allowed us to sometimes have a week to turn stuff in in – sometimes she would give us 2 weeks. She wasn’t like, “You have to turn this into me the next week.” She was very flexible because even with our competencies we could email them to her after we typed them up. I didn’t do that because I have to have a hard copy and always printed mine out. And then my director is so good with language and English that she would review it for me and she would make corrections where I needed commas or she would reword it for me if I had it that it made sense for me, but someone else would have been looking at it strangely. So, she would add a word here or take a word out and then she would give it back to me. That would give me time to retype it and then I could turn it in (Brenda Interview 2, 2011, p. 2).

Brenda had the support of her co-workers, her supervisor, and her husband who attended to family life when needed: “…my husband was able to be with my daughter a good bit and with him making dinners I didn’t have as much. So, he alleviated some of the stress because he’s right there in there helping me” (Brenda Interview 2, 2011, p. 5). Brenda was fortunate to have had the assistance of many individuals. This theme runs throughout each profile in subtle ways but is most prominent in Brenda’s narrative.
Brenda’s Perception of the CDA

In sharing her experience, a major theme for Brenda was the *usefulness* of what she learned through her CDA coursework. She found it personally beneficial: “What I’ve learned I can use a lot in the classroom” (Brenda Interview 2, 2011, p. 4). “It is very rewarding. At the end I feel like I’ve learned a lot” (Brenda Interview 3, 2012, p. 6). “The CDA has really helped me out a lot” (Brenda Interview 3, 2012, p. 10). She also felt strongly that it would benefit her co-workers, documented through these words and an impassioned voice in the audio recording “Brenda3” at time marker 10:15:

I really think that if I can get the other teachers to go and do it, I think they would be so much better in the classroom and they would have so many more answers to questions that they have. We have four teachers that don’t have the CDA and if they were to change their minds – and I told them that I would help them in any way I can and it’s a really good thing and they really need to do it. And I think it would almost be an a-ha if they were to go through it because they could understand the children better. And they would be able to come up with other ways of handling the children then their normal routine and way of doing things. They would learn other things so that way it would make their classroom more interesting. And they’d have a better relationship with the children because they would be meeting the needs and they would know how to meet the needs that they’re lacking in… I just think with all of them if they would take on and go to the CDA they would learn so much more and be able to use it in our classrooms. (Brenda Interview 3, 2012, p. 3)

Brenda had many fewer years of formal experience working in childcare than the other participants, and she had the least amount of formal education of all participants. However, she is the only participant who, unprompted, raised concerns with the reduction of public funding for workforce development and linked it to classroom quality. Her candid interjection, “What I am up in arms about is the whole state budget!” (Brenda Interview 3, 2012, p.5) led to:

… if they are saying that their most crucial time in their life for learning is in their early childhood education which is daycare…I just think that they need to know that if they’re cutting our funding and the teachers aren’t getting the education they need to be able to teach our children then what does our future hold? We don’t have a future president or anybody else because they weren’t taught at such an early age. (Brenda Interview 3, 2012, p. 5)

It was clear at the time of the interview that Brenda had internalized the value of high quality early childhood education for young children. She went on to implore that funds should be
directed toward the professional development of teachers of young children (Brenda Interview 3, 2012, p. 5). Important to the context is that Brenda’s narrative was captured shortly after TEACH funds were eliminated in Pennsylvania. Much of the workforce and three of the four participants in this study utilized TEACH scholarships. Chapter Eight will make further connections between funding the professional development of the ECE workforce and themes within this study.

**Brenda’s Future**

Brenda is unsure of her future. Each time I spoke with her she was very direct, making sure I was clear in my understanding that she was not making a long-term commitment to childcare. Notes taken during the initial screening phone call read:

*Planning to stay in childcare long-term?*

Don’t know if stay once child goes to public school. May stay in childcare or go back to school to get into the school district. May want to pursue something to make more money within the field of education. CDA got my foot in the door. At high school graduation couldn’t find anything I liked enough to pursue for a degree...also got CDA to become a better parent. (Brenda Screening Notes and Memo, 2011, p. 2).

During each interview she would indicate at least once that she does not have a concrete plan for the future. She seemed to approach this with openness and with a willingness to pursue any opportunity that might come her way. Remaining in childcare long-term is a possibility, but she is not committing herself.

This stance presents an interesting context for Brenda and the field of early childhood education. From one viewpoint, the opportunity to pursue a CDA allowed Brenda to advance her present position in the workforce. In fact, in an email exchange with Brenda months after the interview, she was proud to report that a preschool teacher had resigned and that she was slated to take her place. Brenda, a wife and mother with no career aspirations, moved herself from a substitute teacher to a full-time lead teacher with a nationally recognized-credential in two years. This accomplishment is significant.
However, as much as Brenda and the field benefit from her educational attainment, she sees this as perhaps a stepping stone. If she does exit the field, her primary motivation is different from others in this study. Other participants see increasing their education as an opportunity to secure higher-paying employment. Although Brenda does acknowledge she would receive a pay increase, her future plans seem to be driven by a desire to remain in close contact with her daughter. The theme, newly-educated practitioners moving to public education, will be further expanded on in Chapter Eight.
CHAPTER 5. SARAH: PROFILE AND THEMES

Context: Lead Teacher of Young Toddlers (One Year Olds); Earned an Associate’s Degree in Early Childhood Education online; Experience working with children: 30 years; Experience working in current classroom: 17 years.

Sarah is married to her long-time boyfriend and caretaker to her ailing mother and mother-in-law. Her hobbies include crafts, shopping, traveling, and working part-time at a local race track alongside her husband. She has a quiet demeanor and is reserved around strangers. As one gets to know her, Sarah’s personality opens up and her passion for the field becomes undeniable. She is deeply committed to children and families, as well as her employer. Yet, she is disillusioned in some ways. Her narrative tells a tale of perseverance and loyalty.

I grew up in Pennsylvania, about 30 minutes from here in York County. My mother always told me that I was a mother hen and she knew I would be doing some job like this when I was little. Because instead of playing with the other kids I was mothering them, “Don’t do that you’ll get hurt, you’ll get in trouble.” When I was fourteen there was a daycare center down the street from me. It was in-home daycare. My neighbor had asked me to work there. She asked if I would go down and fill in for her—just help out and do little things while she went on vacation. She was older than me, of course. They just needed someone to help out with little things. And I worked there for a week and when it was done the lady who owned the place said, “You’re coming back next week, aren’t you?” I was like, “Yes, if you want me to.” So, I worked there in the summertime. And then after school I would get off the bus and go there and worked until they closed. That’s how I got started.

When I was little I only wanted to be some type of teacher or a nurse or something like that. I guess because I cared too much and wanted to take care of everybody. So, either I wanted to be a nurse or a teacher. But, when I started working there I pretty much made up my mind as to what I wanted to do. Since I was already there I just went full-time right after high school. I worked there for about six years before I realized that $1.75/hour was going to make it! (Laughter) Yeah, I got a raise when I graduated from high school to $2.00 and I realized this isn’t going to work! I had to find a job making more money. (Laughter) But, I learned from there…. I saw a lot of things happen there that I wasn’t comfortable with. So, it pretty much encouraged me to want to do this, because I wanted to do was right for kids. Not the way things were being done there. I think that was really pushed me to do this. When I was living at home with my parents it was just extra spending money. But, when I graduated high school it wasn’t enough extra spending money and I didn’t want to stay living with my parents forever. So, I started working at an electronics company for a while because I couldn’t find anything in daycare. And I was at the electronics company for four years before I decided this isn’t for me. I need to get back into daycare. It was soldering … it was a warehouse, a factory. And I just did not feel comfortable and didn’t feel like I fit into warehouse work. I needed to be nurturing something – not soldering something. So, I left there and started working at ABC Childcare Center and I was there for four years. I worked with infants and young toddlers and older toddlers there. Over the four years I worked in all three rooms at one point. And then I was pretty much in charge of the infant/toddler department.

Unfortunately, the insurance benefits and things like that weren’t as good as what I needed. I asked if there was something more they could do and they said there was nothing they could do. So, I said, “Well then I need to find something with better benefits.” And I started looking and I found a job at another business in Harrisburg. They had a daycare center next door to their building. At that place you had all the benefits that the business had. So, I took that job and was there for about three years until the business decided they didn’t want to have a daycare
center there anymore and they were going to close it up. Someone else came in and bought it. We all had to reapply for our jobs, take major cuts in pay and benefits, and that’s when I came here.

This place was Quality Care prior to Child Time coming in—the center is actually run by a Parent’s Association, but Child Time comes in and helps manage it. I came and interviewed and she said, “Can you start next week?” (Laughter, nods head affirmative) “Sure!” (Laughter) Because I actually started here my last day of work at my other job… I used a vacation day there and came here. They needed the help quickly. Child Time took over management here in September of 1994 and I started here in February of 1995. So, I’ve pretty much been here almost the whole time.

The classroom that I started in was the older toddler classroom. I walked in the door and all the toys were turned against the walls. All the shelves were closed and kids were just climbing on everything. And the teachers were complaining because they were climbing on everything and I’m like, “Well, they don’t have anything to play with! {Of course} they’re going to climb!” So, I slowly {turned around} one shelf at a time – because to do it all would have been way overwhelming for the children. At that point I was the lead teacher. I was hired as the lead teacher because they were not Keystone STARS yet. And I started to implement what I learned from other places to try to get the older toddler room somewhat organized. It was a mess. We started hiring new people to replace the ones we thought were not working. It took about a year to get everything organized again. I slowly {turned} one shelf at a time so they wouldn’t be overwhelmed with all the toys out at once. I think it was about three or four years I was in that classroom before I moved to the classroom I’m in now.

There have been seven directors since I started. It was stressful at times because there was one director who was on maternity leave and left me in charge of the center. When her child was nine weeks old they discovered that he had cancer and he went through all this radiation and chemo and everything. So, she was out for ten months instead of three. I was in charge of the center for ten months doing my classroom and the director-type things and I didn’t even have my Associate’s degree at that point. When she came back she was here awhile and then she left to stay home with him. It took a little while to get a new Director hired so I was once again put in charge and this happened three times between Directors. We would have a director for a year, she left. One for a year, she left. And then this last one’s been here a little over a year. (Laughter) It was just stressful for all of the teachers. Every time we got used to a different director, here comes another one! It’s been pretty stable now. Our current director, she was a preschool teacher at our other center and she’s learning. It’s a different experience to go from a preschool teacher to a director. But, she’s doing pretty well. I think she’s going to stick it out a little longer than the rest of them. She doesn’t have any kids. She may stick it out a lot longer.

I think if I had a chance to be the director I would. But, I also want to be in the classroom, too. So, it’s one of those “I’m not sure.” I know I would miss being in the classroom if I couldn’t be in the classroom once in a while. It would have to be a director position that I could be the director and sometimes be in a classroom. I would still want to be in the classroom. I do this to be with kids, not to sit behind a desk. If I wanted that I would go be a secretary somewhere. I want to be with kids, not behind a desk. These are my kids. I’ve helped raise a lot of toddlers in 30 years! (Laughter)

A while back the director made an announcement that we were going to work {to get four} STARS and I had to go to training for the ITERS* an ECERS** which is part of the STARS. I did that in 2005. It’s in there. (Points to binder. Laughter) They were telling me about all of this because I work alone in my classroom. {They were saying that} if I didn’t want to go back to school I could go work in another classroom with someone else that did have a degree. And then I wouldn’t have to get a degree, because I had a CDA. I got that in 2001, I had that first. But, to be alone in my classroom they were telling me that I have to at least have an Associate’s degree. (Pause) I thought, “This isn’t fair! I’ve been doing this forever—in the same classroom—and now I’m not qualified to work in the classroom by myself?” It was—it was hard to accept
that all of a sudden I’m not qualified to do what I’ve been doing for ten years. (Laughter) You could say I was angry.

They suggested I check with TEACH as far as finances. But, I decided to do this online and not have to go to classes because getting out of the center to go to classes was hard for the whole center. I had seen people in the past trying to do it. When they decided they wanted to take classes and left in the middle of the day to go to a class they had to hire extra staff to do it. And we didn’t have extra staff—we’re a small center. So, I decided to do everything online and the school that I chose didn’t take TEACH. So, then I was like, “How am I going to pay for this?” But, Child Time does reimburse us. I think $1,500 a year for school, up to three classes. So, I had to borrow money from my mother to pay the first semester. And then each time after I paid for the semester when they reimbursed me I paid the next one until I was finished.

I was looking for something that didn’t require me to go to class. This school is in Arizona, but the online stuff is done through Scranton here in Pennsylvania. All of my bookwork and the teachers that I talked to were from Scranton. I got my Associate’s degree in Early Childhood. (Opens binder and takes out photocopy of degree in plastic sheet protector sleeve.) The childcare stuff was the easy stuff. (Points to “B” grade in a general education course on transcript in sheet protector) If I could get a Bachelor’s by just taking all the early childhood classes that you need I could do it in an instant! It’s that other stuff that scares me because I have been out of school for a long time! (Laughter)

For their Associate’s you start when you’re ready. The fee that you pay them pays for all of your books and everything in one fee. They send you your first set of books and when you’re half way through that class you have exams that you have to do online. When you get through the halfway with that they automatically send you the next class. So, there’s no down time. This is work at your own pace, there’s no deadline to get the exams done, you just have one year to complete it. They give you a year and if you’re not done in a year you can file for an extension. The first year I had to file for an extension because the day I got my books is when our director went on maternity leave and didn’t come back right away. So, I just put everything on hold until she came back. So, I lost that whole 10 months.

I did most of my school work in the evenings. During the day when the kids were sleeping and all my other work was done as far as cleaning up the room, paperwork and everything was done they allowed me to work on that type of stuff while the kids were sleeping. We travel a lot in the summertime so I did a lot of reading while I was in the car.

The hardest part was the time. Making the time because there were times when I didn’t feel like doing it and I wouldn’t do it and then all of a sudden it was like, “Oh, my deadline’s here!” And then it’s like push, push, push! (Laughter) So, yeah {the hardest part} was making the time, taking the time to do it. And keeping myself motivated to do it. It was the biology and math and that kind of stuff I was like, “I don’t feel like doing this right now.” You have to be in the right mood for that kind of stuff. Whereas the early childhood classes I was like, “I want to do this. I want to see if there’s something new I can learn.” But with the other stuff I was like, “Who cares?” (Laughter)

I enjoyed the early childhood classes. The other stuff sometimes was a struggle. There were semesters were I drug it out until the year was over. To try and get that stuff done wasn’t easy. It was just my desire to complete something! (Laughter) I’ve started many, many craft projects and things like that and never completed them. I don’t know how many half completed things I have sitting around! (Laughter) This was something that I felt like, “I can do this. I can complete this.” It was a struggle at times and I’m thinking, “Wow, it’s been a long time. I don’t know this stuff.” But, I got through it – it was the determination to finish something. That was the biggest part.

I think earning my degree made me feel better about myself, I guess. Now I officially have that paper that everybody wants. Maybe I could do more. But, I like being where I’m at now. So, it’s hard to just say, “Now I have a degree I can probably go somewhere else and work.”
But, I don’t want to. I want to stay here. I’ve put this many years in. Most of the stuff that I was reading in these books was stuff I had already been doing. It may have enhanced it a little and I think about it more. But, to change the way I dealt with children and all that? I don’t think it did a whole lot. Maybe a Bachelor’s degree would. (Laughter) Because, I mean, my teaching comes from my heart. (Taps chest) Not from this piece of paper. (Taps transcript).

So, (Neck and face begins to flush, tears come down cheeks, wipes eyes under her glasses with fingers, holds breath, interviewer retrieves tissues from handbag) I’m sorry. (9 second pause) I didn’t know talking to you would do this (tears). I think it’s because I’ve done the daycare job so long that that’s my life more than the degree I just got recently. That really didn’t change my job at all. If it were maybe a degree that got me a career change then maybe it would be more important to me. But, because it really didn’t make a change in what I’m doing – I’m still doing the same job that I’ve been doing for 30 years. The same way I’ve done it for 30 years! (Laughter)

I guess I’m one of the few people that can say they love their job whether I have the piece of paper or not. I love my job the same either way. (Tears, 9 second pause) Interviewer: Where are these tears coming from? Do you know? I think because this degree is expected of you, but once you get it it really doesn’t matter. (Tears, 4 second pause) At least a “congratulations.” (6 second pause) Just one of the people from Child Time congratulated me…not really anyone else… (6 second pause, tears, 3 second pause) The director was like, “Yay!” She was good about it, but I didn’t hear much from Child Time themselves.

Yeah, the degree helps give you more ideas for your classroom and things like that. But, especially when you’re dealing with one year olds — it’s not like I’m preparing them {for school} — yeah, in the early years you are preparing them for Kindergarten and the rest of their education, but not {when they are} one year old. That stuff’s not in this degree (taps transcript harder). These {classes} barely touch on infants and toddlers.

For a while I actually had two and a half year olds preparing them for preschool. When they turned three I moved to the preschool with them for about a month. It was about that time I was working on the “Working with Preschoolers” {course} so it helped with that. The course that I enjoyed the most was the “Guidance in Early Childhood Education.” As I was reading the book I was like, “I do this. I just never thought about it.” (Laughter) And it also gave me ideas to enhance what I was already doing. I got a good bit out of it I think.

But, having to get a Bachelor’s degree, that’s why we can’t find good teachers. Because you get a girl who spent a fortune to go to school and she’s not going to stay here. It’s just a place to stay until she can find a public school teacher job. Joy’s the same way. She did the same thing. She’s been here for 14 years and she just got her {Associate’s} degree last year because they told her she had to. And she’s a wonderful teacher (tears). But, they don’t see it because we didn’t have a piece of paper. Now that she does—she has her paper and that didn’t really do anything for her.

We have other girls—they didn’t even get a raise. I’ve been here for 17 years—I’m probably at this pay scale because I’ve been here so long, but it’s just—it’s like they’re making you do this—why? What about the 30 years I just spent? (Neck and face redden, tears, wipes eyes under glasses) They just tell you they want more. They just keeping throwing hints about it, “You need to go further now.” I was getting comments like, “Aren’t you done yet?” during this one course. (Points to transcript) “When are you going to be done?” Now, it’s “Are you going to go for your Bachelor’s?” Not, “Congratulations! You got your Associates are you going for your Bachelor’s now?” It’s like, “Go for more!”

Child Time wants all of their people to have at least a Bachelor’s degree. We have two girls right now who have degrees but they’re not in early childhood and they’re really good teachers but they keep telling them, “You’ve got to at least get your CDA.” They’re pressuring them to at least get a CDA. Well, in another couple of years a CDA won’t be any good. So, why stop there? Why come get a CDA that in two years won’t mean anything?
I got my CDA in 2001 before they had classes to do it. I was probably one of the first Child Time employees to have it. I had to do it all on my own and get 120 hours of training and I worked really hard. Joy did it the same way. We didn’t go to classes for a CDA. We had to get the training that we needed and I’ve renewed every time since. And in 2013 I’ll have to renew and I don’t need it anymore because I have this (referring to Associate’s degree), but I’m still renewing that - I worked hard to get that and I’m going to renew it every year it needs to be renewed.

My husband is always tells me “Do you want to do. You don’t have to do what they tell you to do.” But it’s like, I like my job. (Deep breath) I’m glad it’s over! (Laughter) … I got this letter first. (Turns pages in binder to official letter stating Magna Cum Laude status). I got that first and then shortly after I got the degree. I felt proud when I opened that envelope—that I did it! (4 second pause) I’m glad it’s over! (Laughter) It took 5 years to get a 2 year degree, but I did it! I think it was worth it in the end. I got that (points to diploma). In 1983 I would have never thought I would have a college degree. And here in 2011 I do! (Laughter)

My mom’s been very supportive. I tried to make sure it didn’t interfere with our life, too. You can’t stop your life to do this. That’s why I didn’t go to HACC or Penn State or somewhere like that because I didn’t have time to go to classes.

My mom’s been supportive, too. She was always calling me when she knew I had an exam. “How did you do?” She has a copy of the diploma in a frame that I gave to her. I told her, “Sorry it took so long!” She said, “Well, if you’d done this when you got out of high school I would have taken care of this for you.” But, I didn’t have to — I was already working in daycare and you didn’t need a degree. So, I didn’t have to. If I’d known then I would have done it right out of school. But, I was already doing what I wanted to do and didn’t need a degree to do it.

I was considering enrolling in an online Bachelor’s program and then my mother-in-law had bladder cancer and had to be taken care of and I had to put it on hold. I got the degree in May; she had her surgery in August so from May until August I was working on all that stuff so I could start right away. Because they do it the same way as the school I went to for my Associate’s. You can start as soon as you send them the money. But, I had to put everything on hold. It’s getting harder and harder the longer I wait. (Laughter) Now it’s like, “Do I really want to?” All I have to do is send them the fee and they’ll start sending my books. But, I think it’s a fee to have them see how much of this (points to transcript) will be accepted. The guy I talked to on the phone said it sounds most of it will be (transferrable). I may only have to take two semesters to get a Bachelor’s degree. That’s what he said.

… I would consider more, but I’m not sure right now. I think maybe if I got the Associate’s degree and now I’m doing something different because I got my degree it may be more important to me. But, because there’s been no change it’s really like, “I went to school. Yeah, now I got this piece of paper.” (Laughter) I mean maybe if my job changed because I got the degree it might be more important, but it really didn’t. It really didn’t change the way I teach my kids or my pay either. Maybe, if I got a higher degree and was able to move up into a leadership type role, maybe? But this was basically just to maintain – to be able to work in that classroom by myself. I’ve been in that classroom for 14 years by myself and all of a sudden it’s like, “You have to have a degree now.” And I’m like, “For what?” Nothing’s going to change! (Laughter) I’m still working in this classroom with the same age.

It refreshed a lot of things that I already knew. And maybe because I’ve been doing this same job, seeing things day after day you forget that you’re doing those things. So, when I’m reading those things in the textbook it’s like, “Oh, yeah, I’m doing that. And I can do it more.” But, I really didn’t learn that much new that I didn’t already hear before from the many, many trainings I’ve been to and (from working) in the classroom alone. Like I told you, the Infant/Toddler class (required) the Creative Curriculum (book) that I had already read cover to cover because that’s what we’re using in our center. So all it did was refresh some things that I let slide. I’m in this routine of doing it day after day and you forget that this could make it better. But
you get into that routine. I really didn’t get a whole lot of new stuff out of it. It was just refreshing the old stuff.

(Pause) Taking these classes made me think more about the reason I’m doing this. Because sometimes you get doing the same job day after day and you forget why you’re doing it. I know why I’m really doing the job — because of the kids. Forget all the paperwork stuff and the demands from all the other people, but it’s for the kids and that’s why I want to do it. That’s why I think it would be hard to do something else when I get too old and can’t stand up anymore. (Laughter) … I don’t know how to do anything else. Even though I have a degree, it’s not in anything besides what I’ve been doing for the past 30 years. It would be hard to go do something else.

But, it still doesn’t … I don’t think it makes me … how do I word it? Umm… for the ages that I teach it doesn’t make my quality of teaching any better by having this piece of paper. Because the age I teach involves more nurturing, respect for the parents and the children, and that the kids can trust me. This piece of paper didn’t teach me {how to do} that. It wasn’t in a book how to teach kids to trust you every day and run into your arms when they come in. (Tears)

There’s been times here that I’ve thought things are getting tough. Not with the kids themselves, but with the work environment and the responsibilities and the changing of policies constantly. There’s more and more paperwork that takes away from the care of my children because I have paperwork to do. It’s like, “Do I want to do this? It’s frustrating; maybe I should do something else.” And then I think, “Oh, no, I just got a degree to do this!” (Laughter) “This is what I went to school to do!” (Laughter) I don’t want to be one of those people who went and got a degree to work in daycare and then left and didn’t use the degree. I don’t want to do that. And then I’m thinking, “Maybe I could go back to school to do something else.” I have this; maybe I can have something else, too. Maybe a smaller company, maybe I could be a director for… something little. I don’t know.

I know things have to change with the times. Things aren’t the same now as they were in 1983. There wasn’t as much emphasis on educating the children prior to school. Yes, we should be able to get them ready as far as being able to sit for a little while in a classroom and communicate with people and some writing, but they should be learning through playing. My kids have learned a lot sitting over there on the floor playing.

{The courses} need to focus more on infants and toddlers. The bachelor’s degree stuff that I looked at – there’s nothing in there on infants and toddlers—none of it. So, it’s like, why do I need this? You’re going to take college algebra. I’m not teaching my kids college algebra! (Laughter) I’m teaching here’s one block, here’s two block! That’s it! (Laughter) There should be more on infants and toddlers - I had one class specific to infants and toddlers. That’s it out of all of those classes!

Now, the curriculum class – that was the Creative Curriculum book. (Looking over transcripts) It touched on it, but they sent me the preschool book. Same here (points to another course) —it was preschool. Creative Curriculum was the textbook. The infants and toddlers textbook was the Creative Curriculum book, which I already read cover to cover before the class because that’s what we used here. It made the class much easier because I’m using it here. Yeah, but it didn’t really touch on anything new. But in all the other classes they touch on maybe this much (places index finger over thumb, leaving approximately one inch of space) on infants and toddlers and the rest is preschool and school-age. I don’t plan on ever teaching school-age, but every single class had school-age stuff in it.

Yeah, I think preschool teachers should have some degree— even if it is just an Associate’s degree because they are closer to Kindergarten age where they are preparing them for that. They also need to be able to nurture and give the trust to the children, which sometimes they don’t. (Laughter) Sometimes they look at the children as little soldiers instead of children. I feel the preschool teachers, yes; they should have a degree of some type. Whether an Associate’s or Bachelor’s or whatever, but even Joy’s classroom: infants. There’s nothing in here …
I don’t think the parents of my kids care if I have this degree because they’ve seen me in the classroom. This paper didn’t make anything different. I got “congratulations” cards from a couple of them and some verbal congratulations, but as far me needing this—some of them thought it was crazy that I had been going to school to do this and what I’ve already been doing. Some of them are like, “You need a degree to work with one year olds? To teach my child to feed themselves?” (Laughter) Its like, “Yeah, they’re telling me I do!” (Laughter)

But I think the decision makers should spend some time in a classroom with a teacher who doesn’t have a degree, but has been teaching for 14 or 17 years like we have. Observe and see what they see. When they come and do their ITERS and ECERS observations in my classroom I take a big hit because I don’t have windows and the sink is more than three feet from my changing table—because that’s the way the room is laid out. I get high scores on my interaction with my kids—that’s the important part. Not whether I have a window or I have to step from here to here to wash my hands, which I can’t control. But, because I have good interactions with the kids and the kids are learning and I have all the other things I need in a classroom—those things are okay. So, I can take a hit on [the windows and sink] as far as the numbers because everything else is high. That is what they should be looking for, the teachers. Not the facility - stuff that we can’t control. I can’t knock the wall out and put a window in the basement! (Laughter) I did the best I could with putting a decal on the wall! (Laughter) {They should} spend some time in the classroom with teachers who have been doing it for 30 years and in the same classroom for years. They should see for themselves that you don’t have to have a piece of paper to make those kids happy and learn. (Deep breath, small tears)

Somebody needs to hear that what they’re expecting of people can be too much. And I thought maybe I can have a voice in that—as a person who went through the whole process just to keep the job. Maybe I could help. (Laughter) I don’t know what it’s going to do - to change the policy would crazy, but if they hear enough people, maybe. Or maybe find ways to grandfather people in who have been in the field for years—who are up there in age and who really don’t want to go back to school. Because you have a lot of people who work in daycare—especially in infant rooms—you have someone 50 or 60 years old working in an infant room because they enjoy doing it and then you tell them they have to go to school. We had a teacher in here. She had a hard time with reading and writing, but she was an excellent infant teacher. But, when they put the policies into effect we lost her because she can’t go back to school.

You never will master this. I don’t care how much education you get there’s always going to be something out there somewhere that you can learn. You’ve just got to find it. A lot of times I go to these trainings and it’s the same thing over again because there aren’t any Competency Level 3s. We need something a little more advanced for people who have worked in daycare for years. Like I said, each child is not in the textbook. They’re giving you a cookie-cutter example of how to handle a child. Well, they’re not all the same. You have to learn how your children work if you’re going to survive.

Sarah

Sarah loves her job. She’s invested emotionally in her work and her co-workers. She’s sympathetic to middle-level administration and open to change, but most of all, she is passionate about the role she plays in the lives of the young toddlers in her care. While she was a high school student, working for the first time in group care, her intuition alerted her to what poor care looked like and propelled her to find a place where she could provide high quality services. Since that
time she has secured employment with a reputable company and attended in-service trainings and conferences, earned a CDA credential, and now has a college degree. She’s done everything that was asked of her for the sake of keeping a job she deeply loved.

On the day of our last interview she walked into the building’s lunch room with a two-inch white notebook. The rings of the notebook were at capacity with each paper inside carefully organized and protected by a clear plastic sleeve. One particular document seemed to generate the most pride in Sarah; the Associate’s degree with Magna Cum Laude status. When she pieced together her experience going back to school while working full-time, however, her affect seemed indifferent. From her perspective, very little has changed for her or the children in her care as a result of earning this degree. She reports that her job title, salary, and daily activities remain the same, and the pressure to please her employer has not abated; the company prefers everyone to hold a Bachelor’s degree. She needs to aim higher. She needs to do more.

While some may have responded to the experiences recounted by Sarah with anger or resentment, she does not. Instead, Sarah’s narrative illustrates a teacher who accepts that “things have to change with the times” (Sarah Interview 2, 2011, p. 14). To be a lead teacher, working alone in a classroom of five young toddlers in Pennsylvania, she must at least earn an Associate’s degree. However, her story also illustrates the personal and emotional toll that “changing with the times” can take when it means that an individual’s prior work experience is devalued. Sarah’s story also teaches us about the ways in which an individual can feel marginalized by top-down decision making.

Her experience highlights the need for educational programs with content that closely aligns with the duties and roles of teachers of very young children. Sarah does not oppose being required to earn an Associate’s degree. However, she does highlight the need for an Associate’s degree in which the majority of courses offered focus on infants and toddlers.
Sarah’s Identity as a Teacher

Of the participants in this study, Sarah exhibited the most observable and outward emotion. The second interview was to focus on details of her experience working full-time and attending classes. As she was asked questions about the logistics of this process, how she juggled these roles, and how her education impacted her teaching, she became emotional. She seemed to be struggling with her value and worth in the eyes of her employer, for whom she had worked seventeen years. In separate portions of the interview, she visited this topic, expressing herself in the following way:

I guess I’m one of the few people that can say they love their job whether I have the piece of paper or not. I love my job the same either way. (Tears, 9 second pause) Umm (3 second pause) Interviewer: Where are these tears coming from? Do you know? I think because this degree is expected of you, but once you get it it really doesn’t matter. (Sarah Interview 2, 2011, p. 9) (Tears, 4 second pause) At least a “congratulations.” (6 second pause) Just one of the people from Child Time congratulated me…not really anyone else… (6 second pause, tears, 3 second pause) The director was like, “Yay!” She was good about it, but I didn’t hear much from Child Time themselves. (Sarah Interview 2, 2011, p. 12) …

What about the 30 years I just spent? (Neck and face redden, tears, wipes eyes under glasses) They just tell you they want more. They just keeping throwing hints about it, “You need to go further now.” I was getting comments like, “Aren’t you done yet?” during this one course. (Points to transcript) “When are you going to be done?” Now, it’s “Are you going to go for your Bachelor’s?” Not, “Congratulations! You got your Associates are you going for your Bachelor’s now?” It’s like, “Go for more!” (Sarah Interview 2, 2011, p. 11).

Sarah indeed recognized the value of education: “I know things have to change with the times. Things aren’t the same now as they were in 1983” (Sarah Interview 2, 2011, p. 14). Shortly after displaying her transcripts and diploma, she turned to another sheet protector that held her CDA credential that she earned years prior. Earning her CDA did not come easily. Sarah’s effort was unlike the majority of CDA candidates today. Individuals interested in earning a CDA today are able to join a cohort in their local community and attend classes on regularly scheduled evenings and Saturdays with a single instructor. This was Brenda’s experience in Chapter Four.

However, Sarah earned the CDA by independently finding 120 clock hours of training in specified content areas, creating a portfolio, writing competency statements, and implementing
other program requirements without guidance. This credential is so important to her that she has vowed to meet renewal requirements so that she can maintain a CDA credential even though it is superseded by her Associate’s degree (Sarah Interview 2, 2011, p.11).

Sarah struggled with the lack of value her practical experience was worth in the eyes of her employers and the state. It seems that Sarah was looking for a human acknowledgement of the value and worth of her practical experience.

I thought, “This isn’t fair! I’ve been doing this forever—in the same classroom—and now I’m not qualified to work in the classroom by myself?” It was—it was hard to accept that all of a sudden I’m not qualified to do what I’ve been doing for ten years (Sarah Interview 2, 2011, p. 5).

Longevity in one’s occupation does not insure high quality. Conversely, a reasonable argument could also be made that she would not have be able to retain her position, receive merit increases, and maintain positive relationships with families if her classroom was of poor quality. These three indicators are present in Sarah’s experience. While working on her degree, she remained lead teacher in her classroom, indicating employer satisfaction with her job performance. The median hourly wage of childcare workers holding a position similar to Sarah’s in 2011 was $9.34 (United States, 2011). Considering that Sarah earns $14.35 per hour, one can assume she has received regular merit increases over her years of employment. And anecdotally, our first two interviews occurred during the lunch hour, and we met in the corporate lunch room. During each interview we were repeatedly interrupted as parents of children she currently and previously had in her care came over to say hello or give well wishes. The fondness of these parents for Sarah was noticeable.

Compounded to Sarah’s questioning of the worth of her teaching experience was the perception that her compliance with the requirement to earn an Associate’s degree was still not enough: “…this degree is expected of you, but once you get it it really doesn’t matter” (Sarah Interview 2, 2011, p. 10). One theme of Sarah’s narrative is the importance of implementing state or corporate policy with an eye on the humanity of those it impacts.
Sarah’s Coursework and Impact on Practice

In concert with Sarah’s emotions regarding how she perceived her prior teaching experience to be devalued was her assertion that the degree had little impact on her teaching practice. As she struggled with feeling as if her practical experience was inconsequential, she in many ways communicated that she perceived the highly-prized degree as inconsequential, too.

Most of the stuff that I was reading in these books was stuff I had already been doing. It may have enhanced it a little and I think about it more. But, to change the way I dealt with children and all that? I don’t think it did a whole lot. Maybe a Bachelor’s degree would. (Laughter) Because, I mean, my teaching comes from my heart. (Taps chest) Not from this piece of paper. (Taps transcript) (Sarah Interview 2, 2011, p. 9) …

Yeah, the degree helps give you more ideas for your classroom and things like that. But, especially when you’re dealing with one year olds—it’s not like I’m preparing them {for school}—yeah, in the early years you are preparing them for Kindergarten and the rest of their education, but not {when they are} one year old. That stuff’s not in this degree (taps transcript harder) … These {classes} barely touch on infants and toddlers…. (Sarah Interview 2, 2011, p. 10)

But, it still doesn’t … I don’t think it makes me … how do I word it? Umm… for the ages that I teach it doesn’t make my quality of teaching any better by having this piece of paper. Because the age I teach involves more nurturing, respect for the parents and the children, and that the kids can trust me. This piece of paper didn’t teach me {how to do} that. It wasn’t in a book how to teach kids to trust you every day and run into your arms when they come in. (Tears) (Sarah Interview 2, 2011, p. 15) …

{The courses} need to focus more on infants and toddlers. The bachelor’s degree stuff that I looked at—there’s nothing in there on infants and toddlers—none of it. So, it’s like, why do I need this? …I had one class specific to infants and toddlers. That’s it out of all of those classes! (Sarah Interview 2, 2011, p. 16)

Rightness of fit between coursework available and needs of learners is a recurring theme across all narratives. In Sarah’s case, she was highly motivated to complete her early childhood classes.

It was the biology and math and that kind of stuff I was like, “I don’t feel like doing this right now.” You have to be in the right mood for that kind of stuff. Whereas the early childhood classes I was like, “I want to do this. I want to see if there’s something new I can learn.” But with the other stuff I was like, “Who cares?” (Laughter) (Sarah Interview 3, 2011, p. 5).

Despite her many years of practical experience, Sarah approached courses within her major with an eagerness and anticipation of learning something new. Unfortunately, in her experience there
was little content in the early childhood coursework that was new to Sarah or targeted toward her role as young toddler teacher.

But, I really didn’t learn that much new that I didn’t already hear before from the many, many trainings I’ve been to and {from working} in the classroom alone (Sarah Interview 3, 2011, p. 8).

There should be more on infants and toddlers - I had one class specific to infants and toddlers. That’s it out of all of those classes! But in all the other classes they touch on maybe this much (places index finger over thumb, leaving approximately one inch of space) on infants and toddlers and the rest is preschool and school-age. I don’t plan on ever teaching school-age, but every single class had school-age stuff in it (Sarah Interview 2, 2011, p. 16).

As is demonstrated throughout this study, practitioners across sectors display a willingness to learn and increase their academic credentials. Of concern is the degree to which programs available meet the needs of practitioners. Further analysis of the causes of this poor fit between educational programs and learner needs will be presented in Chapter Eight along with recommendations for institutions of higher education and policy makers.
CHAPTER 6. NATALIE: PROFILE AND THEMES

Context: Center Director, Earning a Director’s Credential online and a Bachelor’s Degree in Education with PreK-4th Grade Teacher Certification part-time, face to face; Experience working in the field: 20 years

Natalie is married to her beau from high school. She loves being the mom of a teen daughter and older elementary-aged son. Despite her husband’s weekend and shift-work she makes family mealtimes and weekend activities a priority. She knew from an early age that she wanted to be a teacher. But, life’s pathway seemed to twist and turn and before she knew it, she was out of the classroom and working as an administrator. Despite challenges that intrude on her personal and professional lives, she is committed to excellence. She takes her work seriously and her profile is one of resilience.

I absolutely loved school and that’s when I decided I wanted to be a teacher myself. My first job was actually in childcare. I was able to babysit through middle school and high school, but I wasn’t allowed to work outside of that. So, that’s when I really found that I loved children. I was actually a very popular babysitter in our neighborhood and I was in high demand! And that’s when I found out that I really liked the younger children as opposed to school-age. (Laughter) When I started college I decided I wanted to major in early childhood education so it just seemed natural to search for a job in a daycare setting.

When I started looking at colleges I was very interested in either Millersville or Shippensburg. But, my family really, really struggled with money. My dad worked in construction and was laid-off a good portion of the year so they were pretty much dependent on my mom’s income and she was just a school bus driver so it really wasn’t that much—it wasn’t substantial. My sister and I are two and a half years apart; I’m the older of the two so I knew as soon as I was going to be finishing my first two years of college that she was going to be starting, too. So, that was kind of in the back of my mind—that I knew that my parents would be able to help with the first two years—they pretty much told my sister and I that the first two years need to be at HACC and then you can transfer elsewhere and we’ll help as much as we can. But, you’re more than likely going to have to take out student loans and so forth. So, that was kind in the back of my mind, too. So when I really started exploring I found out that HACC offered the Associate’s degree program in Early Childhood. When I looked into it more you were able to go up as high as a director with just an Associate’s degree so that just seemed to be the perfect fit. That’s where my heart was anyway, with preschool, nursery school, and daycare—with the younger children. So, that just seemed to be a good fit.

My husband and I were actually high school sweethearts… He was able to buy a house right after high school. It was a really cheap fixer-upper type thing. He ended up proposing when we were only 19 years old. So, it just kind of fell that as soon as I was done with the two year program at HACC that we got married and moved out. It just kind of fit that way better than pursuing the four year degree right away, taking on a lot of personal debt with having to take out student loans and so forth…

So, my first job was at Bright Start. It was a church-based daycare center. I stayed there for nine years working my way up from part-time while I finished earning my Associate’s from HACC in Early Childhood. Then I took on a full-time assistant position and then eventually I became the lead teacher in the toddler room. Then I became the onsite director at their South site.

Next I went to Together We Learn. That was another very large room and it was again an age span of preschool from three to five years old and that was a director’s position, but again it was more like the responsibilities that of what I had left at the South Bright Start site. Just basically your primary duty was the lead teacher in the classroom with just some extra
paperwork. But, to tell you the truth at the point when I was there—I didn’t stay there very long—it just seemed like it was in flux. ... To be completely honest with you, I don’t even know if I even made it a year.

I’m a stickler for DPW regulations. I know a lot of directors feel that it’s a hassle. And to be completely honest I’ve met {directors} a few that (Pause) will only follow the regulations when they know that an inspection is coming up and will kind of run around and prepare the site for it. Whereas my philosophy that the regulations are there for the safety and well-being of the children. And they need to be followed the whole time; from open to close; every single day that you’re open. I understand that things happen. I completely understand that things happen and everything, but to not even have safety outlets or outlet covers. But, to run around and make sure they’re in there for the day of inspection? Come on, do you really want to take the chance that someone’s going to stick their finger in there? Those types of things—that was really what I felt like I was beating my head up against the wall with that and everything that I was basically looked at as the bad guy—like the whistle blower for asking for the outlet covers and I can’t even remember what else.

So, I got out of there and then I went to Community ECE. (Pause) I was at the one more towards Harrisburg. I was at that one. That was preschool—they were actually one of the biggest offenders of the ratios. (Laughter) Every single morning and every single afternoon they were out of ratio. They only had full-time staff – now we worked a nine hour shift so we had an hour break, but even working nine hours that wasn’t a long enough span to have it covered. So every single morning and every single afternoon we were out of ratio. So, they would pull in the television every single day and make the kids sit down and watch TV during those times when you were out of ratio.

After probably about a year of that my husband and I went through a personal trauma. So, when that happened that just kind of gave me an excuse to give my notice and leave. We just kind of dealt with all of that which led me to my next place, which was Play and Learn, which is actually no longer in existence. But, it was in a church in a Harrisburg suburb. It was a church looking to open a brand new daycare center. So, I was there for three years as the director. But, with it being a new center we just really, really struggled financially. I had to do everything. Everything. Completely got them up and running. I was the one developing the parent handbook and everything. But, I was still in the classroom all the time, too. So, I was there open to close. (Laughter) In on weekends, staying late in the evening for three years until I finally got to the point where I drove myself into the ground. I couldn’t physically do it anymore. It was a really, really tough decision to leave, but I really didn’t feel like I had a choice.

And then I started working at the Child Care Works Helpline —the state-wide helpline. It was still kind of in the field, but it was different. It was definitely a desk job. We were on the phone all the time, on the computers, sending out materials to parents calling in and asking for information. But, it was new, when it was first getting started so there was so much downtime that we had absolutely nothing—nothing—to do! (Laughter) When we were busy—when they did their advertising campaigns we were busy. I loved it! You were helping people, asking questions, and sending them information … I just really, really liked it. But, when it was done you were down and they couldn’t even give you anything else to do. So, you were just sitting there. Well, I’m kind of a busy, active person that I just can’t stand sitting there twiddling my thumbs with nothing to do. So, I only lasted there a year. (Laughter) Then I came here. (Laughter)

I came here, to Almost Home Childcare… That was in the summer of 2000. So, I’ve been here eleven years! I found my fit here! I did! I’m the founding director. They didn’t have a daycare center here. The Pastor who is currently here, he came on a year or so right before I did and it was his vision. He didn’t want to see the building sit here empty through the day. He wanted to bring in a lot of people from the community and offer different ministries. He had a big vision and part of that was the daycare center. So, that’s when they got a consultant to give them the ins and outs and guide them on what they needed to do to get a daycare center up and running.
So, she helped them through a lot and they had a pretty good foundation laid before they even started searching for a director. Once they got to that point they started advertising for a director and I walked in and the consultant recognized me and I’ve been to a lot of trainings now that she’s at CAECTI and so we’re still in touch that way and remember one another. So, she’s basically the one who advocated and said, “Yeah, you need her. This is your girl.”

They hired me and I still had a lot to do. I had to develop the Parent Handbook—I think they had the employee manual done, but a lot of the paperwork, getting them through the first DPW inspection to get them up and running, getting everything through the township, labor and industry, and all of that good stuff. So, I got them up and running within six weeks. They hired me—my first day was early in July and we opened August 26th or 28th—right around there, but I can’t remember exactly which one. I had to hire the staff. I had to get the classrooms all set up in six weeks.

We opened with three classrooms and we did infants through preschool. We had an infant room, a toddler room, and one preschool room. Within a year or two we opened up two more classrooms. We were able to start dividing it out a little bit more with the classrooms because the enrollment just continued to grow. Our enrollment right now is about 88. Over the summer we’re probably right around 125, maybe 130 depending on the summer.

In-between HACC and this most recent time I did attempt to go back to Shippensburg. I was there for a semester and then it just became too much of a commute. I was married—no kids at this time—but I was married, still trying to work full-time and fit in Shippensburg and the commute. We were living in Jackson—it was just a lot. My HACC schedule I could go at 8am and be done by 2pm and it was pretty much one class right after another with just a little couple breaks in-between. Where my schedule at Shippensburg was an 8am class and a 6pm class and class’s in-between and it was a lot. Just trying to fit everything in and with the commuting… I was pursuing elementary education to finish up the bachelor’s degree at Shippensburg. And then I decided because I still needed a lot of the general education classes that I could just go back to HACC to finish that up and then pursue it. And I was actually looking at Penn State Harrisburg as opposed to Shippensburg just because of it being closer. But, it became too much and financially we just couldn’t do it on our own.

And then we had children and I didn’t really seriously consider going back until the TEACH scholarship became available and the program through The Academy off of Front Street. That’s when I started it all over again and that was two years ago. They offered two classes in the evenings. One class on Tuesday nights from 6-9 p.m. and one class on Thursday nights from 6-9 p.m. So, that’s when I started going back for my bachelor’s in early childhood. And it was all through the TEACH scholarship which was pushed by the Keystone STARS and our participation with Keystone STARS…that a director needs to have a bachelor’s degree for STAR 3 and 4.

I think one out of the five classes that I took at Shippensburg—one course actually transferred in. Going back to school’s been a good experience. I’m in a cohort with other adult learners who are working in the daycare field as well. There’s only one person who doesn’t. She’s a TSS so she’s mostly paired with children in, sometimes in a daycare setting, but it’s mostly in a school setting and she’s mostly in the Harrisburg school district. But, the rest of us work in daycare. Overall, the experience has been positive, but the whole thing almost feels like our program is up in the air right now. We’re uncertain. This past summer we were told that we were going to have two classes and then at the last minute they said that we weren’t having any classes. We were originally told in the summer that we were going to have the two courses and at the last minute we didn’t have any. We were expecting two courses to be offered in the fall and we only had one. And the spring is still up-in-the-air. The explanation that we’re getting from The Academy is that the advisor that we started with was in charge of the early childhood component—well, apparently we’ve completed and finished all of our course that are required for that and now we’re moving into the special education piece so we have a different advisor. And I guess there were some (Pause) bumps in the road—something with that transition on getting another
advisor down for us. So, we’re supposed to be meeting that advisor the second week in January. We all have individual meetings set up with him. So, we haven’t met with him yet. We’re getting confusing emails from him. Each of us seems to be getting something a little bit different. We’re trying to piece together all of it, but we are hoping our questions become cleared up when we’re able to meet with him.

So, that’s why we’re kind of (Pause) uncertain and when people ask when we’re supposed to graduate we’re not really sure. We were told two courses each semester and that has faltered recently. So, but we are down to six classes—we only need six classes left and then whatever other gen education credits that we still have to take on our own. So, Alexis, my Assistant Director has five, I have three. I thought all of my gen education credits would transfer from Shippensburg and from HACC from before and that I would be okay. But, my history course wasn’t accepted. I had a World History and they want a specific US History. I had Geology, Chemistry, and Biology and only my Biology was accepted so I still need a Physical Science. Oh, and gym! I need gym. I need two credits in gym (Laughter) which wasn’t a part of my associate’s degree when I finished that, but now it’s a requirement.

To be completely honest with you, {of what we’ve done so far} there’s very little that I feel that I’ve been able to pull out and fit in with my work. There are certain components that I feel that we were able to talk to either our school-age teacher or our PreK teacher about, but that’s pretty much it. And I don’t want make it sound derogatory to the professors that we’ve had, but a lot of it has been—well, we’ve gone through quite a few professors. They haven’t been able to find just one professor to stick with us and go through it. The very first professor that we had…a lot of people in the cohort spoke up to the advisor and just didn’t appreciate her at all or her style of teaching. He was planning on having her return for our next semester and then after hearing from all of us, he decided not to. So, then the search was on for other professors for us. With it being a satellite location for them I think they’re having some difficulty. And we’ve only ever had one semester—our spring first spring semester professors from The Academy travelled down. And that was a great experience. That was a wonderful experience. One was “Teaching Science” and the other one was “Reading” and they were great. I felt like I got a lot of that, especially the reading one. But, again it was for elementary school type settings. It was just this past semester we had the birth through kindergarten part of it. This last spring semester was “Teaching Math” for birth through kindergarten, but our professor is a third grade teacher and I feel like a lot of the activities that she shared with us were for third grade on up. You might be able to adjust it to second grade, maybe even first grade. But, we really didn’t talk about the birth, the preschoolers, and the toddlers at all. Where that’s where for us working in daycare, most of us were strong in that anyway, but we didn’t discuss it or bring anything up. It was addition, even some multiplication type activities that she was doing with us…. And I feel like I got a lot of great ideas, but it wasn’t a lot I was able to share with the staff here.

{This degree is} supposed to certify us up to fourth grade. Our classes are specific to birth through kindergarten or first through fourth grade. And that’s actually kind of interesting, too, because our very first semester, our first fall semester, was “Teaching Math 1st - 4th grade”. Now that professor brought a lot of play and blocks and shapes and geometry into it which I felt is a better fit to what I’m doing here at the daycare center with the toddlers and the preschoolers. We really didn’t get into a lot of the addition or multiplication. That semester was unique—I feel like that professor didn’t do a lot of teaching to us, we kind of taught ourselves. Each of us was working in pair and given a math concept: graphs and data analysis, number sense, geometry, fractions; and we had to do our own research and teach it to the rest of the cohort. And I feel that was the bulk of that course. We learned from ourselves. I don’t know that it would work with college freshman or sophomores that don’t have a lot of experience, but most of us have at least five years up to twenty-some years’ experience. So, I think just because of the dynamics of our cohort it was effective, but it wasn’t really what I was expecting from a college course. But, I liked it and I feel that I was able to get stuff out of it. It just wasn’t exactly what I was expecting.
I think I was pretty much expecting more of a lecture type course where we were taking notes. I was expecting some interaction. We are adult learners and I figured that it would be tweaked to that a little bit so it was a little more hands on and sharing experiences. I think I was just expecting a little bit more instruction from the college professor than what we received.

I felt overwhelmed {with classes} at first. Just trying to fit it in whenever I could. My husband works weekends so he’s not even home on weekends. And if my kids were younger I think I would have been completely overwhelmed. But, they are at that age where they are able to self-entertain for lack of a better word, for periods of the day. And my husband bought me a laptop so that I was able to take that down to the family room so that when the kids were down there playing that I can still be a part of it—that I didn’t have to lock myself away. Don’t get me wrong, there were times that I needed the quiet and I would lock myself away or wait until they were in bed until I started doing stuff, but I tried to involve the family as much as I could.

A lot of the courses that were taking have a hands-on part. So, they have us developing concept boxes and preparing lesson plans and doing different things. So, I was able to involve my kids in that—collecting items or having them tell me about a lesson they really enjoyed in school and adapting things or gathering materials…I’ve had a couple of literacy classes where I’m picking a book and picking activities to go with that and my son really, really enjoyed stuff like that and would say, “Oh, I wish my teacher would do something like this!” So he was kind of my guinea pig… So, I was able to kind of find that balance that I could still sort of involve the family and find time to get it done. But, it was trying to fit it in in-between loads of laundry and cleaning up the house. Or waiting until the kids were in bed to get it done. Or waiting until my husband got home on the weekends so that I could still get stuff done and he could be with the kids and take that over while I broke away for a couple of hours and did what I had to do.

But, to be completely honest with you getting to STAR 4—that was pretty much my decision. (Laughter) I’m actually pretty fortunate that the church here has a board of directors that is very trusting. I guess they have faith in me and they give me a lot of say on which direction that the center is going to go in. So, basically if I went to them tomorrow and said, “I really don’t think that Keystone STARS program is what we want to do anymore. It’s just too much work or too much of a demand.” I think they would say, “Okay, give me some reasons why and if that’s your decision we’ll take a vote on it.” And I think it would pretty much be a unanimous vote that we could drop it at any point. It’s me and my enthusiasm for it that I think has them on board. They’re not pushing; they’re basically okay with the pace we want to go at to reach each STAR level. They are considerate about my family time and me, the pressures that are put on me and the pressures that I put on myself—that they don’t want to see me do that—so they’re supportive and I think any decision that I want to make. It’s me. When you dangle that this is top quality and this is what it takes to be considered top quality—it’s me wanting go for that and to prove that the center that I work for is able to achieve that.

The most that I hear about our STAR level is from the Intermediate Unit staff that comes in to work with our kids. We have a handful of kids who get speech services and I’ve had two different speech therapists who will say, “I can’t believe you’re only at a STAR 2. I’ve been in other daycare centers that are a STAR 3 or 4 and you guys have it all over them.” Just kind of random comments like that, that they’re surprised that we’re only at a 2. But, then when I explain that I need the Director’s Credential to move up to a 3 and a bachelor’s degree to move up to a 4 then there like, “Oh!” (Laughter)

Yeah, I still need a Director’s Credential. I’m working on that right now. It’s an online program. I’ve completed two of the nine modules so far. …It was probably when I moved to a STAR 2 or might even have been when we first got started that I knew that long-term that I would need that. The nine modules are available so you can break it down and do any module that you want to do as just director’s training. Or complete the whole 9 modules and apply for college credit to get the Director’s Credential—the actual certificate. As you complete each module they give you a certificate saying which module number it was and the date and it has
your name on it. So, you can do those individually and pay for those individually or you can pay for it all together – the whole complete thing. So, the first 3 modules are considered the first college course. 4, 5, and 6 are considered the second college course and then 7, 8, and 9 are considered the third college course. So, by completing all that together gives you a Director’s Credential.

Now, (Laughter) none of those credits fit with The Academy. (Laughter) Well, let me rephrase this. When I first asked my first advisor about it he looked through everything. He said, no. Now, I’m not sure if I’ll get a different answer from this new college advisor who I haven’t even met yet. So, I originally was told no so I’m not planning on it.

Let me just say, I think from the time you open Module One, when you pay for it all together like I did, I think you have 18 months from the time you open up Module One to complete Module Nine. And from the time you open up your first module, that module has to be completed within nine weeks. But, it is self-paced that you can do it at your own pace. Its online reading.

They call the assignments “Evidence of Learning.” So some of it might be them giving a writing prompt and you have to write a paper. It might be related to one of the articles that you had to read as part of the reading assignment. It has some self-reflection in it or something like that. One of the {assignments} was on the NAEYC Code of Ethics. So, they’ll give you a scenario and then they’ll give you certain codes and you have to pick the top five that you feel relate back to the scenario. There was {an assignment} on networking. So, they wanted you to come up with your networking contacts and they had it broken down by local businesses that you deal with, like your supplies and things like that. One {assignment} was with training and director support on professional development and you just had to come up with anybody that you’re in contact with and they wanted the name, the organization that they were affiliated with and their contact information. How they actually checked that I’m not really sure. I think they were looking to see that it was completed.

(Laughter) Some of the assignments I get feedback. Not all of them. And it’s really interesting because it’s usually positive … I’ve finished two modules and I got a 96% on the first one and a 97% on the second one. And it’s usually positives; the assignments that I’ve completed that I’ve gotten 100% on are the ones that I’ve gotten the comments on. “You gave some really great examples. It was a good self-reflection” da, da, da, those types of things. But, where I’ve actually missed the points, I’m not getting any explanation. I’m not even seeing where I’ve missed the points. So, you’re not even able to go back in and see it marked that it was wrong and see where you missed it. That’s a little confusing to me. So, I am getting some feedback, but I don’t feel it’s the feedback that I need…if that makes sense. To be completely honest with you, I feel that a lot of the assignments are kind of a waste of my time and that they’re easy. I’m not saying that I don’t get absolutely anything out of it, but some of the stuff… I do feel that it’s a waste of time.

It’s definitely time consuming, too, because in a module you’re watching video, you’re hearing people talk, but then there’s a bunch of readings attached to it then too that you have to download and read and then go back in to complete the assignment. The one that I found to be the most beneficial was the NAEYC Code of Ethics and then I wasn’t even able to see (Laughter) where I missed the points!

I haven’t yet been able to completely sit through one from start to finish and that’s kind of the nice thing about it, too. Because it is self-paced and it gives a menu and as long as you mark down where you stopped you can scroll down and start from there and pick up from where you left off. I try to work on those modules in the evenings and on the weekends – on my own time in-between my homework from The Academy. And I will tell you, I’ll be completely honest and tell you that I’m really, really struggling with this – trying to fit it in. Because I know that I can put it off and that I have that 18 month window. Rather than saying that this module needs to be done by “this” date and this module needs to be done by “this” date and this assignment needs
to be done by “this” time. It’s easy to push it off and just say, “Oh, I’ll get to that later.” Whereas I’m much more disciplined on my college courses that I actually have to go to and have that deadline and the syllabus when I know exactly when each thing is due. I’m definitely not an online self-paced learner, at all! (Laughter) I will be completely honest with you!

I guess I just kind of make it happen. (7 second Pause) I want to say, (Pause) I WANT (vocal emphasis on “want” and says the word slower) to say that my role as mother is what I most identify with because that’s what’s in my heart. But, if I’m being honest I have to say that family time has definitely suffered because of everything else. And if I’m being completely honest it’s suffered probably the most as my role here as director. This isn’t a 9 to 5 job that you can come in and put in your time—it follows you home. You get those 5:00 in the morning phone calls. You get those 7:00 in the evening phone calls that are interrupting a game of Scrabble or Trouble or Sorry or whatever you might be doing. You get those 6:00, 6:30 phone calls that are interrupting your dinner. You get those weekend phone calls that are interrupting your family time. I don’t always get to go to the classroom parties and the field trips and things like that just because of my demands here at the daycare center. I want to say that family comes first and that’s what’s in my heart, but that isn’t always what happens. And my family has adapted and deals with it. I’m lucky that my husband picks up the slack and helps. But, I know he gets frustrated, too and he wishes that I just had a regular typical job that I put in my 8 hours like anybody else and I can leave and doesn’t follow me. He gets frustrated when I get those early morning phone calls and (Laughter) and those late night phone calls.

My mom’s definitely very excited for me {to earn this degree}. My sister’s excited that I’m going back. I think my husband is kind of neutral. I think he would be completely on board and supporting me if he knew that I was going to completely go and pursue a job in a public school setting or something like that. Just because it would probably—more than likely—mean less hours for me and less responsibility and more pay and better benefits. And I think he might even support me more if my place my employment was completely paying for it and we weren’t struggling financially right now to figure out a way now that the TEACH scholarship isn’t in place. But, he supports me in other ways. Like taking the kids and going out and doing something so I have time to do homework. Or doing things like that. So, he supports me that way.

There’s not an hourly pay increase to do this. It was either that or a bonus. And financially here it was better for the center to give a bonus. But, it was a bonus in two installments and I think it was $600 total. So, it was a bonus of $300 each time and they could spread it out within 6 months. So, that was a nice little perk, but it really wasn’t big of an incentive to do it. But with TEACH gone, all parts of that are gone.

(Interviewer: Do you ever or how often do you think, “I wish I wouldn’t have started this? We were a good center, we were doing fine. I wish I could reverse?”) Yeah, it probably depends on the day. When things are going well and we’re fully staffed and I can find time that I can break away and leave a little bit earlier than I typically would and go home before the kids get home from school and get my homework and other stuff done before they get home so I can have all that family time that I want to spend—I think that it’s great and this is the best thing for the center and for myself. And then there’s times where I’m dragging and the center is short-staffed and I’m putting in 10-12 hour days and I still have all of this to do at home and any time that I have to myself all I want to do is crawl up and sleep, I’m getting irritated because the kids are asking me to do things or there are things that I’m just like, (Laughter) “Really, why did I want to get this started in the first place?” So, it varies and it probably is very closely knit to the climate here at the daycare center and exactly how much is being demanded of me here. That feeling probably happens at least once a week. At least. It is there. I can work myself out of it. I can pull myself out of it, but it’s probably still always there.

I’m passionate about early childhood and that’s why I do it. I believe strongly in the field and doing what I can to make myself better and to make the center that I work at better. So, that’s why I plug along and do what I can to make even just a small difference if I can. I think it really
has to all tie back to for the love for the field. I absolutely love early childhood education. I couldn’t picture myself doing absolutely anything else to be completely honest. I enjoy being with kids more than I do adults a lot of the time. It’s just trying to be the best that I can be and just trying to make it work.

I still do strongly believe though that a bachelor’s degree is necessary to work in daycare. (4 second Pause) I feel that ongoing training is definitely important—that the field is constantly changing, but I don’t necessarily think that it needs to happen in a college setting. A lot of the classes that I am taking, I think that it doesn’t necessarily fit with infants, toddlers, preschool. It fits for first, second, third, fourth grade. But, knowledge is golden and I think that any teacher needs to acknowledge themselves as a life-long learner to be successful in a classroom. So, I don’t want to say that I don’t feel that it’s not important. I just don’t necessarily feel that a bachelor’s degree that extends up to fourth grade is necessarily what’s needed for a daycare atmosphere. I personally feel that the job I’m doing here, my associate’s degree from HACC has prepared for me that much more than any of the courses that are being offered from The Academy for me to complete the bachelor’s degree.

I will say that even though I’m finding the online learning part of the Director’s Credential that I’m doing isn’t for me, it’s definitely more directly related to what I’m doing here at the daycare center then the courses that I’m taking for the Bachelor’s degree.

Going back to school was always something that I wanted to do. And if money wasn’t an object, I would absolutely love to do it. I just would have liked to do it younger than what I am now. (Laughter) I’m in my forties, I just kind of feel a little, maybe, awkward rather than proud about that – just the thought of being intermixed with the traditional aged college student. Being a part of a cohort of people who are in a similar situation to me doesn’t bother me at all. There’s only one other person who is in the cohort who is close to my age. The rest are a good bit younger, some in their 30s, two in their 20s though. And that bother me at all just because we’re in that same situation—we’re trying to work full-time and fit in the school and everything. But, walking around a college campus during the day when any of those kids could be one of my children is a little awkward and intimidating to me.

And I’m not planning to be a public school teacher. I think it’s just my age that has me…and it just might be me…that whole thing. (Pause) I just kind of feel… I don’t know…sometimes I still feel like I have a lot to offer and then other times I just kind of feel like, “Well, really, would a school district really be interested in hiring woman in her forties who has never taught in a public school setting before?” (Laughter) Hasn’t taught outside of daycare? Has all this daycare experience, but…I just don’t how valued that would be…kind of transitioning at this point in my life to a public school setting. So, I just kind of feel intimidated by that. If I was doing this at a younger age I would probably would. I probably would be very interested in becoming a public school teacher. But, I also know – just from all the experiences I do have that I really don’t enjoy the older kids. I enjoy the infants, toddlers, preschool up to PreK. Kindergarten is probably the end of my comfort zone. Anything that … they’re… not that enjoyable. (Laughter)

But, I know my Assistant Director is definitely considering the public school. I can tell you that just from my cohort that I’m involved in through The Academy that only I and one other person are looking to stay in daycare. Out of nine! Everybody else is looking to go onto the public school setting. (Pause) I can’t blame them, for one. It’s mostly pay driven. Pay and benefit driven. And everybody’s honest about that… if they pay was better in daycare then I think a lot of people would be interested in staying because I think that’s really where their heart is. But, the pay and benefits are driving them to look elsewhere. Especially for some of the girls who are thinking that they’re going to remain single. You know if you have a husband who makes a pretty nice comfortable salary you have some leeway on what you can do.

But, I think it will come back to bite the state. I know that sounds crass, but I think the goal is to have better educated staff in daycare. But when you have that higher degree it opens
more doors and when those doors are opening and are offering better pay and benefits and less hours, (Pause) it’s attractive. And I don’t think you can blame anybody for pursuing that. I really feel that from hearing about other people in my cohort that once it’s complete we’re going to open up those other doors, those other avenues, that I think that they’re going to be leaving the daycare field if they can find employment elsewhere. And I think some of them are totally into it—that they would even take a substitute position as opposed to staying and working in daycare. Just as an avenue—that they think that’s their foot into the public school setting. And if that’s what they have to do and they have to substitute for one or two years or more before they can get a full-time classroom position that’s something that they’re definitely going to do.

I don’t think higher education is a bad thing. I definitely think that’s a perk, but I don’t know that we should (Pause). And I don’t want to say “penalize” but that kind of almost feels like what it is. (Pause) Somebody who’s dedicated to the field but might not have a degree or diploma, but will attend trainings and is basically a star in the early childhood field, but they can’t move up that Career Lattice and that may hinder their center from moving up and reaching the STARS levels. (Pause) I don’t think that should be the only judge.

I definitely don’t think that the higher education hurts. But, I will completely be honest with you and tell you that I’ve hired some people that have wonderful credentials, they have that degree, they have those credentials, but you put them in a classroom—in an early childhood classroom—and they sink. (Laughter) They don’t know how to float. They don’t know how to survive. Whereas I have some people who don’t even have their CDA, but I can put them in an early childhood classroom and they can take over. They know how to manage a classroom and to keep the day going—to get down on the kids levels and to be nurturing and comforting and caring and where somebody else just wants to follow that lesson plan to a “T” and doesn’t have all those other qualities and doesn’t thrive in an early childhood program. I’ve seen it a couple of times.

I think that some of the trainings available right now are excellent. And they’re geared for daycare, not to take it and apply it to a second grade classroom. I think that trainings are golden, but I think it really needs to be tailored to early childhood—into a daycare situation. But this degree that I’m getting is preparing people to be in a public school setting. To teach in a classroom. I really have been able to pull very little out of it that fits my work and what I do here.

While I’ve been here I’ve had staff that earned their CDA. And I think that’s a worthwhile investment of state resources. I do. I do, but then I would also add to that it really depends on the individual and if the individual buys into and is interested in taking what they’re learning in their CDA courses and applying it. Or if they’re just going through the motions to say “Ok, I earned my CDA so check me off the list.” I’ve seen some people be really excited about it and bring back ideas and implement the ideas right away. And I’ve seen other people that go in with the mindset that “I’m only doing this because I feel like I have to and I already know everything that I need to know and I’m really not going to gain anything out of this.”

And I would go as far as to say that I think that the associate’s degree is very worthwhile, too. I encourage my staff to pursue that as well. But, I’m not completely on board with the bachelor’s. Maybe Keystone STARS just think long and hard about requiring a bachelor’s degree. Maybe come up with some kind of other measuring scale to measure a director’s success and the center’s overall success. I think the ERS scores speak volumes.

I personally believe that the bachelor’s program that I am currently enrolled in is preparing me to be a classroom teacher in a public school setting. That it isn’t a good fit for a daycare situation. It isn’t addressing the situations that I see day in and day out. There’s very little that I’ve been able to pick out of it that I feel are a true benefit to what I’m doing here on a daily basis. So, I don’t feel that a bachelor’s degree is the only thing that should be used to indicate high quality, the highest quality a center is able to reach. I don’t necessarily believe that a director needs a bachelor’s degree in order to be effective in his or her job in a daycare situation.

The Director’s Credential? That’s another story. I’m on board. I wasn’t happy about having to complete it. It was just another thing on my plate that I had to juggle. But, so far, up
until this point I’ve only completed two modules, but up until this point I’ve been able to pull a lot out of it or it at least reinforces what I’m already doing is being considered best practice. So, I feel that I’m gaining a lot of valuable information from the Director’s Credential and I totally agree that should be a requirement.

Working on this degree I do feel like I am consumed. That it’s constantly going through my head—just how to juggle family and work and school. So, it is a distraction. There have been times when I know that I have something due and I get distracted here and it takes away from my focus here at the center. (Laughter) I’m just a stubborn person. (Laughter) I just don’t want to give up. I just don’t want to throw in the towel and give up. And with having children I don’t want my kids to see their mom as a quitter. Yes, things are tough and life can be tough, but you just find a way and work through it. And it could also be a lot of the personal things that I’ve gone through. It would have been really easy to just crawl up in a ball and stay in a dark room after a couple of things I’ve gone through let alone putting everything together. That isn’t what life is about. You just have to get out there and live it and do the best you can and not give up. You just keep fighting and having faith.

But the biggest obstacle to really doing this is finances, definitely. That’s why when the TEACH scholarship was available it was too good to be true. It wasn’t something that I always wanted to do, but finances kept me from doing it. So, when that obstacle was taken off the table and removed it just seemed like a golden opportunity and now we’re back to square one with that hurdle—just making the finances work.

But I know my future holds me working in the early childhood field in some capacity. It holds me trying to claw my way to the end of my bachelor’s degree (Laughter) since I started it I want to finish it. Just trying to jump those hurdles to make it happen. And that’s more of a financial issue then a desire issue. It (6 second pause) It holds me basically convincing myself on a daily basis, a weekly basis, a monthly basis that I’m meant to be a director. This whole process and probably even before that I was questioning, “Do I really enjoy being a director?” I really miss being in a classroom. And going back to school is bringing that out more.

In the end, I really do think we need to – as a field we need to – as the whole early childhood field really need to reconsider the credentials that we’re asking for on the whole Career Lattice, not just for the director even though that would be included. Maybe revisit that and think—I do know that research shows that teachers with a higher degree usually get better results. I get that. I’m not saying that I don’t value education. I just don’t know that it’s the only thing that should be—I understand that you still have the ERS scores and everything like that, too. So, even when a teacher with a degree you still are going to assess the classroom to make sure that everything else is in effect. But, maybe just having more weight on the ERS scores - that the degrees and the credentials maybe shouldn’t weigh in as heavily as they are right now for 3 & 4 STAR.

Natalie

Much of Natalie’s life history is omitted from her profile because it does not directly connect to the research questions. However, the transcripts include a number of devastating personal traumas she and her family have experienced. Yet, she maintains a positive attitude and sense of strength. Throughout the interviews, she frequently laughs, hesitates to pick the right words, and articulates a commitment to providing high-quality experiences for young children.
She is an example of a practitioner who, at the time of entry into the field, met the state’s requirements to be in a leadership position. However, her choice to participate in Keystone STARS has resulted in her no longer being qualified for her current position. Consequently, she is working to complete the academic requirements for a director of a STAR 4 program. It is very important to her that her center be recognized as high quality. Since high school she has pursued an education in five settings. She has dutifully attempted to meet requirements of multiple educational institutions that seemingly should be better coordinated. She has engaged in all of this with little complaint. What is problematic for her is the lack of fit between her coursework and her job responsibilities. In Chapter Five, Sarah brought this to light in terms of lack of focus on infants and toddler curriculum in her academic program. Natalie brings to our attention a mismatch between bachelor degree programs available and the role and tasks of center directors.

**Natalie’s Perspective on Degree Coursework Appropriateness**

Natalie values education as documented in two separate interviews: “…knowledge is golden and I think that any teacher needs to acknowledge themselves as a life-long learner to be successful in a classroom” (Natalie Interview 2, 2011, p. 16). “Yeah, I definitely don’t think that the higher education hurts” (Natalie Interview 3, 2012, p. 4). However, she is experiencing tension regarding earning a Bachelor’s degree that leads to teaching certification in Prekindergarten through grade four and her everyday experiences as a center director serving primarily infants through preschoolers. She states, “To be completely honest with you, there’s very little that I feel that I’ve been able to pull out and fit in with my work” (Natalie Interview 2, 2011, p. 7). In her narrative she describes her instructors and the content learned as being appropriate for the degree earned but inappropriate for the tasks of her position as a Center Director.

I personally believe that the bachelor’s program that I am currently enrolled in is preparing me to be a classroom teacher in a public school setting. That it isn’t a good fit for a daycare situation. It isn’t addressing the situations that I see day in and day out. There’s very little that I’ve been able to pick out of it that I feel are a
true benefit to what I’m doing here on a daily basis (Natalie Interview 3, 2012, p. 6).

She insinuates that one way to make her learning meaningful is to share new ideas with her classroom teachers. But as she stated in her second interview, she had not yet been able to do so.

There are certain components that I feel that we were able to talk to either our school-age teacher or our preK teacher about, but that’s pretty much it … Our spring first spring semester professors from The Academy travelled down. And that was a great experience. That was a wonderful experience. One was “Teaching Science” and the other one was “Reading” and they were great. I felt like I got a lot of that, especially the Reading one. But, again it was for elementary school type settings…. I feel like a lot of the activities that she shared with us were for third grade on up. You might be able to adjust it to second grade, maybe even first grade. But, we really didn’t talk about the birth, the preschoolers, and the toddlers at all. …. And I feel like I got a lot of great ideas, but it wasn’t a lot I was able to share with the staff here (Natalie Interview 2, 2011, p. 7).

Conversely, when speaking about her Associate’s degree from the local community college, she spoke more highly of it’s worth in preparing her for the tasks of a center director.

I personally feel that the job I’m doing here, my associate’s degree from HACC has prepared for me that much more than any of the courses that are being offered from The Academy for me to complete the bachelor’s degree (Natalie2, 2011, p.16).

**Natalie’s Perspective on Credential Appropriateness**

Unlike her displeasure with the fit between her degree program and her role, Natalie perceives the content of the Director’s Credential to be more beneficial.

I will say that even though I’m finding the online learning part of the Director’s Credential that I’m doing isn’t for me, it’s definitely more directly related to what I’m doing here at the daycare center then the courses that I’m taking for the Bachelor’s degree (Natalie Interview 2, 2011, p. 17).

Subject matter of her Director’s Credential is perceived to be more useful; however, Natalie is critical of the assignments during a portion of the interview omitted from the profile: “To be completely honest with you, I feel that a lot of the assignments are kind of a waste of my time and that they’re easy” (Natalie Interview 2, 2011, p. 14). This dialogue was not included in the profile.
because it was not a recurring theme. However, it is important to include it here in an effort to fully disclose all of Natalie’s perceptions of her experience.

Another notable concern of Natalie’s regarding her Director’s Credential program was the type of feedback she was receiving from program implementers. She shared that most of the feedback she received was positive in nature. And although positive feedback is typically well-received by learners, Natalie was noticing that when she did not receive feedback about mistakes in her work, she missed an opportunity to learn.

(Laughter) Some of the assignments I get feedback. Not all of them. And it’s really interesting because it’s usually positive … I’ve finished two modules and I got a 96% on the first one and a 97% on the second one. And it’s usually positives; the assignments that I’ve completed that I’ve gotten 100% on are the ones that I’ve gotten the comments on. “You gave some really great examples. It was a good self-reflection” da, da, da, those types of things. But, where I’ve actually missed the points, I’m not getting any explanation. I’m not even seeing where I’ve missed the points. So, you’re not even able to go back in and see it marked that it was wrong and see where you missed it (Natalie Interview 2, 2011, p.13).

Natalie’s experience adds another dimension to the theme of fit between educational program and learner needs. Her experience demonstrates that, for some, engaging in learning is not about completing a checklist for a QRIS. There is an authentic desire to learn. Effective academic programs must view education as a cyclical process. They must see assessment as equal an opportunity for learning as it is during instruction.

Lastly, before leaving this subtopic it is important to highlight a delimitation of Natalie’s narrative. At the time of data collection, Natalie had completed two of the nine modules in this online Director’s Credential program. It is possible that in the future she will determine the content is less useful. However, at the time of the interviews she perceived the program as relevant.

**Education requirements and skill**

As a childcare administrator, Natalie processed her personal experience going to school through the lens of a supervisor. As she made meaning of what she was learning, relevant or
otherwise, she also considered how education may or may not relate to teachers at all levels of the Career Lattice.

I’ve hired some people that have wonderful credentials, they have that degree, they have those credentials, but you put them in a classroom—in an early childhood classroom—and they sink…Whereas I have some people who don’t even have their CDA, but I can put them in an early childhood classroom and they can take over. They know how to manage a classroom and to keep the day going—to get down on the kids levels and to be nurturing and comforting and caring. Where somebody else just wants to follow that lesson plan to a “T” and doesn’t have all those other qualities and doesn’t thrive in an early childhood program. (Natalie Interview 3, 2012, p. 4).

She brings into the dialogue the belief that some practitioners possess natural teaching abilities without formal education. And she contrasts that with the notion that having a formal education does not guarantee high quality teaching.

She summarizes her concerns about using educational achievements as a single measurement of quality in this way:

In the end, I really do think we need to – as a field we need to – as the whole early childhood field really need to reconsider the credentials that we’re asking for on the whole Career Lattice, not just for the director even though that would be included. Maybe revisit that and think—I do know that research shows that teachers with a higher degree usually get better results. I get that. I’m not saying that I don’t value education. I just don’t know that it’s the only thing that should be—I understand that you still have the ERS scores and everything like that, too. So, even when a teacher with a degree you still are going to assess the classroom to make sure that everything else is in effect. But, maybe just having more weight on the ERS scores - that the degrees and the credentials maybe shouldn’t weigh in as heavily as they are right now for 3 & 4 STAR (Natalie Interview 3, 2012, p. 9)

This tension is not new to the field of education in general. In some ways it parallels contrasting views in public education related to alternate pathways to teacher certification. For Natalie and many other educators and policy makers, this problem is unresolved. In Chapter Eight a recommendation for instructors and administrators is presented.

**Educational achievement and future plans**

Natalie’s discourse included concern for the fact that increasing educational credentials tempt practitioners to exit the field of childcare. Although not significant in the number of times
coded, Natalie reported future plans of her cohort to leave the childcare field once obtaining their early childhood certification.

   I can tell you that just from my cohort that I’m involved in through The Academy that only I and one other person are looking to stay in daycare. Out of nine! Everybody else is looking to go onto the public school setting (Natalie Interview 3, 2012, p. 3).

As the childcare workforce increases its education, and especially for those who obtain teaching certification, the opportunity to seek a higher salary, better benefits, and reduced hours is alluring. This concern is raised frequently in stakeholder meetings and among early childhood professionals.

   Within this study the theme, educational achievement and exiting childcare, was first suggested in Chapter Four by Brenda. In Chapter Five Sarah mentions that it is has crossed her mind, but she quickly reaffirms that she is content in her current position. Now, Natalie admits considering this option herself but questions whether her background would be valued in a public school, as well as her innate preference for younger children (Natalie Interview 3, 2012). This theme will be further explored in Chapter Eight.

**Program Difficulty**

   One code, *Program Difficulty*, was added while analyzing Natalie’s profile that does not appear in the three other interviews. It includes what Natalie presents as problems related to course availability, consistency and quality of instructors, advising issues, and inconsistent communication from her Bachelor’s degree program. Natalie does not suggest reasons for these ongoing challenges, except for one mention that perhaps the problem is geography. Her cohort and she are enrolled in a satellite program of an institution that is approximately a two-hour drive from her campus. The significance of this occurrence will be further expanded upon in Chapter Eight.
CHAPTER 7. ANN: PROFILE AND THEMES

Context: Center Director; Earning a Master’s Degree in Early Childhood Education with PreK-4th Grade Teacher Certification online; Experience working with children: 10 years.

Ann is warm, confident, and laughs easily. She is happily married and an eager step-mom to two elementary aged children. She enjoys exercising and gardening. She’s not afraid to get her hands dirty on property improvements at her site and speaks highly of the families who utilize the childcare services her program provides. She values education, is open to less traditional United States approaches (such as The Waldorf School), and is proud of her efforts to obtain a graduate level degree. However, despite being conflicted about higher education, her narrative is one of achievement.

I grew up in Juniata County, which is about an hour north of Harrisburg, a very small town. I did well in school and I would say I thought I wanted to be a teacher probably from about the time I was in third grade. I planned on being a teacher and I just kind of stuck with that—that was what I was going to do. I went to college for elementary education at Shippensburg University and I made it through in four years and during student teaching I taught Kindergarten and fourth grade. And then after I graduated I applied for lots of teaching jobs and of course there wasn’t any. I was set-up on a sub list, but at the university there was a preschool on campus, and an elementary school, and I got a preschool teaching job there.

So, I started out there and I enjoyed it. I thought it was very tiring! (Laughter) And I was thinking, “Maybe I like the younger ones better.” I worked there for about eight months as a preschool teacher and then I applied for a director position at a small church, a non-profit with probably about 80 kids including the school-agers. So, I was a director and I was 22 years old! I was there and I was 22 and I was really scared to answer the phone. I hated confrontation with parents. I actually hid in my office because I didn’t want to see certain people because I told them they needed to pay or they couldn’t come back and stuff like that. But, those three years there really built my confidence as a director and I got a little older and wiser.

And then, I met my husband. He was from Lancaster County and I started to look for a position around Lancaster. I took a position as a director of the Kids Zone, which is a for-profit center, which was completely a different world than what I was used to. It was very about strict ratios, making money, and our tuition was huge and I had to dress up every day because I had to look professional for all of the professional parents coming in. I loved the teachers and the parents and the kids at that center. But, it didn’t feel like it was exactly what I wanted to be doing and I got really fed up with the for-profit world and the way the business ran. Very, very dissatisfied with that—but, the job market wasn’t great a few years ago, but I just kind of kept looking and looking.

I actually got to the point that I applied for a Head Start teacher position. Because I thought, “You know, I’ll just take a break. I’m tired of being a director of this” because as a director at Kids Zone you had to be there until 6:00 pm every night. I didn’t have an Assistant Director even though I had 20 staff and probably had 90 kids there. But, I didn’t have an assistant director. I did everything. I did the billing I did everything. So, it was just the hours I had to work were sometimes unreasonable. You didn’t have any kind of benefits really. I couldn’t get health insurance through there that was affordable. We had little time off even as a Director and stuff like that.

So, a Head Start position offered fabulous benefits so I thought I would try it. Well, when I put in my application for the Head Start teaching position they called me the next day and said, “Our childcare needs a director and you’re qualified and we think you should interview for that.”
And I was like, “Ooookay, I guess. I was really looking to get out of that, but I’ll try it.” I did a phone interview. I came in and did another interview and they hired me the next day and I started the next week!

That would have been in April 2008. So, I’ve been here a little over three years and I’ve liked every day of it here! I’m very happy at this center. We serve 85 children. They’re mostly from Lancaster city; almost all the kids have CCIS, which is the low-income funding stream. It’s very diverse center and it’s just—I feel like we’re really doing something here. This center was a STAR 2 when I came in and my assistant director, Melissa, was already here. Together we decided that was something we really wanted to do—we wanted to bring it up to a STAR 4. By January we were STAR 3 and by June the next year, which would have been a little over a full year after I started, we were a STAR 4. We really moved up the levels fast! So, now we’ve been a STAR 4 for over two years.

We’re really doing this as a social service. It’s not so much a business. At Kids Zone we were selling childcare. And it’s not like that here. Here we’re providing childcare. So, I came in and we had certain ideas. I could see that my Assistant Director was interested in doing things and we were like, “We’re going to get this up to a STAR 4!” I really think my husband being so interested in social justice has really shaped a lot of what we do… The trainings he’s doing and the things he’s talking about—that’s what I work with here. He’s got all of his literature and he talks to me about the importance of this and that, but it sinks in now because I see it every day. So, those things have become so important to me in the last ten years.

I had applied to grad school at Shippensburg when I was still living in Shippensburg and I had been accepted. I was actually going to go into Educational Leadership. That’s what I was thinking about doing. I hadn’t started classes yet, but then I moved to Lancaster County and it was too far away. And I couldn’t really afford it because my husband was still in school when we got married so I was helping him. So, when Melissa found out that the TEACH scholarship had started offering the scholarship to get your certification I was looking around at the colleges that had it and I saw that California University’s certification track lined right up with their Master’s degree. I just had to add three classes after that.

So, I knew that TEACH would pay {tuition} for us up to our certification. Then we could probably use Keystone STARS to help pay for the rest {of the credits we needed}. So, we applied. We got accepted. We’ve been blowing through these courses two at a time since fall 2010! We took two classes that fall, then two classes in the spring, two classes in the summer. Now, we only had one this fall because we lost the TEACH scholarship. The voucher program only goes up to $3,000 per year. So, that’s only one class per semester that we can keep mostly covered. So, we had to cut back a little bit on that which was fine, because it does take up a lot of your time. It’s not so bad now, one class at a time.

I kind of feel bad saying this, but we do a lot of our school work here at work. Melissa and I are both taking the same classes, we’re both sitting right here {in the same office}, and we both work way over 75 hours bi-weekly, which is our salary requirement to work. We both work 75-80 hours every two weeks. So, we actually do most of our school work here because we often don’t take lunch breaks. So, we just use those times to work on our homework here. There have been a few times I’ve had to take my classwork home with me. For instance, I had to post on discussion boards every week so sometimes I would do that in the evening. Or even when I was on vacation I had to still keep up with some of that stuff. But, for the most part we do our schoolwork here at work. And sometimes I don’t have anything pressing in the morning and if I have schoolwork I will do that in the morning. I also like to do schoolwork from 1:00-3:00 over nap time because I can get a lot of done.

I’m not finding the coursework to be very difficult. And I think that’s just because I have a background in what we’re doing. For example, the Leadership & Management class I just took—it was kind of a piece of cake. But, I can imagine that some of the preschool teachers who are in this class probably had to work a little harder just because they didn’t have the resources
that we have. Like, we had to develop handbooks and stuff like that. Well, we already have handbooks developed here. So, we were just copying and pasting a lot of stuff because we had already done this. But, other people had to start from scratch and I think that would have been a lot harder. It seems like almost everything we’ve focused on has been preschool and up—not a lot of infant and toddler stuff in these classes.

There have definitely been connections. A lot of the classes we take, they want you to come up with scenarios and examples. And it’s very easy because we have them right here in our center. And especially with case studies on children we’ll often anonymously use a child here at this center and we can work with the teacher of that classroom to really get in-depth on those things. So, I think in that way the teachers and the directors are learning from each other because we can share insights about we’re studying and they can tell us more about the child and we can build those things together. A lot of the classwork gets inserted into the center somewhere. If we have to do a whole bunch of lesson plans, when we’re done we pass them off to the teachers and say, “Hey, maybe you can use these sometime.”

I think {the value in going back to school} depends on the degree. I think the people from the TEACH scholarship with their Associate’s degree and Bachelor’s degree—I think they’re getting more value out of their classes and learning more. I just think that the classes I’m taking now—I’ve already learned so much of that content in real life and that’s why it’s maybe not helping my job as much.

I think there are some aspects of the Career Lattice that are kind of silly. I mean the certain percentages {of staff with specific qualifications} that you have to get to—we’ve been lucky, we’ve always had a lot of people with degrees already and other people willing to get their CDAs, but there’s a lot of fantastic teachers out there who have a hard time going back to school. Especially for an Associate’s or something like that because it’s so much time and they don’t have as many ways to pay for it now. It doesn’t make them any less of a teacher because they don’t have a degree. As long as staff members are still willing to learn and go to trainings—they don’t have to take classes and have a degree—they can continue to learn without being formally enrolled in school. It’s the people who don’t want to keep learning who may be stuck—those are the people that are the problem. And then they’re not your best teachers in the first place.

I think the thing is that the people in leadership who are going to be the spokespeople in the first place are the ones who need to be taken seriously. I think those are the people that it’s most important to have the degrees. Not necessarily because the degree gives them so much more, but because it gets them so much more in the eyes of other people. And that’s really what most higher education degrees are—it’s for the way other people look at you. Not necessarily as how you look at yourself.

But, what I think it just comes down to is we really need to work on certain things so that other people can see us in a certain way. I mean the public face of early childhood education. We need higher educated people who can be the spokes-models for those things and go out and talk to the public and make statements and talk about the importance. And then we need all of those other teachers who have degrees or don’t have degrees—who are simply working in the field and doing a good job—they’re giving us the results in the children. The children they are turning out are the results.

I think the CDA is really good for the teachers for learning to talk to parents, they work on that, they work on a lot of the assessment things, too. And that’s important. It really gains that “with-it-ness” for a teacher. So, I think the CDA is extremely valuable for everybody. We’ve had people with Bachelor’s degrees—sometimes I have somebody with a Bachelor’s degree in Bible or somebody who had a Bachelor’s degree in education in religion—they have a Bachelor’s degree, but they go and take their CDA class and that is so helpful to them because that is a class for people working in childcare centers. So, CDA is really important and then the Associate’s and the Bachelor’s is great for the people who want it and are good at that kind of thing, but it’s not for everybody and it doesn’t have to be.
So, I’d like to see more flexibility with the Career Lattice as far as years of experience and not just degrees. For me, it starts with how important CDAs are. How not important I think Associate’s and Bachelor’s have to be depending on the teacher, but back to how important I think it is for directors to get higher levels of education so they can be spokespeople for the brand of early childhood education.

What I’m saying is not forcing people to move forward on the Career Lattice. Because I think other centers do that. They say, “Well, now you have to go for your next step. This is what you have to do next. We need this for our center.” And basically they are saying, “If you want to stay this is what you have to do.” And I don’t like that ultimatum. If you had a whole center of Bachelor’s degrees I think you would have really high turnover because they could always go for a better job immediately.

I’m always looking for other opportunities. Even here—as happy as I am—I still check out other job opportunities even though I basically can’t get much better than what I have here. With my Master’s degree I’d really like to teach at HACC or something like that. I would really like to study more about Waldorf education because everything I’ve studied on my own I’ve loved. And I want to incorporate more of that into my classroom because I really like the natural environment and how holistic it is and those aspects of the curriculum. I want to bring in more of that.

I just don’t know if what I’m studying is that good of a fit to what I do. My degree is not going to advance my career here. It has not really affected what I do here. I don’t even know if I’ll be able to give myself and my assistant director a bump in salary! (Laughter) But, for the most part this is benefiting me because I will have the degree and I will be able to go on to do other things with it. So, it’s really not about what it’s going to do for my career at my job now, but what it can do in the future. So for people like Melissa and me, maybe we’ll teach some classes eventually. Maybe we’ll teach a CDA class or something like that after we have our degree. Those are the kinds of things we can do, more in addition to what we already do.

I guess, especially for people who want to be directors it would be the great degree to get. I mean people who are preschool teachers right now who are working on this degree—in especially the class I just took: Leadership and Management. They learned a lot about what it’s like to run an early childhood center. That is really the degree to get if that’s what they’re moving on to. With my degree I would like to, kind of like what I said before, probably I’d like to teach some CDA classes or something like that. That’s what I’d like to do with my Master’s degree. I’m not planning on leaving this center anytime soon because I really like it here. I like what we do. I like what we stand for and it’s a good job to have, especially with this economy.

Earning the degree is something that I wanted for myself. I’ve wanted to further my education. I just felt that when I had the opportunity I really needed to grab it because if I didn’t do it now I probably wasn’t going to do it. So, some of it’s just for myself – feeling more accomplished. It would just feel nice to say that I have my Master’s degree. And the other part is what I can do with it. I’ve often thought about maybe working for the Department of Education or something like that. Even the more entry {level} positions there are asking for a Master’s degree already so that maybe something I can get into, too. I just think while I had the chance I wanted to be able to open myself up to any opportunities that I might have for the future.

There’s definitely a huge value in education for me. That’s something that my family has always believed in. I think the biggest value would simply be that when you have that Master’s degree in your education it gives people a higher opinion of our field. To have these higher-level experts in our field—it just elevates us because a lot of people still think of preschool teachers as, “Oh, they don’t even have to have degrees, they don’t have to do this, they don’t have to do that.” Well, that’s something that’s important if we’re really going to expand what people think about early childhood education. And that obviously needs to happen because there are so many things, like especially funding and stuff like that – we have to be seen in a good light otherwise is going to dry up and things like that are going to go away. So, it’s really important for the general public
to learn more about these things. And I think the best people to broadcast them are teachers who are working on their degrees and going back to school—just to be taken more seriously.

**Ann**

Ann radiates warmth toward people and a fondness toward the children and families at her center. She is concerned with issues of social justice and elevating the status of the field of early childhood. She gives the impression that her personal and professional lives are functioning well and that she appreciates both. She is soaring through advanced degree coursework and is highly motivated. However, as she makes meaning of her experience, she frequently contradicts herself regarding the value and importance of four-year and advanced degrees. It seems she has an affinity toward higher education but is questioning the practicality or usefulness of such degrees for childcare teachers and directors.

Ann’s concern for the usefulness of degrees is present in other narratives within this study. However, Ann described her life history and details of her experience much differently from other participants. Portions of her story do not align with patterns in the study and therefore represent the negative (Wolcott, 2009) or deviant case (Patton, 1980). For example, she has had very positive schooling experiences to date, including her current academic program. Beginning an advanced degree was a *dream come true* and the act of earning the degree has not been difficult for her. Her responses to interview questions were so vastly different from her peers that the third interview (meaning making of experience) was collapsed into the second interview (details of experience).

**Ease in obtaining an advanced degree**

Shortly after obtaining her Bachelor’s degree, Ann was accepted into a Master’s degree program in Educational Leadership. Due to her then upcoming marriage and housing relocation, she did not begin coursework and was pleased to have this opportunity: “Earning the degree is something that I wanted for myself. I’ve wanted to further my education…” There’s definitely a
huge value in education for me. That’s something that my family has always believed in.” (Ann Interview 2, 2011, p. 6).

Earning a Master’s degree has come easily to Ann. She suggests this comes from practical experience, access to resources, and the ability to complete school work while on the job.

I’m not finding the coursework to be very difficult. And I think that’s just because I have a background in what we’re doing. For example, the Leadership & Management class I just took—it was kind of a piece of cake. But, I can imagine that some of the preschool teachers who are in this class probably had to work a little harder just because they didn’t have the resources that we have. Like, we had to develop handbooks and stuff like that. Well, we already have handbooks developed here. So, we were just copying and pasting a lot of stuff because we had already done this…

I kind of feel bad saying this, but we do a lot of our school work here at work. Melissa and I are both taking the same classes, we’re both sitting right here (in the same office) and we both work way over 75 hours bi-weekly, which is our salary requirement to work. We both work 75-80 hours every two weeks. So, we actually do most of our school work here because we often don’t take lunch breaks. So, we just use those times to work on our homework here. There have been a few times I’ve had to take my classwork home with me… But, for the most part we do our school work here at work. And sometimes I don’t have anything pressing in the morning and if I have schoolwork I will do that in the morning. I also like to do schoolwork from 1:00-3:00 over nap time though because I can get a lot of done. (Ann Interview 2, 2011, p.1).

Ann’s experience is unique in that she does not describe going back to school as a challenge in any way. She does not struggle to find time to do her school work, nor does she describe having to juggle personal, professional, and academic responsibilities. She also describes the rigor of her coursework as “a piece of cake” (Ann Interview 2, 2011, p. 1). Ann demonstrates that earning teaching certification and an advanced degree is not a strain for some of the workforce.

**The value of education and for whom it is most valuable**

Throughout the interview Ann speaks of the worth of formal degrees differently. As previously identified, she places a high personal value on obtaining an advanced degree. She also holds the CDA in high regard: “I think the CDA is really good for the teachers… It really gains that “with-it-ness” for a teacher. So, I think the CDA is extremely valuable for everybody” (Ann
She takes issue with the quasi-mandate for degrees that exists when participating in Keystone STARS.

What I’m saying is not forcing people to move forward on the Career Lattice. Because I think other centers do that. They say, “Well, now you have to go for your next step. This is what you have to do next. We need this for our center.” And basically they are saying, “If you want to stay this is what you have to do.” And I don’t like that ultimatum (Ann Interview 2, 2011, p. 10).

She states that all teachers should have the opportunity to earn degrees and credentials if they want a formal education (Ann Interview 2, 2011). She negates, however, the necessity of completing such a program: “It doesn’t make them any less of a teacher because they don’t have a degree” (Ann Interview 2, 2011, p. 8).

As she continues to process how she makes meaning of formal education programs, she indicates that degrees are valuable for individuals in leadership positions because the advanced degree raises an individual’s public status.

I guess the thing is that the people in leadership who are going to be the spokespeople in the first place are the ones who need to be taken seriously. I think those are the people that it’s most important to have the degrees. Not necessarily because the degree gives them so much more, but because it gets them so much more in the eyes of other people. And that’s really what most higher education degrees are—it’s for the way other people look at you. Not necessarily as how you look at yourself. … We need higher educated people who can be the spokes-models for those things and go out and talk to the public and make statements and talk about the importance (Ann Interview 2, 2011, p. 8).

Throughout the interview, Ann seemed to be expressing that there is a value in earning a degree, but the value was related to status in the eyes of the public rather than knowledge learned. Exception to this was for an individual earning a degree to move into a new position.

Unfortunately, as much as Ann is motivated to earn her degree, she is displeased with the content of her coursework: “I just don’t know if what I’m studying is that good of a fit to what I do. My degree is not going to advance my career here. It has not really affected what I do here (Ann Interview 2, 2011, p. 2). She perceives that people earning Associate’s and Bachelor’s degrees as “getting more value out of their classes and learning more” (Ann Interview 2, 2011, p. 7) than in her experience.
I’m not finding the coursework to be very difficult. And I think that’s just because I have a background in what we’re doing. For example, the Leadership & Management class I just took – it was kind of a piece of cake. But, I can imagine that some of the preschool teachers who are in this class probably had to work a little harder just because they didn’t have the resources that we have. Like, we had to develop handbooks and stuff like that. Well, we already have handbooks developed here. So, we were just copying and pasting a lot of stuff because we had already done this. But, other people had to start from scratch and I think that would have been a lot harder (Ann Interview 2, 2011, p. 1).

It seems that Ann strongly desires to complete a Master’s degree program for the status that it holds and future possibilities. She shared in her phone screening interview and in both face-to-face interviews that she is always looking at options for her future and new employment opportunities but that she doesn’t foresee herself leaving her current position. She sees an advanced degree as a symbol of status and a potential benefit in her future career path, but it is disconnected from her current context. Earning this advanced degree will fulfill Ann’s personal goal and professional mandate. It is unclear of the practical benefits for the children and families under her supervision.
CHAPTER 8. FINDINGS, DISCUSSION, AND CONCLUSION

Brenda’s, Sarah’s, Natalie’s and Ann’s experiences hold an undeniable uniqueness, yet sameness across the field of early childhood practitioners. Each individual is passionate about young children having high-quality classrooms and is willing to take measures for her program to be recognized as high quality by the state. Their individual profiles answer the research questions of this study and will be expanded upon in this chapter.

Findings and Discussion

Four themes are consistent across all profiles. The issues of TEACH funding, Exiting the field, Teacher education and quality teaching, and Appropriate coursework are further expanded upon in the upcoming sections. One theme from Natalie’s narrative is limited to her situation; however, it is significant to her experience and stakeholders. This isolated concern (Program difficulty) will be addressed first.

Research question one: “How does an experienced South Central Pennsylvania center—based early childhood practitioner working full-time and going to school as a result of a quality improvement rating system describe his or her experience?” is answered in the sections titled Program difficulty and Appropriate coursework.

Research question two: “What successes, challenges, supports, and needs does this practitioner describe?” is addressed in themes Program difficulty, TEACH funding, and Appropriate coursework.

Research question three: “What value does this practitioner place on quality improvement systems and teacher qualifications?” is highlighted in Teacher education and teacher quality, and Appropriate coursework.

Program difficulty.

Natalie is experiencing difficulty with the higher education institute from which she is earning her Bachelor’s degree. Given the pseudonym The Academy, this four-year college responded to the market demand for a part-time, evening, Bachelor of Education degree with
early childhood certification. The school’s efforts are appreciated, but in Natalie’s experience, the institution is having difficulty providing what it promised.

Located outside of the immediate geographic area, the institution does not have a permanent facility where Natalie attends classes. This means that advisors, professors, and other supports are not available for easy, convenient access. Natalie’s perception is that full-time faculty members from the institution are unwilling to commute the approximate two hours to teach courses, so local adjuncts are utilized. Vetting, preparation, and accountability of the adjuncts by the institution are questioned. Natalie believes the instructors are not subject matter experts in the education of children under age six. The number of courses offered per semester is also inconsistent. This problem causes concern for Natalie as she is working against a timeline to complete her degree in order to remain eligible for Keystone STARS.

As previously mentioned, within this study this specific issue is limited to Natalie’s narrative. It is quite possible that other participants had similar or different areas of difficulty within their programs. As researcher and interviewer I could have chosen to ask questions to probe for this theme with Brenda, Sarah, and Ann. However, I chose to use the predetermined broad questions and see what topics emerged rather than ask what seemed like a “leading” question, at the time. To determine if challenges similar to the ones Natalie experienced is a widespread occurrence further study is needed.

Whether or not Natalie’s experience is unique or common, standards for teacher educator programs exist at the national (Lutton, 2012; “Professional Standards,” 2008) and state level (“The Framework,” 2009). Similar in intent to a QRIS, these standards include expectations for program content, program assessment, and faculty qualifications. Even institutions deemed accredited or approved as meeting such standards have difficulties from time to time. Faculty turnover and changes in standards are often contributing factors to challenges related to course delivery and student support.
While analyzing the transcript of Natalie’s interview I was able to call to mind her tone of voice, facial expressions, and body language while speaking on this subject. What I observed communicated to me an internal tension. She seemed to be uncomfortable speaking poorly of her institution; yet still wanting to communicate her frustration with her circumstances.

Also during analysis I questioned the possibility that perhaps Natalie had unreasonably high expectations for program delivery or a low tolerance for change. I challenged myself to find evidence to support the notion that perhaps Natalie was overreacting to the challenges. I concluded this was not the case. This is not Natalie’s disposition. If one were to read all three of Natalie’s interviews he or she would likely draw the same answer to this question. In fact, she is quite resilient in her personal life; adapts to change easily in her professional life; and holds high, but reasonable expectations for her academic life.

As a student and instructor my experiences allow me to identify with Natalie in several ways. As a student I share her frustration with coursework that seems to not match the needs of the learner. Mismatch between required content and student readiness or role can lead to negative emotions for both students and their instructors. In my professional role, I can sympathize with the challenges a university can experience when designing a new program. I am aware of the many considerations which must be addressed within the larger context of the institution. I am also sensitive to the complications of recruiting, hiring, mentoring and assigning a team of faculty within a program.

Yet, through my researcher’s lens I attempt to co-construct meaning of experience. Studying and reflecting on Natalie’s narrative demands attention and careful focus on the minute details of her experience. The lens is very narrow. Conversely, analyzing and interpreting the study as a whole allows for a wider lens and considering her experience within the broader context. This later form of thinking foregrounds Natalie’s challenges against the QRIS system as a whole. In this approach, Natalie’s perceived struggles are expected. Reform is a process and during the time of change many obstacles will be faced (Elmore, Abellmann, & Fuhrman, 1996;
Datnow, Hubbard, Hugh, 1998). While sympathetic to Natalie’s challenges, these types of frustrations are often the byproduct of reform implementation.

**TEACH funding.**

Narratives were collected several months after the announcement that TEACH funds were being eliminated in Pennsylvania. Brenda had not relied on a TEACH scholarship, yet she is acutely aware of how the lack of tuition support impacts her colleagues. Natalie’s and Ann’s ability to continue their programs of study are severely impacted by this loss of financial assistance. As these and other practitioners work to increase their quality rating, it is imperative that adequate supports are made available to support their educational goals.

Recommendations regarding funding teacher preparation exist at the national level (“A Good Teacher,” 2005; Lutton, 2012) and are frequent hot topics by the federal (see [http://www.ed.gov/teaching](http://www.ed.gov/teaching) for policy and programs available) and the state government (see [www.pahigheredcommission.com](http://www.pahigheredcommission.com) for information on a recently convened panel). Despite the attention teacher preparation funding draws, progress is stunted. Darling-Hammond (2006) compares programmatic consistency of teacher preparation in the 21st century with medical training in 1910. She highlights not only the lack of funding for teacher education programs, but the limited funding available for students. Abbate-Vaughn, Paugh, & Douglass (2011) respond to Massachusetts’s policies regarding early childhood teacher preparation. They highlight that meaningful reform to early childhood practitioner development is not simply a matter of higher education, but must also take into consideration the quality of the program. Their recommendations include federal and state funding for postsecondary education with policies that monitor the quality of the program and promote higher compensation for degree completers.

As a student I can attest that paying for schooling, either out of pocket or through loans, is expensive and requires substantial sacrifice. Tuition funding for early childhood practitioners in Pennsylvania has been generous and readily available since before the implementation of Keystone STARS. Tuition reimbursement was available before TEACH funding was available
and remains intact since TEACH was discontinued. I believe that TEACH scholarships—especially the value-added components—had many benefits. However, an argument could be raised that incentives such as TEACH and Keystone STARS may contribute to current challenges within the field. The use of extrinsic incentives and rewards to change behaviors is widely discussed in the literature (Bandura, 1977; Ryan & Deci, 2000, Wagner, 2010). TEACH and STARS both contain components that trigger extrinsic motivation. Unfortunately, extrinsic motivational strategies often result in short term changes.

In a subsequent section titled Suggestions for Further Research I will propose areas of inquiry that I would like to pursue. Embedded in that context are questions regarding the nature of teacher change within professional development as a whole. This study seems to bring to light a disconnect between valuing education and valuing the education. Brenda, Sarah, Natalie, and Ann in one way or another value TEACH and STARS, especially the learning that results from credentials. However, as will be discussed in subsequent sections, there seems to be a lack of inherent valuing of the education. These participants express value in education (earning a credential or degree), but do not seem to give voice to valuing the education (knowledge and skill) that can be garnered through coursework.

Exiting the field.

Brenda perceives that her specialized training might be helpful to obtaining a position in a public school. Her motivation to leave childcare is significantly different from others in this study. She wishes to work where her daughter goes to school. Working in a public school allows her to maintain the same schedule as her daughter, along with the expectation of a higher hourly wage.

Sarah has not earned a teaching certificate but voices this theme as a concern in her narrative. Sarah feels that colleagues with four-year degrees will not be interested in childcare due to the low wages. This notion is not new. In recent years, PreK Counts and Head Start teacher qualifications have increased to require a public school teaching certificate. Since that time many
institutions of higher education have built obtaining the certificate into their Bachelor and Master degree programs. Consequently, many practitioners have the opportunity to earn their certificate while working on degrees to qualify for STAR Levels 3 and 4.

Stakeholders have long recognized that the potential exists for practitioners to seek public school teaching positions and leave childcare once they obtain certification. It is assumed that the increase in salary, better benefits, and altered work schedule will be attractive to childcare practitioners. Natalie and Ann both admit they have contemplated the possibility of looking into teaching in a public school setting. Natalie indicates that the majority of her cohort have plans to exit the field and enter public school—even if that means being a substitute teacher to get a foot-in-the-door.

Participant concerns regarding newly degreed practitioners leaving the childcare setting for public schools seems misplaced. First, in our current context public school teaching positions are limited due to funding cuts and older teachers delaying retirement. In addition, there are a deluge of new teachers graduating from traditional and alternative teacher certification programs who are competing for the few positions available.

Second, before Keystone STARS was implemented high rates of staff turnover was an ongoing problem within the field (Goffin & Washington, 2007; Lutton 2012). There is not space in this manuscript to completely address the causes of practitioner turnover. But the point to be made is that ringing alarm bells at the potential loss of teachers due to certification is failing to see the larger issue of actual loss of teachers due to low pay, poor benefits, and unacceptable working conditions.

Lastly, during the interviews none of the participants suggested that in certain circumstances having a teacher or teachers exit the field might be positive. It seemed the assumption was that all teachers were “good” and worthy of retaining. Sarah has worked in the field for 30 years; Natalie and Ann are Center Directors. Seemingly, over the years and in their positions they must have come across ineffective teachers or teachers with dispositional issues.
This is another example of participants thinking in narrow terms and not considering the larger context.

As a researcher it is difficult to know if participants’ narrow responses are a byproduct of engaging in focused interviews or is the narrowness reflective of their general perspective. In considering this I asked myself. “To what degree do socio-cultural constructs (such as the interview) influence people to respond in ways that imitate the narrative of the larger society?” Meaning, how much of the concern raised was authentic to participants and how much of the concern was sparked by the questions I asked. I also wondered to what extent were participants’ anxieties about individuals leaving the profession a result of hearing peers or other stakeholders first give them voice? Their perspective on this theme seems logical when considering the innate disposition of those who work with young children. How should we expect individuals who have chosen a profession that requires a degree of nurturing to react when threats (perceived or real) are made toward their practice? As the field evolves and responds to policy and budgetary realities, the concern of practitioners exiting the field is likely to remain. It is important that this issue be viewed in context of the larger picture.

**Teacher education and teacher quality.**

A central construct to this study is the linkage between teacher education and teacher quality. As addressed in the literature review, a plethora of research exists on the topic (Barnett, 2003; Early et al., 2007; Hyson, 2003; Whitebook, 2003; Zaslow, Tout, Maxwell & Clifford, 2004). The majority of recognized studies uphold that the more education a teacher obtains, the higher the quality of his or her teaching. However, always at odds with this research is the anomaly of the exceptional teacher with limited or no job specific preparation. Some scholars argue that teacher qualifications alone are not the “difference maker” in high quality classrooms (Goldhaber & Brewer, 2000; Lutz & Hutton, 1989). From this perspective, overall intellectual ability and content knowledge yield higher student outcomes than successful completion of
education coursework (United States, 2002). This tension is also part of the dialogue of increasing educational achievements of ECE practitioners.

Practitioners in this study are less likely to believe degrees and credentials are necessary to be a good teacher. Brenda and Ann (CDA and MEd respectively) are neutral on the topic. Sarah and Natalie (AA and BS respectively) disagree with a statement regarding educational attainments and quality (see Appendix F). In their interviews, this theme seemed to generate the most impassioned statements. The findings of this study do not argue for or against teacher preparation. Rather, the findings indicate that at either completion of an educational program or while still in one, practitioners are not convinced of its benefit. Evidence of this perception exists in the following statements:

Most of the stuff that I was reading in these books was stuff I had already been doing. It may have enhanced it a little and I think about it more. But, to change the way I dealt with children and all that? I don’t think it did a whole lot. Maybe a Bachelor’s degree would. (Laughter) Because, I mean, my teaching comes from my heart. (Taps chest) Not from this piece of paper. (Taps transcript) (Sarah Interview 2, 2011, p. 9)

In the end, I really do think we need to – as a field we need to – as the whole early childhood field really need to reconsider the credentials that we’re asking for on the whole Career Lattice, not just for the director even though that would be included. Maybe revisit that and think—I do know that research shows that teachers with a higher degree usually get better results. I get that. I’m not saying that I don’t value education. I just don’t know that it’s the only thing that should be—I understand that you still have the ERS scores and everything like that, too. So, even when a teacher with a degree you still are going to assess the classroom to make sure that everything else is in effect. But, maybe just having more weight on the ERS scores - that the degrees and the credentials maybe shouldn’t weigh in as heavily as they are right now for 3 & 4 STAR (Natalie Interview 3, 2012, p. 9)

I guess the thing is that the people in leadership who are going to be the spokespeople in the first place are the ones who need to be taken seriously. I think those are the people that it’s most important to have the degrees. Not necessarily because the degree gives them so much more, but because it gets them so much more in the eyes of other people. And that’s really what most higher education degrees are—it’s for the way other people look at you. Not necessarily as how you look at yourself. … We need higher educated people who can be the spokes-models for those things and go out and talk to the public and make statements and talk about the importance (Ann Interview 2, 2011, p. 8).
Nevertheless, this study brings to light an ideological disparity between policymakers, stakeholders, and practitioners. It brings to the forefront a dialogue that is underdeveloped in the literature on ECE QRIS. To truly enact reform (i.e.: quality improvement) scholars and practitioners must grapple with the parallel viewpoints on the purpose of education, what counts as knowledge, and what value such knowledge holds.

Chapter Two of this document articulated how a profession is defined and the field of ECE fits the agreed upon definition. Of particular relevance to this discussion are the constructs:

- “Is identified by a discrete and technical body of knowledge which is both theoretical and practical,
- Requires formal training and education for entry in the profession…”

(Griess, 2012, p. 16)

With this in mind, the ECE profession includes the acquisition of skills and knowledge from both experiential learning within practice and formal learning in organized settings. This approach to teacher preparedness is not new. A 1985 article which vision casts the future of childcare projects that “it will no longer be sufficient to demonstrate competent clinical practice based primarily upon intuition and experience” (Fergusen & Anglin, p. 89). Yet, nearly three decades later, three participants within this study—who were selected based on rigorous methods for potential transferability—for the most part value experiential learning far more than formal learning.

Practitioners do not stand one this side of the debate alone. Scholars, who identify themselves as “reconceptualists,” apply the notions of what knowledge counts and which forms of professional development are valued in a framework of positioning, power, and equity. They state,

We will argue that our positioning as teacher educators places us in the role of experts training novices when we work with pre- and in-service preschool teachers. With our position comes power, as persons perceived
as having expertise, we also have more agency. Conversely, classroom teachers, especially those working preschool settings, typically have little power hence little agency. They are positioned, then, as recipients of our disseminated wisdom and socially sanctioned knowledge about how to ‘best’ work with young children. (Novinger, O’Brien, Sweigman, 2003, p.4)

Perhaps, practitioners in this study who seem to be struggling with issues of personal identity and professional value in relation to formal education are validated within this framework. Policymakers, trade organizations, institutions of higher education, and faculty become “multiple forces that perpetuate a culture of expertise in early childhood education” (Novinger, O’Brien, Sweigman, 2003, p. 3). These forces place highest value on formal learning.

On the other side of the debate, well-respected scholars such as Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993), Connelly and Clandinin (1985), Darling-Hammond (2006), Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Holtzman, Gatlin, & Heilig (2005) and Fenstermacher (1994) acknowledge there are many ways teachers develop various forms of knowledge related to their practice. In this paradigm, experiential learning, which aligns with Fenstermacher’s (1994) “situated knowledge” (p.32), is seen as valuable. As is standardized learning that occurs in formal classrooms (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005, Darling-Hammond, 2006).

How then does the field move forward with this seeming tension? Perhaps this dilemma is well-suited for the application of Third Space Theory (Bhabha, 1994; Gonzalez-Mena, 2009). This paradigm calls for individuals to cease attempting to win others to their own ideology. Rather, opposing groups willingly create a new third space that is neither totally mine nor totally yours. This space represents a new culture that is intersecting, dynamic, fluid, and represents all who are present. For mainstream ECE professionals and reconceptualists this would require a shift from “either/or” thinking to “both/and” thinking.” For professional development to reach a new third space it would require a coming together that is not based on compromise—which often results in neither side being satisfied. Successful joining would depend on an openness and ability to form a space that is both complimentary and compensatory of professionals needs.
Appropriate coursework.

The most significant theme that emerges across all four participant interviews is the perceived usefulness or relevancy of coursework. It is important to make clear the distinction between the terms “credential” or “degree” and “coursework” as they are used intentionally when interpreting the data. None of the participants indicate the credential or the degree earned lacks usefulness or relevancy; the satisfaction or dissatisfaction relates to the content of the program (coursework). To be clear, Sarah, Natalie, and Ann do not indicate that they think earning a two-, four-year, or advanced degree is useless or irrelevant. They question the usefulness or relevancy of the topics, readings, assignments, etc. that make up their degrees in light of their position or role.

There is also need to provide clarification on the use of the words “usefulness” and “relevancy” as they are not interchangeable. In many cases, participants indicate that what they have learned is useful information, but it is not relevant to their context. For example, Natalie indicates that she learned many good math activities to do with third graders—it is useful information. However, she does not perceive that knowledge applicable to her role as a Center Director; therefore, it is not relevant.

Overall, credentials are looked upon as useful and relevant. Brenda, Sarah, Natalie, and Ann all believe the CDA is a valuable credential for a teacher to earn. Natalie and Ann also believe the Director’s Credential is focused on topics meaningful to a program administrator.

However, Sarah, Natalie and Ann question the fit between degrees earned and their current roles. Although allied in their dissatisfaction, their grievances vary, and each displeasure will be discussed individually in the following sections.

**Sarah: young toddler teacher earning an Associate’s degree in early childhood education.**

In addition to Sarah feeling challenged to perform well on general education courses thirty years after high school, she does not perceive the coursework as relevant. Sarah failed to
understand the value of general education courses such as English and algebra to her role as an early educator. Her dialogue highlights the need for stakeholders to make the role of general education explicit to practitioners.

NAEYC (Lutton, 2012), along with other educational scholars (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Roskos, Rosemary & Varner, 2006; Wei, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson & Orphanos, 2009), posit that teachers’ academic content knowledge, among other things, is the “linchpin in the development of high-quality programming for children younger than age 6” (Pianta, 2006).

The third edition of *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age 8* (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009) contains a noticeable increase in the focus on academic content knowledge and “robust content” (p. xiii) throughout the age spans.

Beyond assisting practitioners in their ability to scaffold and teach developmentally appropriate content, proficiency in general education courses undergirds vital professional skills of the workforce. Strong oral and written communication skills support interactions with colleagues and families. Developed mathematical thinking skills aid practitioners in seeing within their world’s structure, logic, patterns, and processes.

Sarah’s dissatisfaction went beyond her general education plan of study and feels that courses within the major lacked usefulness and relevancy. She is disappointed that of the 39 ECE credits, only three were dedicated to infant and toddler care. The institution describes the program on their Plan of Study Check Sheet as a “comprehensive study of the way young children (birth through preschool age) develop and learn.” But Sarah reports that much of the content focused on preschool-aged children and was simply not relevant to her. She is proud to have earned her Associate’s degree. Unfortunately, she reports it has had little impact on her daily activities with young children since much of what was learned was directed toward older children.

On face value her report seems fair. Yet, tension lies in the expectation that practitioners will spend their entire career with one age group or age band. The extent to which practitioners
change assignments within childcare settings is undocumented in the literature. However, staffing patterns in childcare settings mirror public school settings. Administrators encounter situations that require practitioners to be placed in classrooms with children above or below their current placement based on a variety of factors. Some changes are short term; others are indefinite. Consequently, teacher preparation programs have developed preparatory plans of study that cover the continuum of development and content across a number of years or grades.

Sarah’s complaint is not completely unwarranted. A more balanced set of coursework that gives equal attention to infants and toddlers, preschoolers, kindergarteners, and early primary grades seems appropriate. Practitioners would benefit from a broad study of child development with narrowed focus on methods that consider what is developmentally, individually, and culturally appropriate. This type of evenly distributed curriculum reflects other changes in the most recently revised edition of *Developmentally Appropriate Practices* (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009) which focuses on each of these age spans independently. If greater equity among the age bands is objectionable, offering concentrated degrees provides an alternative.

*Natalie: center director earning a bachelor’s degree with PreK-4th grade certification.*

Natalie is extremely fortunate to have found an institution offering a Bachelor’s degree on a part-time basis. The program is targeted to adult learners with an Associate’s degree or others with a partially completed degree. It is advertised as an *Early Childhood Education BSEd* and is marketed toward individuals working in childcare settings. However, Natalie’s experience suggests that the program coursework is the same as what is available at the main campus for students earning degrees to be public school teachers. Although the institution is responsive to learner needs regarding time of day and location, it has not altered the content of the degree.

Natalie shares that very little of what she is learning is relevant to her role as a center director. Thirty-three of the 73 credits in the major are dedicated to content methods. None of the 73 credits have an ECE prefix; in fact, the majority of the prefixes are ELEMED (Elementary Education). When looking at the program as a whole, it is a very useful degree for anyone
looking to become a public school teacher. However, for someone like Natalie, who is working as an administrator, it is not relevant. She would have experienced richer professional development with coursework addressing her daily responsibilities.

One way of looking at this scenario is to argue the value of a childcare administrator with strong primary elementary grade content knowledge and pedagogical competencies. This knowledge would provide a foundation for supporting classroom teachers as they prepare children to transition to public school. In addition, it would be useful and relevant when supervising before and after, and summer camp programs.

Another viewpoint would be that administrators are better supported with a wider foundation including knowledge and competencies related to infant through school-age out-of-school care. In addition, those with administrator roles benefit from developing knowledge and skills related to management and leadership.

This context presents the field with a dilemma worthy of discussion and debate. In an ideal world, an administrator would begin their tenure having practical experience in the classroom and specialized training related to their teaching role. Ann’s profile demonstrates this type of career progression. However, since the ideal is often not reality, other administrators are promoted into leadership based on classroom ability, but with minimal academic qualifications. This is the case with Natalie. Scenarios such as Natalie’s will decrease and pathways such as Ann’s will increase if the field continues to promote higher academic qualifications for the workforce.

However, this is likely to take a great deal of time to come to fruition. In Pennsylvania, STAR 4 Performance Standards require a director to hold a bachelor’s degree with 30 ECE credits from a range of major emphasis areas (see the Career Lattice, Appendix A). The latitude in the types of degrees accepted reflects the diversity of the workforce and the field’s ongoing inclusive mindset toward practitioners (see discussion in Chapter 2, The Professionals). This presents a quagmire for policy makers, stakeholders, and leadership. It seems the time is fast
approaching when the field as a whole must take a stand regarding whether it prefers a workforce with specialized preparation or if it prefers a workforce reflecting the diversity of its service base (children and families) and the types of programming it provides. What must remain ever present in the debate is compensation; if the field prefers practitioners to hold high academic qualifications, then infrastructures and mechanisms must be in place to support salaries, benefits, and working conditions that are commensurate with their academic rank. As this study shows, increasing one’s education costs individuals a personal investment as well as a financial one.

**Ann: center director earning a master’s degree with PreK-4th grade certification.**

Ann also reports that completing coursework has not changed how she performs on the job. However, assignments that Ann describes seem to be useful for a childcare administrator. Specifically, the assignment to create a handbook is relevant for a center director. A review of the program advisement sheet indicates the content of this degree is both useful and relevant. Six courses begin with an ECE prefix and are listed under the title “Specialized Courses” and focus on subject matter content, assessment, development, and leadership, yet Ann does not perceive the degree as necessary. She believes her undergraduate coursework was preparation enough and that earning this degree does not advance her current position.

Her motivation for obtaining PreK-4th grade teaching certification is unclear since she does not seriously entertain the idea of becoming a public school teacher at this time. She indicates that earning the certificate would only require a few extra courses so she chose to take advantage of the opportunity that was available.

Ann seems to consider the degree as currency for her future. When speaking about the value of her education, she consistently speaks of using this achievement in the influential role of teacher educator. Ann’s interest demonstrates how her degree might put her in a leadership position.

“With my Master’s degree I’d really like to teach at {the local community college} or something like that. For the most part this is benefiting me because I will have the degree
and I will be able to go on to do other things with it. So, it’s really not about what it’s going to do for my career at my job now, but what it can do in the future. So for people like my assistant director and me, maybe we’ll teach some classes. Maybe we’ll teach a CDA class or something like that after we have our degree.”

She also believes that earning an advanced degree is added human capital that generates social capital or benefits. Unlike many others who pursue further education for economic gain, Ann does not express this motivation. She perceives that earning an advanced degree increases her cultural and social capital (Bourdieu, 2002). Attaining the degree garners a coveted status for Ann.

“There’s definitely a huge value in education for me. That’s something that my family has always believed in. I think the biggest value would simply be that when you have that Master’s degree in your education it gives people a higher opinion of our field. To have these higher-level experts in our field—it just elevates us because a lot of people still think of preschool teachers as, “Oh, they don’t even have to have degrees, they don’t have to do this, they don’t have to do that.”

This line of thinking might be problematic for some readers. Educators might stiffen at the notion of earning a degree simply to be looked upon more favorably in society. However, Ann links this social standing gain to the larger context of how early childhood practitioners are viewed by the general public. Despite her personal reasons for wanting a Master’s degree, she articulates a gain for the field as a whole when it comes to perceptions of outsiders.

**Strengths of the Study**

This project contributes to the literature in several meaningful ways. Specifically, it is the only study known that takes a complete emic perspective of the experience of practitioners returning to school while working full-time across a range of programs and contexts. Over twelve hours of interview data were collected, transcribed, and analyzed using traditional and modern coding methods. Each narrative is substantiated by the participants as accurate renderings of their experiences. The variety of their experiences is documented in one report that captures both similarities and differences.
The wide range of demographics represented by participants also strengthens the findings. Participants cross multiple sectors which suggests the inclusion of a variety of perspectives. Participants represent the following:

- Sectors: corporate, for-profit, non-profit, faith-based, urban, suburban
- South Central counties: Dauphin, Lancaster, York
- Education goals: CDA, Director’s Credential, AA, BS, MEd
- Program types: face-to-face, online
- Educational agencies: PASSHE, State-related, distance learning correspondence
- Positions: substitute/floater, classroom teacher, center director

Limitations of the Study

As with any study, there are certain limitations that occur as a result of respondents available or unforeseen challenges. Two voices are not included that would have strengthened the study. One, a practitioner who is earning or who had earned the state-recognized School-Age Child Care Credential would have rounded out the perspectives on programs available. Second, the experience of a classroom teacher earning certification would have been welcomed. In the study, the two participants earning public school teaching certification are center directors. The perspective of a classroom teacher earning certification would have added another layer of understanding.

Another limitation of the study is the missing voice of a practitioner with ten or more years of experience who is earning a CDA. This issue was addressed previously; Brenda initially indicated she met this criterion. Once I discovered that she did not, a decision was made to retain her in the study due to other contributing factors. It would be valuable to document the narrative of a teacher with more hands-on experience in formal childcare settings to compare and contrast his or her experience across the set of profiles.

Lastly, the study would have been strengthened by having participants provide feedback on the final write-up of their profile including researcher interpretation. The member checking that occurred was limited to the profile itself—their words stripped of interviewer questions. Sending each participant the full chapter and allowing her to respond would have added another
dimension to the study. This possibility was considered. However, because it was not included in the proposal, co-advisor Dr. Johnson and I concluded that although this step would likely be interesting, it was not necessary.

**Suggestions for Further Research**

The iterative process of asking questions, seeking answers, and challenging results often leads to more questions, so it is at the conclusion of this study that a host of new questions have emerged. In the following paragraphs, I will recommend several research topics that complement quality improvement initiatives yet focus on teacher development in the larger context.

First, more research needs to be conducted to document the *results* of teachers increasing their educational qualifications. It is not enough to have a cadre of teachers with the appropriate qualifications on the Career Lattice. Evidence of application of learning, improved practice, and improved child outcomes should be garnered. Within this line of research should be the development and promotion of evidence-based practices that support the transfer of learning between the formal adult classroom and the early childhood setting.

Second, in light of limited local, state, and federal funds for formal education programs, research needs to be conducted on methods for teacher development that fall outside traditional formats. The preference of the author is for teachers to be engaged in formal learning experiences. However, if funds are unavailable to adequately support practitioners in these pursuits, alternative methods for developing the workforce are necessary. This line of study should be paired with the previous call for documentation of transfer of learning.

Lastly, ongoing research is necessary regarding the benefits of QRIS as a whole. This study looked at one aspect, teacher development which represents “Training/Professional Development” in the STARS acronym. The effectiveness of the “Standards,” “Assistance,” “Resources,” and “Support” initiatives must also be measured. A statewide quantitative study should be designed that goes beyond the annual report of the activities of these branches.
Research focusing on child outcomes, program improvement, and Return-on-Investment would assist in maintaining and improving the initiative as a whole.

**Summary and Conclusion**

The purpose of this study is to deepen understanding of the experiences of early childhood practitioners returning to school under specific circumstances. The goal is to learn from their narratives about their successes and challenges so that stakeholders can be informed and act appropriately. Focused interviews capture the experiences of four practitioners representing an array of contexts. Analysis of their profiles presents similarities and differences with meaning for policy makers, intuitions of higher education, instructors, and administrators.

Findings indicate that the value of formal education and training programs are widely agreed upon. They are valuable for maintaining the status as a profession and for increasing the quality of young children’s everyday experiences. But, as is often the case, a one-size-fits-all approach does not work. As early childhood practitioners embrace increased educational requirements, it is important that professional development programs are in place that meet their needs. Programs should be well-funded, focused in content, facilitated by experts, and easily accessible. As the field of early childhood continues to advance on all fronts, may the question no longer be: “Should early childhood practitioners have an education?” but rather: “What educational program is most meaningful for this early childhood practitioner?”

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1. Throughout this document the terms “teacher” and “practitioner” will be used interchangeably.

2. Currently, in ECE in PA “credentials” refers to a state or nationally recognized credential such as the CDA, the School-Age Credential, etc. It does not mean a certification credential.
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Afterword

I fully recognize that this research is only a small sample of what there is to know about early childhood teacher development. However, teacher development as a whole is very important to me. Over the past 15 years and now as a faculty member at the Pennsylvania State University, teacher education is my life’s work. I have dedicated my career to nurturing and guiding pre-service and in-service teachers of children from birth through high school in informal and formal settings. Candidly, I myself did not follow traditional pathways to becoming an early childhood teacher. Consequently, I have a reticence about limiting the qualifications that “count” toward being considered a legitimate teacher. I believe formal education has significant benefits. Here at the conclusion of my doctoral program, I therefore, continue to wrestle with how to balance these two paradigms.

Completing my dissertation has been energizing, exciting, and at times worrisome. It has propelled me to launch my research agenda with renewed commitment. As I reflect on the narratives of these four women, I am moved by their commitment and passion. I appreciate their transparency in relating their stories with their only goal being that their voice will contribute positively to the field. I am extremely grateful that they volunteered to participate in this study, and I am grateful to employers who changed work schedules and allowed them to speak with me on the company dime.

My greatest concern is that my findings will be used out-of-context and for the purpose of decreasing educational requirements for early childhood practitioners. It is my hope that readers will honor the intent of the study and the motives of the participants and author. I maintain hope that as a nation we will one day provide all children with equal access to high quality childcare settings—settings that include fairly compensated and well-prepared teachers with specialty knowledge about the children in their care.
Appendix A: Pennsylvania Keys to Quality Early Learning Career Lattice

Pennsylvania Early Learning Keys to Quality Career Lattice

POSITIONS
- Child Care / School Age
- Early Childhood Head Start
- Early Intervention
- Early Child Care Provider
- School District
- Private / Non-profit
- Child Care School
- Family Child Care

Level I
- 16 Hours or 2 ECE Credits
- Orientation Training

Level II
- 30 credits including 12 ECE credits

Level III
- Credential, Pennsylvania Certificate II or 4 ECE credits

Level IV
- Bachelor's Degree in ECE/Equivalent Degree in ECE-related field including 30 ECE credits

Level V
- Bachelor's Degree in ECE/Equivalent Degree in ECE-related field including 30 ECE credits

Level VI
- Bachelor's Degree in ECE/Equivalent Degree in ECE-related field including 30 ECE credits

Level VII
- Master's or ECE/Equivalent Degree in ECE/Equivalent Degree in ECE-related field including 30 ECE credits

NOTE 1: High school equivalency may be accepted in Level I.
NOTE 2: These 45 hours may include 15 hours of Orientation Training from Level I.
NOTE 3: For SACCS programs, credits on the Career Lattice may be in Education (excluding Secondary Education).
NOTE 4: For Education and Early Learning (EEL) programs, refer to all courses offered at all levels.
NOTE 5: For ECE/Equivalent Degree and ECE credits, all courses must be in Education (excluding Secondary Education).
NOTE 6: Note to the Early Childhood Education Teacher Quality: Recognizing High-Quality Care Certificate: PA Credential to determine if a candidate meets Level IV/Level V requirements.
NOTE 8: Unrelated Bachelor's Degrees that include 30 ECE credits meet Level VI of the Career Lattice.
NOTE 9: Continuing education credits for ECE in ECE/Equivalent Degree and ECE credits in ECE/Equivalent Degree with Secondary Education.
NOTE 10: For a list of approved degree requirements, go to www.pajobs.org and Career Development/Requirements.
NOTE 11: All levels V and above on the Career Lattice; in-state or out-of-state ECE Certifications are accepted regardless of degree awarded.
Appendix B: Interview Script

Educating Early Educators
Principal Investigator: Carolyn J. Griess

Semi-structured Interview Script:

Thank you for being willing to talk with me, today.

I would like to record our conversations. The primary use of the recording will be for my recall. If this recording will be played publically neither your name, nor any other identifiers will be attached. In print, no identifiers will be attached to any quotes taken from the recordings that are part of this study.

There is no right or wrong answer. Please be honest and candid as your input is meaningful to our field and nothing you say will reflect negatively on you nor will anything you say bring any positive, tangible rewards. I am only interested in hearing your experience with career development in early childhood programs in Pennsylvania.

Interview One: “Focused Life History” Starter Questions

Today I want to hear about you and your experiences up until this point in your life, going as far back as you can in the time we have together.

1. Tell me about your early experiences growing up with your family, in school, with friends, in your neighborhood, your extra-curricular activities, and work experiences.

2. How did you come to be a preschool* teacher at this center?

3. Tell me about how you’ve arrived at where you are in life.

4. Tell me about how you’ve become who you are today.

5. Is there anything I haven’t asked you about that you think is important or relevant to our conversations that you would like me to know about?

*substitute position title as appropriate based on demographic data collected

Interview Two: “The Details of Experience” Starter Questions

Today I want to hear about you and your experience as a preschool* teacher and as a student.

1. Tell me about what you do in your role as a preschool teacher. What are your responsibilities?

2. What might a typical day be like for you? Start with when you wake up through to going to bed.

3. Tell me about your role as a student.
4. Tell me about your relationships at home, at work, and at school.

5. Can you describe some of the choices you’ve made along the way and how they have impacted you?

6. Is there anything I haven’t asked you about that you think is important or relevant to our conversations that you would like me to know about?

**Interview Three: “Reflection on the Meaning” Starter Questions**

Today let’s talk about how you connect in your mind what we talked about in the first two interviews.

1. Based on what you said about life before becoming a teacher and student, and life while teaching and going to school, how does it all fit together?

2. In light of our last two conversations, where do you see yourself in the future?

3. Is there anything I haven’t asked you about that you think is important or relevant to our conversations that you would like me to know about?
Appendix C: Before and After Interview Memo Sample

[Handwritten notes about the before and after situation involving Brenda and another individual, discussing aspects such as personality, approach to school, and voluntariness of involvement.]
Appendix D: Recruitment Materials

Educating Early Educators
Principal Investigator: Carolyn J. Griess

Email Subject Line: Participate in research about ECE teacher qualifications

Hello, allow me to introduce myself, my name is Carolyn Griess. I teach in the early childhood program at Penn State Harrisburg and I am currently a doctoral student at Penn State, University Park. Before going back to school at PSU I worked with children and families from birth to school-age in childcare settings in the eastern part of the state. I’ve taught in urban areas and the suburbs and for non-profit and for-profit early childhood programs. I am also a PQAS instructor and have enjoyed facilitating workshops and credential courses around Pennsylvania.

Today I am contacting you because I am soliciting volunteers to participate in a research study designed to explore early childhood practitioners’ experiences going back to school while working.

Criteria to participate are:

- 18 years of age or older
- Working full-time in a Keystone STARS facility
- Minimum 10 years of experience working with children
- Active enrollment in a credential or degree program or graduation within the past six months
- Ability to commit to 3 two-hour interviews over the course of four weeks and a minimum of 1 one-hour follow up meeting between June 27th and July 25th

If you are selected to participate in the study, you will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview regarding your experience teaching and working on increasing your qualifications at the same time. Each interview will last approximately 1 ½ - 2 hours and will be digitally recorded. Only I will have access to these recordings. The purpose of the digitally recording is to capture our conversations for later analysis. Also, the digital recordings will be transcribed, and no personal information will be linked to the recordings. The transcripts of the recordings may be summarized for research and possible publication involving the results of the study. I assure you that no participants will be identified in any publication. There is no obligation or requirement beyond the interviews.

The digital recordings and their transcription will be safely stored in a locked cabinet in the researchers’ office and will be shredded in the year 2015.

If you have any questions, please feel free to email me at cjg130@psu.edu or call 717-948-6217. If you are interested in participating, please click here to complete an online survey by <deadline>.
Research about ECE Teacher Qualifications
Participant Survey Online

Please indicate that you:
___ yes ___ no: Are 18 years of age or older
___ yes ___ no: Are working full-time in a Keystone STARS facility
___ yes ___ no: Have a minimum 10 years of experience working with children
___ yes ___ no: Are currently enrolled in a credential or degree program or have graduated within the past six months
___ yes ___ no: Are able to commit to 3 two-hour interviews over the course of four weeks and a minimum of 1 one-hour follow up meeting between June 27th and July 25th

Type of program you are enrolled in/graduated from:
___ Credential (CDA, School-age Child Care Credential, Director’s Credential)
___ Associates Degree program
___ Bachelor’s Degree program
___ Master’s Degree program

Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements:

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<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
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<td>3. I have learned a lot as a result of going back to school.</td>
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<td>4. I have a lot of people supporting me in going back to school.</td>
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<td>5. Going back to school has been easy.</td>
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<td>6. It’s good that Keystone STARS requires caregivers/teachers to have credentials or degrees</td>
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<td>7. Children deserve to have caregivers/teachers who have a credential or degree.</td>
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</table>

Additional comments (optional):

___ yes ___ no  I would be interested in participating in a follow-up phone call to discuss my answers above.

If you checked “yes” please complete the following:
Name:
Employer:
Phone number:
Best time to call:

Thank you for your time in completing this survey.
Hello, allow me to introduce myself, my name is Carolyn Griess. I teach in the early childhood program at Penn State Harrisburg and I am currently a doctoral student at Penn State, University Park. Before going back to school at PSU I worked with children and families from birth to school-age in childcare settings in the eastern part of the state. I’ve taught in urban areas and the suburbs and for non-profit and for-profit early childhood programs. I am also a PQAS instructor and have enjoyed facilitating workshops and credential courses around Pennsylvania.

Today I am contacting you because I am soliciting volunteers to participate in a research study designed to explore early childhood practitioners’ experiences going back to school while working. I was wondering if you or one of your staff would be interested in participating. Please take a moment to read on and consider participating or passing this flyer on to your staff.

Criteria to participate are:

- 18 years of age or older
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If you have any questions, please feel free to email me at cjg130@psu.edu or call 717-948-6217. If you are interested in participating, please complete the attached survey and return to me using the enclosed envelope by <deadline>.
Research about ECE Teacher Qualifications
Participant Survey Paper (to be distributed with a self-addressed, stamped return envelope)

Please indicate that you:

___ yes ___ no: Are 18 years of age or older
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<td>1. Going back to school has helped me in my job.</td>
<td>Totally Disagree</td>
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<td>3. I have learned a lot as a result of going back to school.</td>
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<td>5. Going back to school has been easy.</td>
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Additional comments (optional):

___ yes ___ no I would be interested in participating in a follow-up phone call to discuss my answers above.

If you checked “yes” please complete the following:
Name: _____________________________________________ _____________________________
Employer: _________________________________________ ______________________________
Phone number: _____________________________________ ______________________________
Best time to call: ______________________________________________________________

Thank you for your time in completing this survey.
Appendix E: Recruitment Follow-Up Phone Script

*Educating Early Educators*
Principal Investigator: Carolyn J. Griess

Thank you for completing the survey and be willing to speak with me today. I found your responses to the survey interesting and was hoping I could learn a little more from you.

Tell me more about… (choose one of the ten survey questions).

Hmmm. That’s interesting. Can you also tell me more about… (choose one of the ten survey questions).

*This loop will be repeated as often as necessary.*

_Potential participant closing:_
I really do appreciate your time today. And I respect and commend you for going back to school and maintaining your commitment to young children. I think you have an interesting experience that I would like to learn more about. I am curious if you would be willing to talk with me in more depth about your career development and work with children and families.

I’d like to set up some times with you to conduct three interviews. Each interview will last approximately 1½ - 2 hours and will be digitally recorded. Only I will have access to these recordings. The purpose of the digitally recording is to capture our conversations for later analysis. There is no obligation or requirement beyond the interviews. I’d be happy to meet you in a place that you feel comfortable and at a time that works around your schedule. Is this something you would be willing to consider?

_Non-potential closing:_
I really do appreciate your time today. And I respect and commend you for going back to school and maintaining your commitment to young children. Is there anything else that you would like to share with me before we end the call?
## Appendix F: Participant Responses to Survey Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brenda</th>
<th>Totally Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Totally Agree</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Ann</strong></th>
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<td>4. I have (had) a lot of people supporting me in going back to school.</td>
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<td>5. Going back to school has been (was) easy.</td>
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<td>6. It's good that Keystone STARS requires caregivers/teachers to have credentials or degrees.</td>
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<td>7. Children deserve to have caregivers/teachers who have a credential or degree.</td>
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<td>8. In order to be a good caregiver/teacher you need to have a credential or degree.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. I am interested in being a public school teacher.</td>
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<td>10. Going back to school has been a goal I've had for a long time.</td>
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Appendix G: Participant Recruitment Phone Follow-up Memo Sample

RECRUITMENT FOLLOW-UP/SCREENING SCRIPT

_Educating Early Educators_
Principal Investigator: Carolyn J. Griess

Participant 7, Natalie
1. Going back to school has helped me in my job.
   Agree

2. Going back to school has made me a better caregiver/teacher.
   Agree

3. I have learned a lot as a result of going back to school.
   Agree

4. I have (had) a lot of people supporting me in going back to school.
   Neutral

5. Going back to school has been (was) easy.
   Disagree

6. It’s good that Keystone STARS requires caregivers/teachers to have credentials or degrees.
   Neutral

7. Children deserve to have caregivers/teachers who have a credential or degree.
   Neutral

8. In order to be a good caregiver/teacher you need to have a credential or degree.
   Disagree

9. I am interested in being a public school teacher.
   Neutral

10. Going back to school has been a goal I’ve had for a long time.
    Agree

Thank you for completing the survey and be willing to speak with me today. I found your responses to the survey interesting and was hoping I could learn a little more from you.

Tell me more about… (choose one of the ten survey questions).

Hmmm. That’s interesting. Can you also tell me more about… (choose one of the ten survey questions).

_This loop will be repeated as often as necessary._

Initial Phone Call: 12/2/11

_How did it come back to be that you came back to school?_
Participating in STARS, to go to STAR 4 Director’s need a BA, TEACH scholarship too good to pass down – 6 classes to go

Where are you going to school?
Through Bloomsburg at Dickinson University Center, targeted HACC AA, took additional degrees/institutions only 9 signed up, 100+ showed up for the information meeting

First semester without scholarship from TEACH…

What has been the biggest benefit?
Classes are great, tight cohort – same situation working full-time, 3 directors, 3 teachers – share good ideas from peers, learning from professors, gaining valuable information, being able to network with people in the family, juggling family working full-time

What has been the biggest challenge?
Working 40+, juggling family life – 2 children, homework, projects

How much of it can you implement?
Pretty much have freedom to do things so if I think good idea and can gear to children can implement it. But what I’m finding is that if I want to go work in the public school would benefit me the most.

Is that what you are thinking of doing?
If the opportunity presented wouldn’t turn it down – money & retirement package, wouldn’t definitely pursue, but if...

12/20 10am
xxxx Locust Lane

MEMO
There are many interesting things in Natalie’s screening that catch my attention…the damage of the loss of TEACH is apparent. Not just in the immediate benefit of the funding, but also creating in her less loyalty about staying after she receives the degree and certification. I’m also curious about earning a teaching degree when you’re a director. Needless to say I understand some benefits and believe that director’s need a solid background in education and teaching to support their staff. However, in larger program’s where there may be a Curriculum specialist then an education degree may not be what a director really needs. It seems we’re throwing one degree as the solution to all educational needs. I’m interested in how she’s gotten to the place of Director with an AA, how this teaching degree is changing practices in her center, and what the degree means for her future…and her center’s future now that funding for the degree has dried up.
Appendix H: Email Sent to Participants as Form of Member Checking Profiles

May 7, 2011

Hi, Ann -
Happy spring and Happy Mother's Day!! I hope you've been well the past few months and enjoyed the warm winter. I'm doing well. We finished our semester last week and I'm putting the finishing touches on our conversation held over the Christmas holidays.

Here's what I've done. I took the two interviews and typed them out word-for-word. That came out to be 21 pages single-spaced!! I then went back through and looked for themes or topics that seemed to be important for my research study. I highlighted those items and then removed all the other parts of the conversation.

Next I edited that document and added parts of our conversation back in that maybe weren't highlighted, but were important to the context. What I ended up with was only your words as if you were telling a story about yourself; not answering interview questions. That is a much shorter document (7 pages) and so obviously I left a LOT out. But it was necessary - all the "extra talk" helped me to get to know you in the broader context so that I could pull out the integral pieces related to my topic.

As I mentioned when we first started this process, I've changed your name and all other names that could identify you. Your pseudonym is Ann, your AD is Melissa, and I've changed the names of places you worked that could be an identifier (except for Shippensburg).

I'd like you to read over the attached file. It's in Microsoft Word and as PDF. If you can't open it, let me know and I'll mail you a hard copy. Please let me know if you think this is an accurate recording of our conversation and yourself. Is there anything that I left out that you think should be included? Do you feel misrepresented in any way?

Let me know what you think! And thanks again for participating!!

__________________________
Carolyn J. Griess
Early Childhood & Middle Level Teacher Education Faculty
Penn State University, Harrisburg
777 W. Harrisburg Pike, W331 Olmsted
Middletown, PA 17057
717-948-6217, Visit me on the web!
## Appendix I: Themes and Coding Legend

### LEGEND

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<th>Themes Created Coding Interviews</th>
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Appendix J: Sample of Results from Rounds of Coding

(Waiting for my assessor to come out I was) anxious. I was very anxious because I just wanted to get it done and over with. And then I was very nervous when the time came. I was very nervous. She would ask me questions and she told me not to be nervous and then we went through it. I told the Director, I’ll probably get a letter saying I didn’t make it. And she said it’s really hard not to pass it unless you’re telling her that you’re beating the children and putting them in closets. (Laughter) She said, “it’s very difficult not to.” And I was like, “Well, she was telling me all I need to do – the different steps I had to take in order to redo it.” I just kind of felt anxious. I was nervous the whole time. It was supposed to be for three hours and it was actually two and a half or right under two hours. It wasn’t long at all so I was happy because when were done we were able to leave.

I got my certificate in the mail. And that took a month after I talked to her for me to get it. Well, my husband got the mail and when I came home from daycare he said to me that there was a package on the table but it was big envelope. As soon as I saw “CDA Council” and then I was all excited. So, I just ripped that open in no time and I was very excited. I was happy. My director gave me a little goodie bag with gift cards and stuff in it. I told her that I had a surprise and the next morning I had it on her desk and then she was very excited. Everybody was screaming through the center (Laughter). They were happy that I got it. At home, my husband was very happy that I got it.

I think I’m still going to be at the daycare in the future just because it’s a lot less stressful then going into the schools… unless I help in the kitchen or as an aide on the playground or something like that. I like the daycare, however when I left my other job, Supply Line, they had told me that I could come back at any point. But, I feel like I can’t go back and get a real full-time job – not that this isn’t real, but outside of where my daughter is until she’s self-sufficient enough that I can leave her at home and not worry because something could happen or she can’t get something for herself. But, I like it at the daycare right now so I probably will stick it out for a little while. But, I don’t know where I will end up or what my future will hold when she goes to school.

I like knowing that I have the CDA because I’ve learned a lot and it helps me no matter where I go because it’s an education that I will have forever and I can remember what I’ve learned. If I do stick
Appendix J: Alignment of Research Questions and Inquiry Tools

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Survey Questions</th>
<th>Interview 1 Questions</th>
<th>Interview 2 Questions</th>
<th>Interview 3 Questions</th>
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<td>How does an experienced South Central Pennsylvania center—based early childhood practitioner working full-time and going to school as a result of a quality improvement rating system describe his or her experience?</td>
<td>1. Going back to school has helped me in my job. 2. Going back to school has made me a better caregiver/teacher. 3. I have learned a lot as a result of going back to school.</td>
<td>1. Tell me about your early experiences growing up with your family, in school, with friends, in your neighborhood, your extra-curricular activities, and work experiences. 2. How did you come to be a preschool* teacher at this center? 3. Tell me about how you’ve arrived at where you are in life. 4. Tell me about how you’ve become who you are today.</td>
<td>1. Tell me about what you do in your role as a preschool teacher. What are your responsibilities? 2. What might a typical day be like for you? Start with when you wake up through to going to bed. 3. Tell me about your role as a student. 4. Tell me about your relationships at home, at work, and at school.</td>
<td>1. Based on what you said about life before becoming a teacher and student, and life while teaching and going to school, how does it all fit together? 2. In light of our last two conversations, where do you see yourself in the future?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What successes, challenges, supports, and needs does this teacher describe?</td>
<td>4. I have a lot of people supporting me in going back to school. 5. Going back to school has been easy.</td>
<td>3. Tell me about how you’ve arrived at where you are in life. 4. Tell me about how you’ve become who you are today.</td>
<td>5. Can you describe some of the choices you’ve made along the way and how they have impacted you?</td>
<td>1. Based on what you said about life before becoming a teacher and student, and life while teaching and going to school, how does it all fit together?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What value does this practitioner place on quality improvement systems and teacher qualifications?</td>
<td>6. It’s good that Keystone STARS requires caregivers/teachers to have credentials or degrees 7. Children deserve to have caregivers/teachers who have a credential or degree.</td>
<td>3. Tell me about how you’ve arrived at where you are in life. 4. Tell me about how you’ve become who you are today.</td>
<td>1. Tell me about what you do in your role as a preschool teacher. What are your responsibilities? 2. What might a typical day be like for you? Start with when you wake up through to going to bed.</td>
<td>1. Based on what you said about life before becoming a teacher and student, and life while teaching and going to school, how does it all fit together? 2. In light of our last two conversations, where do you see yourself in the future?</td>
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<td>8. In order to be a good caregiver/teacher you need to have a credential or degree.</td>
<td>9. I am interested in being a public school teacher. 10. Going back to school has been a long time goal of mine.</td>
<td>bed. 3. Tell me about your role as a student.</td>
<td>conversations, where do you see yourself in the future?</td>
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## Appendix K: Percentage of Profile Coded to Theme

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Education
Ph.D.  Curriculum and Instruction          2012  Pennsylvania State University
M.Ed.  Instructional Systems               2002  Pennsylvania State University
B.S.   Education                          1993  Philadelphia Biblical University
B.S.   Bible                              1993  Philadelphia Biblical University

Professional Experience
2008 - Present  Pennsylvania State University, Harrisburg, PA
                 Instructor, School of Behavioral Sciences and Education

2002 - Present  Childcare Training Solutions, PA, NJ, DE
                 Sole proprietor, formed company in 2001 to meet practical needs of center-based
                 and family providers, nursery schools, school districts, churches and recreational
                 organizations

2007 - 2008    Pennsylvania State University, Cooperative Extension York, PA
                 Contracted Instructor

2004 - 2007    Pennsylvania State University, College of Education, Harrisburg, PA
                 Adjunct Instructor

2001 - 2002    Aramark Educational Resources, Newtown, PA
                 Program Administrator

1999 - 2001    Aramark Educational Resources, Bryn Mawr, PA
                 Center Director

1996 - 1999    The Neighborhood Center, Inc. Camden, NJ
                 Center Director

1995-1996      Downingtown School District, PA
                 Third Grade Classroom Teacher

1994-1995      Faith Christian School, Willow Grove, PA
                 Fifth Grade Classroom Teacher

Professional Certifications

               Certificate