THE EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCES OF THREE EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHERS
DURING DIFFICULT PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES:
AN ANALYSIS OF CARE STRATEGIES IN RESPONSE TO THESE EMOTIONS

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Abstract

Using case study design with a semi-structured interview approach and diary journal entries, my research study seeks to describe the emotional experiences of three inner-city, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania early childhood teachers during a difficult parent-teacher conference. Teachers’ anxiety caused by confrontational parental interactions is one of the three most highly ranked areas of negative emotional tensions for beginning teachers (Barrett Kutcy & Schulz, 2006). The year prior to this study, the three teachers participated in a year-long professional development program. Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE) was created to provide teachers with mindfulness strategies that may enable them to experience stressful classroom situations with an attitude of curiosity, openness, and acceptance of themselves, others, and the situation. This study investigates if these teachers, who self-reported that they used CARE strategies in their classroom during the fall of 2011, relied on any of the strategies during what they predicted and described as a difficult parent-teacher conference in February of 2012.

As evidenced through the three teacher’s description of their thinking and feelings prior to the anticipated difficult parent-teacher conference, teachers experienced stress. In addition, each teacher spoke of exchanges with the parent during the conference in which they felt stressed or angry. The consistent response to these emotions was the teachers’ recognition of what she was feeling and the utilization of deep breathing, a strategy they learned and attributed to their CARE training.

In these three cases, teachers’ judgments about the parenting decisions they witnessed were consistent. All three teachers spoke about how differently they would
respond to the child if they were the parent; all believing that their approach would have been more appropriate in obtaining the desired behavior from the child. Although unsolicited, the teachers voluntarily spoke about how different their parents were in comparison to the parents sitting across from them during the conference.

Listening to these judgments about parents, it appears that one of the goals of CARE may not have been realized. Specifically, CARE strategies were designed to develop within the teachers a sense of acceptance of others. Based upon the teacher's critical comments about parents, this acceptance was not evident. Thus, I was unable to assert that the teachers expressed empathy and compassion towards the parents.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

- Purpose of the Study .............................................................................................................. 2
- Statement of the Problem ........................................................................................................ 7
- The Research Study and Questions ...................................................................................... 9
- Significance of the Study .......................................................................................................... 11
- CARE and Quality Professional Development ........................................................................ 13
- Emotional Components of Teaching ...................................................................................... 21
- Glossary of Terms ...................................................................................................................... 25

## CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

- Conceptual Framework ........................................................................................................... 28
- CARE ........................................................................................................................................ 32
- Mindfulness ................................................................................................................................. 36
- The History of Parent-Teacher Relationships ........................................................................ 38
- Background Literature Concerning Methodology .................................................................... 42
- Case Study Research ................................................................................................................ 42
- Interviews .................................................................................................................................. 43
- Diaries ....................................................................................................................................... 44
- Theoretical Framework .............................................................................................................. 45

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

- Interviews ................................................................................................................................. 48
- Diaries ....................................................................................................................................... 49
- The Sample ............................................................................................................................... 50
- Sampling Method ...................................................................................................................... 51
- Data Analysis ............................................................................................................................ 53
- Validity ....................................................................................................................................... 56
- Conclusion ................................................................................................................................. 57
CHAPTER FOUR: THE TEACHERS
Jennifer ................................................................. 59
Sarah .................................................................. 60
Nancy .................................................................. 61

CHAPTER FIVE: ANSWERING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS .......... 67
Research Question 1 .................................................. 67
Research Question 2 .................................................. 67
Setting Intention ..................................................... 68
Breathing ............................................................... 72
Caring Practices ..................................................... 75
Awareness and response to their emotions during the conference .. 76
Research Question 3 .................................................. 80
The Teachers’ Evaluation of Parenting Decisions ......................... 88
CARE strategies in the teacher’s personal life ............................. 91

CHAPTER SIX: SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM AND THE FIVE EMOTIONAL GEOGRAPHIES ................................................................. 94
Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Theory ........................................... 97

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS .................. 99
Summary of findings ................................................... 100
Setting Intention ..................................................... 100
Breathing ............................................................... 101
Caring Practices ..................................................... 102
Awareness and response to their emotions during the conference .. 103
Empathy and compassion ............................................... 105
Teachers’ evaluation of parenting decisions ............................. 106
Experience as a researcher ............................................ 107
Strengths and limitations ............................................. 111
Implications for Practice ............................................ 114
Suggestions for Future Research ....................................... 116
References.................................................................................................................................................. 121

APPENDICES.................................................................................................................................................. 134
Appendix A: Modification Request Form ................................................................................................. 134
Appendix B: Recruitment Script .............................................................................................................. 140
Appendix C: Fall 2010 Questionnaire ....................................................................................................... 141
Appendix D: Jennifer’s use of CARE strategies ...................................................................................... 142
Appendix E: Sarah’s use of CARE strategies ........................................................................................... 143
Appendix F: Nancy’s use of CARE strategies ............................................................................................ 144
Appendix G: Interview Guide .................................................................................................................. 145
Appendix H: Pre-Conference Diary Prompt ............................................................................................ 146
Appendix I: CARE Post-Conference Diary Prompt ................................................................................ 147
Appendix J: Initial Codes and Themes .................................................................................................... 148
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Prior to beginning my studies at Penn State, I was a Director of a private, non-profit, early childhood program. During the last six of the ten years that I held the position, I was involved with a monthly program with many of the school's parents. The program, called the Parent Project, was deliberately named to mirror the educational philosophy of the school which was inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach. At the core of our educational belief was the recognition and value of utilizing children's interests and questions to guide their learning and experiences. The children's investigations were termed projects because they evolved into week-long, month-long and even year-long inquiries. The parents who attended the Parent Project were committed to this learning approach as it related to their role as parents. My interest in connecting with parents came from what I learned and understood of the Reggio Emilia approach. In fact, the schools in Reggio Emilia were started by parents. Thus, Reggio parents are not seen as intrusive or interfering in the work of the schools but are perceived as essential and necessary components to the educational system. The intent of Reggio educators is to create a culture that is focused on what is best for children and families. I was determined to create a similar culture within our school. The connection I made with parents through the Parent Project was profound. Parents were sincere and honest about their struggles, fears, and uncertainties as well as accomplishments as parents. There was a genuine desire by the parents to create a sense of community with each other and with me in order to understand their child and childhood. Our shared learning and insights bonded us together.
It was because of the hours I spent with these parents that I realized the significance and value of parent and teacher relationships. However, I am astutely aware and troubled that not all parent-teacher relationships are as amiable. Thus, when I arrived at Penn State, I had a desire to learn more about the dynamics of parent-teacher relationships. In addition, I seek to determine if mindful awareness strategies can provide teachers with strategies to enable positive interactions and responses during a conference for which the teacher expects to be difficult. Ideally, these strategies will not only improve parent-teacher interactions but will also improve the social-emotional climate of the parent-teacher conference and keep quality teachers in the school system.

Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE) is a professional development program that was created to provide teachers with mindful awareness strategies that would improve the social-emotional climate of their classroom. During the 2010-2011 school year, I had the opportunity to attend CARE trainings with teachers from the Harrisburg, Pennsylvania area school district. It was during my attendance at these workshops that I began to consider whether the skills that the teachers were learning to become more socially and emotionally competent classroom teachers could also be successfully used during difficult parent-teacher conferences to enable them to be more socially and emotionally competent partners with parents.

**Purpose of the Study**

During the 2008-2009 school year there were 3,380,300 teachers in public and private school classrooms in the United States representing four percent of the entire
civilian work force. This equates to two times more kindergarten through twelfth grade teachers compared to registered nurses and five times more teachers compared to lawyers or professors (Aud, Hussar, Kena, Bianco, Frohlich, Kemp, & Tahan, 2011). However, teaching in the 21st century is rated as one of the most stressful professions (Gu & Day, 2007). Studies have found that teachers’ workloads are resulting in tremendous stress and strain. At least one third of teachers are identified as suffering from extreme stress and/or burnout (vanDick & Wagner, 2001). Unfortunately, the stress is leading teachers to abandon the classroom. Teacher attrition has been referred to as a U-shaped phenomenon. The U-shape represents high attrition for young or new teachers and lower attrition for older or more experienced teachers until they reach the age for retirement. Attrition is the highest during the first five years of teaching (Guarino, Santibanez, & Daley, 2006).

There is reason to be concerned with the high turnover rate of teachers, particularly since teachers with the highest measured ability are most likely to leave the profession (Guarino et al., 2006). Unfortunately for students, the difference between being taught by a highly competent and a less competent teacher is equivalent to an entire grade level of achievement (Borman & Dowling, 2008). Teachers who leave the classroom are most often from schools that are attended by low income and minority students. Schools with poverty levels greater than 50 percent have substantially higher teacher turnover rates than schools with less than 15 percent poverty (Guin, 2004). In addition, schools with 50 percent or more minority students encounter teacher turnover two times more often than schools with lower minority populations (Guin, 2004).
As a result of high quality teachers leaving the profession, lower achieving schools have the least qualified teachers (Guin, 2004). In addition, the ramifications of teacher turn-over are felt economically as well as interpersonally within the school. Low performing, high minority, and high poverty schools spend their limited funds on teacher turnover (Barnes, Crowe, & Schaefer, 2007). However, these monies could be invested in professional development programs to provide teachers with strategies to help them learn how to respond to the stress of their job. The interpersonal detriment of teacher turn-over is caused by the inability of various relationships to be developed. Since people are not with each other for multiple years, they are unable to establish a sense of trust and create a unified team; both essential components to a healthy, vibrant school. Thus, interactions between teachers and students, teachers and other teachers and the principal, and teachers and parents give one the feeling that they are talking to strangers.

Of the teachers who remain in the classrooms, only 11% are satisfied with their job (Bobek, 2002). All teachers, from novice to veteran, experience many situations that produce conflict and stress. A link has been found between emotions and health (Salovey, Rothman, Detweler, & Steward, 2000). If the stress is not alleviated, it can affect the teacher’s physical health and psychological well-being which lead to changes in their self-esteem, sleeping and eating difficulties, depression, declining job satisfaction, high absenteeism, and potential for illnesses (Bobek, 2002). In addition, negative emotions may produce phobias, anxiety disorders, aggression, and violence (Fredrickson, 2004).
Teachers’ anxiety caused by confrontational parental interactions is one of the three most highly ranked areas of negative emotional tension for beginning teachers (Barrett Kutcy & Schulz, 2006). In addition, teachers experience frustration and anger when parents do not follow the school’s expectations of appropriate parental behavior or in response to parents who were perceived as uncaring and irresponsible (Sutton & Wheatley, 2003).

John Dewey wrote about the alternatives people have when confronted with a challenging circumstance. He believed:

> When a situation arises containing a difficulty or perplexity, the person who finds himself in it may take one of a number of courses. He may dodge it, dropping the activity that brought it about, turning to something else. He may indulge in a flight of fancy, imagining himself powerful or wealthy, or in some other way in possession of the means that would enable him to deal with the difficulty. Or finally, he may face the situation (Dewey, 1933).

Practicing mindful awareness may help teachers “face the situation”.

Specifically, the professional development program, Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE) was designed to provide teachers with mindfulness-based strategies to recognize and regulate strong emotions. It is suggested that this recognition and regulation will enable them to provide social, emotional, and instructional support in the classroom (Jennings, Snowberg, Coccia, & Greenberg,
However, since interactions with parents have been found to cause great emotional strife for some teachers, it would be valuable to learn about CARE’s impact on teachers’ emotional regulation during parent-teacher conferences.

Mindful awareness entails two elements:

1. Self-regulation of attention-This involves an astute alertness to what is currently taking place. This entails being aware of each thought, feeling, and sensation that surfaces.

2. Orientation to experience- This non-judgmental awareness creates an attitude of acceptance toward each experience. Thus, the teacher receives all thoughts with a stance of openness (Bishop, Lau, Shapiro, Carlson, Anderson, Carmody, Segal, Abbey, Speca, Velting, & Devins, 2004).

Mindful awareness may also help teachers see the connection between thoughts, feelings, and actions and understand that thoughts and feelings are “passing events in the mind rather than inherent aspects of the self or valid reflection of reality (Bishop et al., 2004, p. 234). Thus, by applying mindful awareness, teachers may experience stressful situations with an attitude of curiosity, openness, and acceptance of themselves, others, and the situation.

We know that parents and teachers have the most influence in a young child’s life. When parents and teachers have genuine respect for each other, a partnership is created that provides social, emotional, and academic support the child needs to succeed in school (Lazar & Slostad, 1999). However, we also know that some teachers
experience negative emotional responses to confrontational interactions with parents which may impair their partnership. Providing teachers with skills to manage their emotion reactivity may help them to maintain supportive partnerships with parents. Since one of the results of mindfulness may be the capacity to develop acceptance, the skills that teachers learn through the CARE trainings may be a solution.

**Statement of the Problem**

Teaching requires much from teachers. Teachers are expected to have:

- knowledge of subject matter and curriculum goals
- knowledge of learners and their development in social contexts
- knowledge of teaching (Darling-Hammond & Branford, 2005).

However essential this knowledge is, it disregards the human side, the emotional aspect of teaching. “Emotions are at the heart of teaching” (Hargreaves, 1998, p 835).

The central problem addressed in this study is the recognition that teachers are experiencing tremendous amounts of stress in anticipation of and during difficult parent-teacher conferences. Typically, professional development programs focus on the technical aspects of teaching and disregard the human connection and emotional understanding that are also major components of teaching and may alleviate the stress experienced by teachers. In order to keep quality teachers from abandoning the classroom and assist teachers in the development of strong parent-teacher relationships, educational leaders have an obligation to provide teachers with a strategy to assist them to cope with the emotions of teaching.
Benjamin H. Dotger from Syracuse University incorporates simulated parent-teacher conferences into the courses he teaches. He recognizes the difficulties that these soon-to-be teachers may experience with parents and believes that one way to provide meaningful learning is through situated practice (Walker & Dotger, 2012). Thus, he provides opportunities for pre-service teachers to participate in many, increasingly challenging, one-on-one interactions with “trained parents”. The training entails providing a paid parent with a realistic scenario and characteristics to present to the teacher candidate during the videotaped simulated parent-teacher conference. The pre-service teacher receives immediate feedback from the parent and professor and during whole class discussions about the conference. In addition, the teacher candidate has access to the video and is able to review it for further learning opportunities.

These simulated parent-teacher conferences have found an improvement in the pre-service teacher’s ability to respond to parents and structure a professional conversation with parents (Walker & Dotger, 2012). However, what is missing from this training is the inclusion of an opportunity for the pre-service teachers to learn how to be aware of and respond to the emotions that will undoubtedly be a part of the dynamics that take place between parents and teachers during a conference. Thus, including emotional awareness training, such as CARE, with the simulations may provide even more powerful ways to fully equip students for what they will encounter with their own classrooms and parents.
The Research Study and Questions

Using case study design with a semi-structured interview approach and diary journal entries, the present study focused on three participants in a larger study to test the efficacy of the CARE program. I explored the emotions three early childhood teachers experienced before and during what they anticipated to be a difficult parent-teacher conference. I performed a conversation analysis from tape recorded interviews using detailed verbatim transcripts along with documentary analysis of the diary journal writings. At the time, all three teachers worked for the Harrisburg, Pennsylvania school district. Harrisburg is the capital of the United States Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Based upon the 2010 census data, Harrisburg is the ninth largest city in Pennsylvania with a population of 49,528. During the 2010 school year, there were 8,345 students enrolled in the Harrisburg City schools. Of those students, 34% of the students qualified for the free/reduced lunch program. (PA Dept. of Education, 2010).

In July, 2000, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court issued a ruling that permitted a change in the governance of the Harrisburg School District from an elected board, to a board named by then Harrisburg mayor, Stephen Reed. Mayor Reed had direct oversight responsibilities over the troubled district. This was the first time that a Pennsylvanian mayor had taken on this role. In January, 2010, Mayor Linda Thompson took control of the district. Towards the end of 2010, the local community elected a school board to restore local control of the district (PA Dept. of Education, 2012). This turmoil occurred during the 2010-2011 school year when they were participating in the CARE program. While many teachers expressed concerns about the situation during
the CARE program, none of the teachers mentioned this during their interview which was conducted during the following school year.

The focus of this study was to learn about the perceptions the three teachers have of parents and the expectations they have for the parent conference. I wanted to explore whether they applied the learning acquired from the CARE training and found it useful during their parent-teacher conferences. I also wanted to learn whether their perceptions of parents were different after the conference as a result of applying the CARE techniques they learned to the conference interactions.

Data analysis consisted of thematically coding the diary entries and the interview responses. The major themes were: setting intention, breathing, awareness and response to their emotions during the conference, empathy and compassion towards parents, teachers’ evaluation of parenting decisions, and CARE strategies in the teachers’ personal lives.

In alignment with my interest in the retention of high quality teachers who are skilled in recognizing and utilizing strategies to navigate the emotional aspects of teaching, and the importance of strong parent-teacher relationships, three research questions guided my study:

1. How do three early childhood teachers who demonstrated positive effects of CARE and reported they applied CARE strategies, describe the use of the CARE strategies during a parent-teacher conference that they expect to be difficult?
2. What CARE strategies do teachers use to self-regulate their emotions during parent-teacher conferences?

3. Do teachers express empathy and compassion towards parents?

Significance of the Study

There are several significant areas of this study that relate to the field of early childhood education. First, after an in-depth search, I am unaware of any studies that have addressed the teachers’ use of mindful awareness strategies before and during parent-teacher conferences to help teachers self-regulate and to support parent-teacher relationships. Mindfulness is achieved when the person’s “thoughts and feelings are observed as events in the mind, without over-identifying with them and without reacting to them in an automatic, habitual pattern of reactivity” (Bishop, et al., 2004, p. 232). This study describes the teacher’s reliance on CARE’s mindfulness strategies and how the strategies assisted them during their difficult conference.

The deliberate decision to study teachers’ emotional responses before and during parent-teacher conferences was because “conferences represent one of the most fully institutionalized manifestations of the home-school relation” (Weininger, & Lareau, 2003, p. 377). Parent-teacher conferences are arranged to enable the important adults in a child’s life to meet and work together to help the child succeed; a manifestation of Bronfenbrenner’s theory. The conference represents the mesosystem during which the parents and teachers, the adults from the microsystem, come together
to influence the child’s development and benefit the child’s learning (Lee & Bowen, 2006). These conferences are often the single most often used method for parent teacher communication (Minke, & Anderson, 2003). Conferences make it possible for teachers and parents to discuss what they know about the student, enabling both to accomplish more than they could alone (Georgiady & Romano, 2002). This study details the emotions that the three teachers experienced during their brief time with parents in the parent-teacher conference, and in doing so, provides a description of the stress the teachers experienced.

An unexpected aspect of this study was hearing teachers’ description of parents and how these descriptions impacted their emotional responses. Clearly, research has found that teachers are leaving the classrooms, and for some teachers, their decision to leave is based upon their negative relationship with parents. Students deserve to have quality teachers in their classrooms. Thus, this study contributes to the recognition that teachers, who are in a different socio-economic position from the parents they work with, need strategies to enable them to interact with parents with a demeanor of non-judgment and acceptance.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the growing need for research on professional development programs that provide training as it relates to teachers’ social and emotional well-being. Most professional development programs aim to provide teachers with practices, beliefs, and understanding toward a specific curriculum dedicated to a precise academic outcome. The majority of professional development programs measure their success based upon an improvement in student learning (Guskey, 2002). Although this learning is essential, it disregards the importance of
teachers' social and emotional well-being. Without training that targets this important area, it is unrealistic to expect teachers who are struggling emotionally because of all the demands associated with teaching to provide the best learning for their students and create the highest quality relationships with parents.

CARE and Quality Professional Development

CARE was selected as the professional development program because of its focus on teachers’ emotional well-being and how its protocol correlates to what is defined as quality professional development. Professional development is defined as “systematic efforts to bring about change in the classroom practices of teachers, in their attitudes and beliefs, and in the learning outcomes of students” (Guskey, 2002, page 381). Research has revealed many components of quality professional development. To ensure that the desired outcomes are realized, the professional development program should consist of the following ideals of quality professional development:

1. Professional development must engage the participants in inquiry, questioning, and experimentation. Ideally, this teaching/learning approach will then be replicated as a teaching strategy in the teachers’ classrooms (Supovitz & Turner, 2000).

2. Professional development must link the learning to the experiences teachers have within their classrooms specifically associated with teaching and with students (Darling-Hammond, & McLaughlin, 2003; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; & Supovitz & Turner, 2000). This will enable teachers’
to understand how to connect the new learning to their practice. Ultimately, professional development should bring about changes in the teachers’ knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes which will result in acquiring new skills and concepts associated with their teaching (Firestone, Mangin, Martinez, & Polovsky, 2005; Fishman, Marx, Best, & Tal, 2003).

3. Professional development must be continuous (Darling-Hammonod & Mclaughlin, 2003; Drago-Severson, 2007; Garet et al., 2001; Lieberman & Mace, 2008; Nolan & Hoover, 2008; & Supovitz & Turner, 2000). Studies have found that when teachers participate in approximately 49 hours a year of professional development that concentrates on the curriculum, students’ scores rose by 21% (Hirsh, 2009). The continuation of professional development is beneficial to the teachers’ learning. For example, once teachers take their new learning into the classroom, they discover questions and realize they need clarification about some aspects associated with implementation. These questions would not have been known without initiating the ideas in their classroom (Nolan & Hoover, 2008). Thus, the value of multiple meetings and hours engaged in professional development provide teachers a place to ask questions and seek clarification. In fact, research has found that teachers need approximately 50 hours of professional development to improve their skills and their students’ learning (Hirsh, 2009).
4. Professional development must be offered in conjunction with other school reforms (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2003; Drago-Severson, 2007; Hirsh, 2009; Shriner, Schlee, Hamil & Libler, 2009; & Supovitz & Turner, 2000). Specifically, the goals of the professional development experience should support the goals of other activities in which teachers are engaged as well as endorse state and district requirements (Shiner et al., 2009). This alignment will allow teachers to see how their work and learning connects to the mandates within their school and state. Thus, this cohesion will motivate teachers to commit to the practices and knowledge which are the outcome of the professional development experience.

5. Professional development must increase teachers’ content knowledge in order to increase student achievement. It is imperative that teachers understand the content they teach and the way students learn the content (Garet, et al., 2001; Guskey, 2003). Utilizing “student learning data” (Guskey, 2003, page 13) to determine how students learn the subject material can be beneficial for teachers because they gain a better understanding of the subject material, they learn to recognize if and how their students are learning, and they discover new ways to teach the subject (Horsley-Loucks & Matsumoto, 1999).

6. Professional development must take place within the school (Drago-Severson, 2007; Garet, et al.; Guskey, 2003). There are many benefits to
teachers from the same school, grade, or content area participating in professional development activities together. First, teachers will have others who truly understand the implementation struggles and successes. Thus, they will be able to discuss the content from the professional development activities. In addition, they have opportunities to converse about issues they encounter while initiating the new professional development strategies and this will lead to sharing insights and suggestions for success. These authentic exchanges will enable a culture of collaboration to develop. Secondly, with administrative support, teachers from the same school or content area will have opportunities to observe and reflect on the new practices with each other (Darling-Hammond, & McLaughlin, 2003). The discussions and insights from the observations will provide opportunities for deeper understanding and possible suggestions for successful implementation. Furthermore, the teachers who work together can share other requirements such as curriculum and assessment. Thus, they would be resourceful in understanding how to include the professional development learning into their teaching. “If reform plans are to be made operational, enabling teachers to really change the way they work, then teachers must have opportunities to talk, think, try, and hone new practices” (Lieberman, 1994, page 69).

7. Professional development activities must be evidence-based. The research should guide what is expected of students and what is understood about child
development, curriculum, instruction, and assessment strategies (Corcoran, 1995).

CARE’s professional development strategies meet the seven components of what constitutes high quality professional development. Specifically, quality professional development engages teachers in inquiry, questioning and experimentation. CARE participants have multiple opportunities for each of these learning strategies. For example, teachers are given time to reflect on situations in which they experienced an uncomfortable emotional reaction, times when they felt angry, joyful and happy, and times when they felt grateful. The intention of these activities is to cultivate teachers’ emotional awareness and enable them to discover their emotional reaction habits, recognize what triggers their emotions, and determine their typical response patterns. Mindful awareness activities are introduced to help teachers notice and regulate emotional reactivity. Once teachers have examined their emotional tendencies, they are given role-playing opportunities to practice responding rather than unconsciously reacting to situations. The aim of these activities is to provide teachers with the skills to recognize and regulate their emotions in their classroom in order to better provide social, emotional, and academic support to their students.

Quality professional development links learning to the experiences teachers have within their classrooms, specifically associated with teaching and with students. Teachers in CARE learn about and discuss “Wait Time” which is the time given after the teacher asks a question and after the student’s response. CARE teachers are
encouraged to utilize this strategy because it benefits their students in the following ways:

1. The length and correctness of their responses increase.
2. The number of "I don’t know" and "no" answers decrease.
3. The number of volunteered correct answers by a greater number of students increases.
4. The scores on academic achievement tests increase (Stahl, 1994).

Quality professional development must be continuous. Teachers attend the CARE professional development program throughout a school year. At this initial training, teachers are given a CD that they are encouraged to use as a way to practice the mindful awareness activities that have been introduced.

Research has determined that quality professional development consists of at least 50 contact hours within a school year. CARE provides 30 hours delivered over several months. Thus, the CARE program does not meet this criterion for quality professional development. However, the researchers found that it was very difficult to offer the program during work time and had to rely on teachers’ own time off work to provide training. This limitation necessitated offering the program within the 30 hour timeframe.

Quality professional development must be offered in conjunction with other school reforms. The intention of the CARE trainings is to enable teachers to learn how to "reduce stress, improve their emotional awareness and mental concentration, and elicit responsiveness from students" (Lindenbaum, 2009). Thus, the connection of
CARE with other school reforms is the strategies teachers learn through CARE that can be transferred to the demands associated with the school reforms. For example, teachers may be required to teach a new curriculum that is more in line with the state mandated assessments that students must successfully pass in order to graduate. Teachers can utilize the mindfulness strategies such as breathing to alleviate tension, setting a daily intention, and walking and standing mindfully to counteract the potential stress that the new curriculum may elicit.

The goal of quality professional development is to increase teachers’ content knowledge. Since CARE is not intended to increase teachers’ content knowledge, this aspect that defines quality professional development does not directly apply. However, because one of the goals of CARE is to improve teachers’ awareness, CARE may provide techniques that will enable teachers to participate in other professional development opportunities that focus on increasing their content knowledge. CARE is deliberate in acknowledging that its intention is to improve the emotional health of teachers and assist them in learning ways to apply mindful awareness to their work environment. Thus, rather than content knowledge, teachers are encouraged to master practices that enable them to practice “present moment awareness, be open and non-judgmental, work from their heart and mind, and focus on the environment” (Jennings, quote from a CARE training).

Quality professional development takes place within the school. CARE does not take place within the school. Rather, teachers gather in a neutral location and are provided meals and snacks. When professional development activities are offered in the school teachers can support one other. In addition, teachers in the same school
can start a mindful awareness practice group. During the CARE program offered for this project, there were some teachers from the same school. Optimally, programs would include a group of teachers from the same school. However, since the current research was performed as part of a larger study and the program was not well accepted, researchers accepted teachers from a variety of schools for the purpose of the study.

Lastly, quality professional development must be based upon research. The CARE program was developed by applying research in the area of mindfulness, emotion awareness and regulation to teaching. Many of the techniques that teachers learn have been tested in studies from the field of neuroscience. In addition, the CARE approach is based upon the Prosocial Classroom Model (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009) that highlights the importance of teachers’ social and emotional competence to student academic and behavioral outcomes. The mindfulness strategies that are recommended to teachers are a result of the creators of CARE’s research findings about mindfulness-based interventions.

One of the effects of mindful awareness is the formation of a non-judgmental attitude and the ability to respond to situations reflectively which may promote feelings of empathy and compassion towards parents, even in the midst of a challenging interaction (Bishop et al., 2004). Greater empathy and compassion should create a positive social-emotional climate during parent-teacher interactions.
Emotional Components of Teaching

All aspects of teaching elicit some emotion. Emotions are central to the interactions teachers have with students, colleagues, administrators, and parents (Dotger, Harris, Maher, & Hansel, 2011). These emotions impact teachers’ perceptions of themselves and the relationships they encounter each day (Hargreaves, 2001). According to Hargreaves (2000), there are four emotional components of teaching. These include:

1. **Emotional intelligence** is comprised of five emotional competencies that characterize a highly effective teacher:
   a. knowing how to express one’s emotions
   b. managing one’s moods
   c. empathizing with the emotional states of others
   d. motivating oneself and others
   e. utilizing a variety of social skills

2. **Emotional labor** takes place when teachers remain calm during confrontational situations.

3. **Emotional understanding** is developed as teachers spend time with students and parents. Rather than teachers using past relationships as their guide to interpret the emotional responses that occur in their relationships with students and parents, their time together enables teachers to accurately “read” each students’ and parents’ emotions.

4. **Emotional geographies** are what build or destroy the emotional bonds between teachers and parents. However, it must be emphasized that the
cultural context influences the closeness or distance between teachers and parents. The five emotional geographies are:

1. **Sociocultural geography** - Classrooms are comprised of students from many cultures which are unfamiliar to teachers. In addition, teachers are physically, socially, and economically separated from their students and parents. This disconnect leads teachers to stereotype parents and parents to stereotype teachers (Hargreaves, 2001).

2. **Moral geography** - Parents’ and teachers’ emotional responses are prompted by their perceived purposes. Thus, there may be a difference in what parents’ and teachers’ believe is best for the student.

3. **Professional geography** - Professional geography encompasses the social distance between parents and teachers. Hargreaves’s (2001) work has found that the reason for the majority of negative emotions teachers experience during their interactions with parents results from parents challenging the teachers’ expertise, instructional knowledge and judgments.

4. **Political geography** - Emotions correlate with a person’s experience of power and/or powerlessness (Hargreaves, 2001). Thus, this geography is evident when parents and teachers struggle over who should make the decision about the student. In addition, Hargreaves’s study found that the second most common cause of
negative emotions from teachers was when parents did not support them in their concern for their child’s inappropriate behavior (Hargreaves, 2001).

5. Physical geography—“We cannot know or understand people we rarely meet; nor can we be understood by them in return” (Hargreaves, 2001, p. 1070).

Hargreaves’s research found that teachers’ interactions with and responses to parents are impacted by many emotional dimensions. Poor emotion regulation and distress are consistently cited as reasons for the high turn-over rates in teaching (Darling-Hammond, 2001). In addition, negative emotions are related to a decrease in a teachers’ intrinsic motivation (Sutton & Wheatley, 2003). Although there is an awareness that teaching is emotionally demanding, it is unfortunate that teachers rarely receive training to acknowledge and learn ways to successfully conquer the emotional demands of the profession.

The strife between parents and teachers is of great concern. Rooted in Bronfenbrenner’s theory about the importance of positive parent-teacher relationships for the healthy development of the child, this study explores the usefulness of mindfulness strategies for the emotional well-being of the teacher in the context of the classroom. With the motivation to retain quality, emotionally healthy teachers and ensure positive educational outcomes for students, the following diagram depicts the focus of this study.
Glossary of Terms

Compassion: An active desire to alleviate another’s suffering (Sutton, 2003).

Emotion: Mental states accompanied by intense feeling and which involve bodily changes of widespread character (Hargreaves, 1998).

Emotion regulation: The ability to regulate one’s emotions through initiating, inhibiting, or modulating behaviors and expressing an emotion appropriately (Jennings, Turksma, & Brown, 2010).

Empathy: The ability to feel as other’s feel (Hendrick & Weissman, 2006).

Feelings: Sensations of the body (Denzin, 1984).

Mindfulness: Being completely engaged to what is happening in the present moment without judgment (Bishop, et al., 2004).

Self-regulate: The ability to plan, guide, and monitor behavior to changing life circumstances (Feldman, Hayes, Kumar, Greeson, & Laurenceau, 2007).

Social and emotional competence: The ability to recognize, interpret, and respond constructively to emotions in self and others (CASEL, 2008).

Social emotional climate: Interactions in which people understand and manage their emotions, develop compassionate concern for others, make ethical decisions, handle conflicts constructively, and form positive relationships (CASEL, 2008).

Solicited diary: Writing produced specifically at the researcher’s request (Meth, 2003).

Stress: Stress is caused by the internal perceptions that cause an individual to have anxiety/negative emotions surrounding a situation (Folkman, 2010).
**Teacher anxiety:** Anxiety usually caused by feelings or lack of preparedness to teach, discipline issues in the classroom, relationships with colleagues, administrators, and parents (Chang, 2009).
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this research study was to determine if the strategies that the teachers learned through the CARE training would be applied to their interactions with parents during a difficult parent-teacher conference. Specifically, the questions to be addressed are:

1) How do three early childhood teachers who demonstrated positive effects of CARE and reported they applied CARE strategies, describe the use of the CARE strategies during a parent-teacher conference that they expect to be difficult?

2) What CARE strategies do teachers use to self-regulate their emotions during parent-teacher conferences?

3) Do teachers express empathy and compassion towards parents?

In this chapter, I will review the pertinent literature as it relates to this study. Thus, I will focus on the following areas:

1. Conceptual Framework

2. CARE

3. Mindfulness

4. The History of Parent-Teacher Relationships

5. Background Literature Concerning Methodology
Conceptual Framework

It is important to place the context of the study within a conceptual framework. I have identified the Ecological Theory from Bronfenbrenner as one that correlates to the application of CARE and to parent-teacher conferences. This theory is grounded in the belief that human development is influenced by progressively more complex reciprocal interactions between the individual and others, objects, and the environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The environment has several systems in which the child or the individual is the core nucleus. The five environmental systems include:

1. Microsystem: face-to-face contact in settings such as the family, school, or peer group

2. Mesosystem: the linkages that take place between two or more Microsystems

3. Exosystem: the events that indirectly influence development such as the relation between the teacher and the parent’s workplace

4. Macrosystem: the beliefs, life-styles, customs, the societal blueprint

5. Chronosystem: the changes or consistencies of the person or the environment in which the person lives such as family structure, socioeconomic status, employment, or place of residence (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).
Bronfenbrenner’s ecology of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and how it corresponds to parent-teacher partnerships.

Development affected by events occurring in settings in which the person is not present
(Parent employment inhibits the parent from attending parent-teacher conference)

Engaging in face-to-face interactions
(Child interacting with parent at home and teacher at school)

Consistencies at the micro, meso, and exo levels due to cultural beliefs.
(American educational system recognizes that all children have a right to an education. Thus, teachers are expected to meet the needs of all students.)

Interactions between Microsystems
(Parent-teacher Conferences)
Although the connection between microsystems is beneficial for the development of the child, the connection may not be accomplished easily. For instance, since the responsibilities associated with teaching and interactions between people elicit various emotions, emotional understanding between parents and teachers may be tenuous. The emotional distance between parents and teachers may be exacerbated when teachers come from different cultural or social class backgrounds (Hargreaves, 1998). Thus, creating opportunities for teachers to better understand their emotions would be valuable for the parent-teacher connection and might assist in the academic achievement of the student.

Along with emotional understanding, teaching also requires emotional labor. Emotional labor “requires one to induce or suppress feelings in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others…This kind of labor calls for a coordination of mind and feeling” (Hargreaves, 1998, p. 840). The need for emotional labor can be prevalent in parent-teacher conferences and must be developed in teachers so that encounters with parents can be productive and focused on the student.

In addition to aligning this study with Bronfenbrenner’s ecological framework and Hargreaves emotional components of teaching, it is necessary to acknowledge how the tenets of the social constructivist epistemology also impact parent-teacher relationships. Social constructivism is based upon the premise that “individuals create their own understandings, based upon the interaction of what they already know and believe, and the phenomena or ideas with which they come in contact” (Beck & Kosnik, 2006, p. 2).
Thus, social constructivism is rooted in beliefs about reality, knowledge, and learning. These beliefs are related to parent-teacher conferences in the following ways:

**Reality:** Social constructivists believe that reality is constructed through human activity. Thus, one activity in which teachers and parents create their reality in relation to one another is during parent-teacher conferences.

**Knowledge:** To social constructivists, people create meaning through their interactions with one another and with the environment in which they live. Therefore, the environment which includes the emotional climate, seating arrangements, and the physical comfortableness of parents and teachers during the parent-teacher conference is tremendously important as each person creates meaning during this time together.

**Learning:** Social constructivists perceive learning as a social process and meaningful learning the result from individuals engaging in social activities. Hence, one social activity in which learning will take place for both parents and teachers is the parent/teacher conference (Kim, 2006).

In order for teachers to have an accurate and non-judgmental reality towards parents, it will take more than the time spent at parent-teacher conferences. These conferences are typically scheduled only twice a year and often have a pre-determined protocol which puts the teacher in control.
CARE

CARE is a professional development program that brings teachers together during one school year for five sessions each lasting six hours.

CARE was created by a group of educators and researchers at the Garrison Institute who were motivated to help teachers manage their stress and bring enjoyment to their teaching (Jennings, et al., 2011). They hypothesized that reduced stress and increased enjoyment felt among teachers would improve their relationships with students and classroom management capabilities as well as enhance social and emotional learning. Social and emotional learning involves five components:

1. Self-awareness. Teachers and students can recognize their emotions.
2. Social awareness. Teachers and students understand how their emotions affect their interactions with others. In addition, they are able to recognize and understand others’ emotions.
3. Relationship management. The social awareness that is developed enables supportive relationships based on understanding and cooperation to successfully resolve conflicts.
4. Responsible decision making. Since socially and emotionally competent teachers and students possess pro-social values and are responsible for their actions, their decisions are determined by how they will affect themselves and others.

5. Self-management. Socially and emotionally competent teachers and students successfully control their behavior even when exposed to challenging situations (CASEL, 2008).

CARE involves various techniques such as direct instruction, activities, discussion, and reflection to support the development of teachers' social and emotional competence. During the five training sessions, teachers receive information and participate in activities to enable them to understand, recognize, and regulate their emotional responses.

Teachers who become emotionally exhausted tend to burnout which can have a negative impact on their teaching ability (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Therefore, CARE introduces teachers to strategies that elicit positive emotions. The emphasis on
positive emotions is based upon the finding that people with positive emotions rebound from difficult situations and stress and these emotions can protect them against depression (Cohn, Brown, Fredrickson, Milkels, & Conway, 2009).

The emotion skill instruction component of CARE is designed to build teachers’ emotional resilience by providing opportunities for teachers to understand, recognize, and regulate their emotional responses as well as those of others with whom they encounter. This is accomplished while teachers participate in reflective and role playing activities. During these activities, teachers learn to recognize their typical emotional patterns and triggers. Thus, they may discover the kinds of events that activate various emotions and understand the source and result of these emotions. This acknowledgement and eventual learning of new responses enables teachers to reexamine emotionally challenging encounters and react with more understanding (Jennings, 2011).

Compassion and listening are promoted through “caring practices” and “mindful listening” activities. Caring practices require the teachers to silently reflect and think about caring for themselves and others as they mentally offer happiness, peace, and well-being to themselves, a person whom they care about, and to a person whom the teacher perceives as challenging. When this activity is routinely practiced, it provides an increase in social support, life satisfaction, and a decrease in illness and depression symptoms (Cohn et al., 2009).

Mindful listening activities are intended to promote the ability to listen to another with complete attention without responding. The responses that are withheld may include
judgments about the person who is speaking or the desire to give advice. The intention of this practice is to understand the value of being present and fully listening.

As a way to encourage teachers to be more aware, present, and engaged they are taught mindful awareness techniques that can be incorporated into their everyday activities. These activities include breath awareness practices along with silent reflection. Teachers are encouraged to integrate mindful awareness into their daily activities such as eating, standing, and walking. During the CARE program, mindful awareness is applied when teachers practice being fully present while standing in front of the group as well as during role-playing scenarios. The mindful awareness aspect of CARE is intended to give teachers techniques that they can transfer to their classroom as a way to “bring greater awareness to their classroom organization and their relationships with students, parents, and colleagues” (Jennings et al., 2011).

CARE trainings began in 2007 and have helped teachers deal with the emotions of teaching (Jennings, 2011). Specifically, data from pre-and post-CARE trainings have found improvements in teacher well-being, less teacher stress in response to time demands, and improvement in the measures of mindfulness (Jennings et al., 2011). Based upon the responses from CARE participants, it was found that 84% of them categorized CARE as highly important or important to their professional development while 87% strongly agreed or agreed that all teachers should receive CARE training (Jennings, 2011). My study was a sub-study of a pilot randomized trial involving 52 teachers from the Harrisburg, Pennsylvania school district. Of the teachers who received the CARE training during the 2010-2011 school year, there was significant
improvement in their well-being, efficacy, and mindfulness compared to the control group of teachers (Jennings, Snowberg, Coccia, & Greenberg, 2011).

With my interest centering on the relationship between parents and teachers, I focused on three Harrisburg teacher’s interactions with parents during what they expected to be a difficult parent-teacher conference. Each teacher completed the CARE training and reported in the fall of 2011 that they applied CARE strategies in their teaching. I sought to discover if they utilized the CARE strategies they learned to understand, recognize, and regulate their emotional responses in the classroom to interactions with the parents.

**Mindfulness**

The opposite of mindful awareness is mindlessness. Mindlessness is evident through a less alert set of behaviors that are based on habits or automatic responses to a designated situation. Thus, practicing mindful awareness may help people recognize and overcome their mechanical thought, habit, or unhealthy behavior patterns (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Since mindful awareness is a skill that enables people to more effectively respond to life’s stresses and emotional distress (Bishop et al., 2004), CARE has incorporated mindful awareness skills into its program.

The study of mindful awareness and the recognition of its benefits have significantly increased within the last 20 years (Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007). Mindful awareness entails self-regulation of attention that enables an awareness of one’s emotional and cognitive experience as it occurs with a non-judgmental response that leads to curiosity, openness, and acceptance (Bishop et al., 2004). In
effect, mindful awareness is the experience of being completely engaged to what is happening in the present moment without judgment and can be developed through training (Brown et al., 2007). Three components of mindful awareness include:

1. Intention-Intentions determine what is possible; however, intentions change as the person gains more practice, insight and awareness.

2. Attention-Paying attention is the deliberate awareness of what is happening both internally and externally.

3. Attitude-The attitude that a person brings to attention is important. A critical attitude would generate a much different response than one that is compassionate and understanding (Shapiro, Carlson, Astin, & Freedman, 2006).

Higher levels of mindful awareness have been found to reduce levels of negative mood disturbance and stress (Brown & Ryan, 2003). In addition, mindful awareness has been found to reduce thought suppression, worry, and overgeneralization. In contrast, people low in mindful awareness tend to experience feelings of distress, excessive fears about future events, and focus on personal inadequacies (Feldman, Hayes, Kumar, Greeson, & Laurenceau, 2007).

Since mindful awareness consists of a non-judgmental, present-moment focus of one’s emotions, it may support the ability to demonstrate empathetic responses. Empathy is defined as the ability to feel as other’s feel (Hendrick & Weissman, 2006). Research has found that “people need to possess self-knowledge before they can empathize with others and that once people are able to empathize they are also likely to be aware of their own feelings” (Block-Lerner, Adair, Plumb, Rhatigan,
& Orsillo, 2007, p. 509). In addition, mindful awareness activities “may offer a unique set of tools in the quest to develop individuals’ capacity for empathy” (Block-Lerner et al., 2007, p. 509).

The History of Parent-Teacher Relationships

Relationships are an important component in education. Throughout history, the tenuous relationship between teachers and parents has been documented. Starting in America’s colonial period, tensions between teachers and parents have been prevalent. Educators blamed parents for not nurturing their child’s intellectual, social, and moral development. The laws at that time also affirmed the lack of trust for parents. For example, if a child was found immoral and illiterate, the state had the authority to remove the child from the parents. In the early 1800s, teachers instructed immigrant children not to speak their parent’s language nor follow their family’s customs. This created conflict between parents and teachers. In 1897, the national Parent Teacher Association was created by concerned mothers and scholars. Their focus was to study how parents and teachers should best relate to one another with the assumption that children would benefit from supportive communication between parents and teachers. In addition, they suggested that professionals should instruct parents about what children need for their development and growth (Powell, & Diamond, 1995). Continuing into the Industrial Revolution was the belief that schools must emphasize uniformity and discipline. This focus was intended to counteract the lack of nurture and moral teaching that children were not receiving from the family (Lazar, & Slostad, 1999). The strain
between parents and teachers was described and attributed to the “invasion of the home by teachers and of the school by parents” (Kaplan, 1950, p. 190).

During the late 1940s data was analyzed from over 500 parent-teacher conferences. Three factors emerged that were found to contribute to difficult parent-teacher relationships. The first was a misunderstanding or lack of agreement over the school program. Secondly, parents and teachers made efforts to protect their own interests, and lastly, friction was a result of the feelings of personal inadequacies among parents and teachers (Kaplan, 1950). Some teachers felt that their years of experience gave them the knowledge they needed to teach children. In addition, since parents were not schooled in the educational field, teachers believed parents did not have the necessary information to participate in the school. Consequently, these teachers insisted they knew what quality teaching was and that parents had no right to question their educational decisions (Kaplan, 1950).

Since the twentieth century, there have been ideological changes in parent-teacher relationships. Douglas Powell and Karen Diamond (1995) highlighted these changes as follows:

-During the first 60 years of the twentieth century, early childhood teachers perceived parents as learners. Specifically, parents needed to be informed about how to support their child’s development with an emphasis on the child’s social-emotional development. Thus, information transmittal was from teacher to parent.
-Parent Cooperative nursery schools were prevalent in the 1950s. These programs exemplified a parent-teacher partnership and were often started by parents who were also involved with hiring the teachers. In addition, a parent worked each day in the classroom. The cooperative nursery schools also provided parents an opportunity to learn from a trained early childhood professional.

-In the 1960s and early 1970s, there was a major change in the perception of parents. They were no longer viewed as needing knowledge but as partners in the school’s decisions. In addition, parents encouraged teachers to recognize their families’ values and situations.

-In the late 1970s, Bronfenbrenner’s research instilled an understanding that the child and parent relationship is influenced by the family and community.

-In the 1980s the African proverb “It takes a whole village to raise a child” was the sentiment of society and a reflection of Bronfenbrenner’s work. The National Association for the Education of Young Children defined what constitutes developmentally appropriate practices. In the definition was a requirement for teachers to partner with parents through regular communication.

-The nation’s governors in 1989 and the National Education Goals created by the U.S. Congress in 1994 acknowledged the importance of parents. Specifically, the first goal states that parents are imperative in preparing young children for school and were recognized as children’s first and most important teachers.
- The Educate America Act of 2000 directs every school to "promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children (Lazar, & Slostad, 1999).

- The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 details six areas of reform that each school district must address. One of the six areas specifically addresses the need for parent involvement.

The relationship between parents and teachers and the various perceptions they have about one another existed for many years. However, parents are mandated to be involved with schools. Involvement includes various opportunities for parents to make contact with their child’s teacher or other educators associated with the school. These activities may include attending a school-wide meeting, meeting with a teacher during parent-teacher conferences, initiating contact with a teacher, attending school events or volunteering in the classroom. Nearly two-thirds of parents, regardless of their ethnicity, attend parent-teacher conferences (Pomerantz, Moorman, & Litwack, 2007).

Parents’ involvement in school positively influences their child’s achievement. When parents participate and show an interest in their child’s school, the child’s academic performance is improved (Pomerantz, Grolnick, & Price, 2005). However, for parents to want to be involved in their child’s school, they must have a sense that they are welcome and that the relationship between them and the teacher is one of mutual respect. Research tells us that this is not always the case.

No matter what policy exists, supportive parent-teacher relationships cannot be mandated. Parents and teachers need to feel mutually valued, appreciated, and heard
in order for the benefits of the partnership to be realized by the child. It may be unrealistic to expect teachers to have the skills to successfully navigate and improve relationships with parents without specialized training. However, based upon what is known about the importance to students for parent involvement and the understanding of the significance of parent and teacher’s interactions in the development of children, it is important that school leaders provide teachers with tools to assist them in their interactions with parents. This qualitative study will seek to determine if CARE strategies are utilized by the teachers during a difficult parent-teacher conference as a way for them to be aware of and in control of their emotions during the conference and increase their level of empathy and compassion towards the parents.

**Background Literature Concerning Methodology**

The intent of qualitative research to delve for a deeper understanding of a social phenomenon enables contact between me and the participants. It is essential for me as the researcher to listen, hear, and understand both what is said, unsaid, and written to accurately interpret and document what the early childhood teachers communicate. My goal is to present their reality.

**Case Study Research**

According to Stake (2000, p.135), case study research is “highly personal research”. By using a case study approach, I was able to individually interact with three teachers to get an in depth understanding of their difficult parent-teacher conference.
Thus, my goal was accomplished as I examined genuine teacher experience as a way to more fully understand a complex social situation that is encompassed by emotions.

**Interviews**

I used a semi-structured life world interview approach which involved “an interview with the purpose of obtaining descriptions of the life world of the interviewee in order to interpret the meaning of the described phenomena” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 3). If conducted and analyzed well, the interviews would enable me to learn about the teacher’s subjective experiences and attitudes (Perakyla & Ruusuvuori, 2011). Thus, my hope was that the interview climate allowed the teachers to feel safe enough to honestly express their experiences with parents during the difficult parent-teacher conferences. I utilized an interview guide to enable me to learn about the designated themes from my three research questions. The guide served as my script to delineate the topics of the discussion and ensure that each teacher was asked every predetermined question. However, utilizing the semi-structured approach, I had the freedom to ask relevant, clarifying, follow-up questions based upon their responses to the prescribed questions. My hope was that the interview felt more like a conversation than a guide-driven exchange of questions and answers.

The semi-structured life world interview approach is in line with the postmodern epistemology that reflects my thinking. Thus, I believe that knowledge is generated through conversations and exists in the relationship between people and the world with the interview being the “production site of knowledge” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 53).
Thus, I needed to respect and attentively listen to the wisdom and perspective that each teacher divulged.

**Diaries**

I used diary entries as another data collection source for my study as a way to complement what I learned through the interviews. The purpose of the diary was to gather information in a way that may not be possible in the face-to-face interview (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007) because the diarist may write about feelings that may never have been verbalized during the interview (Denzin, 1989). A “diary” is an “annotated chronological record or “log” (Zimmerman & Wieder, 1977, p. 481). With the help of prompts, the teachers were asked to record and reflect on their expectations, thoughts, reactions, feelings and behaviors before, during, and after the difficult parent-teacher conference. I emphasized that all the information that captured their thinking and feelings would be valuable for this study and that the diary entries would be read by me and used for data analysis.

The diary entries enabled me to determine what was important to teachers, helped me to understand their attitudes towards parents, and gave me an indication of the relationship they have with them (Jacelon & Imperio, 2005). In diary studies, memory lapse was found to be unlikely because the diary requires short-term memory (Verbrugge, 1980). In my study, teachers wrote their diary entries within a few hours before and within a few hours after the difficult parent-teacher conference. Since the diary entries were two-fold and encouraged reflection, they enabled the teachers to
more accurately capture their range of thoughts and feelings (Meth, 2003) about the parent-teacher conferences.

Theoretical Framework

Inspired by social theorist, George Herbert Mead, Symbolic Interactionism was developed by Herbert Blumer (Schwandt, 2007). Symbolic Interactionism is based upon three beliefs:

1. People interact with others and objects in their environment based upon the meanings the people and objects have for them.
2. The meanings people have for others and objects are determined by the social interactions they have with each other. The communication that takes place between people is considered symbolic because communication creates symbols.
3. Meanings are created and changed through interpreting interactions. Thus, the meaning that people form from interacting with others and objects guide and determine their action (Schwandt, 2007).

Through the Symbolic Interactionism lens, this study sought to understand the interaction and relationship between the teacher and parents. Through the interviews and diaries, I strived to solicit the teacher’s emotional state before and during the parent-teacher conference. In addition, questions were asked to understand the thoughts and feelings teachers had about parents and determine what, if any, CARE strategies they used to prepare for the conference. If teachers said they did use CARE
strategies, questions were asked to determine if teachers saw or felt results of implementing these strategies. Lastly, the questions were intended to decipher if there was a difference in the teachers thinking and feelings about parents before and after the parent-teacher conference.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This study’s aim was evaluative and a qualitative study was appropriate. The three research questions that guided data collection and analysis are:

1. How do three early childhood teachers who demonstrated positive effects of CARE and reported they applied CARE strategies, describe the use of CARE during a parent-teacher conference that they expect to be difficult?

2. What CARE strategies do teachers use to self-regulate their emotions during parent-teacher conferences?

3. Do teachers express evidence that they are more able to show empathy and compassion towards parents?

To answer the research questions, it was imperative that the methodologies of qualitative research were applied in a way to effectively solicit the teachers’ knowledge, experiences, thinking, feelings, and perceptions. The qualitative approaches of interviewing and diary writing were selected because they were not intrusive and disruptive to the parent-teacher conference. Utilizing a quantitative approach would not have adequately solicited a descriptive account of the teacher’s emotional perceptions and responses before, during and after the conference. By listening and reading about the teacher’s beliefs, interpretations, and emotional responses to parents, I came to understand how CARE strategies were used by the three early childhood teachers during the conferences.
Interviews

Audio recorded, individual interviews with the three teachers provided the framework for the research methodology for this study. The interview was my way to interact with and obtain the teacher’s knowledge (Kvale, 1996). Along with their knowledge though, I strived to ask questions to solicit their views, understandings, interpretations, and experiences as a way to understand their reality (Mason, 2002). I saw my role as the researcher to gather information from the teachers in order to help me understand the “lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (Seidman, 2006). I relied on the techniques outlined by Kvale (1996) that encouraged teachers to express their perceptions of their realities. The process I used to employ these techniques was as follows:

1. Providing the teacher with a context for the interview’s intent prior to asking the first interview question.
   a. I explained that I am interested in understanding their emotional state prior to the parent-teacher conference, how they emotionally prepared for the conference, their perceptions of parents prior to, during, and after the conference, and how they perceived the emotional climate during the conference.

2. Establishing rapport with the teachers to engender trust.
   a. I listened attentively, demonstrated interest, and displayed understanding and respect for what the teacher said. I did this through my eye contact and body language as I looked at them and turned and leaned toward them while they spoke. In addition, I asked follow-up questions that
included a portion of their previous answer as a way to demonstrate that I was listening and interested in understanding their experience.

3. Concluding with a debriefing.

   a. I reviewed some of the main points that I heard during the interview and allowed the teacher to respond, clarify, or ask questions.

   The use of the interview guide ensured that each teacher was asked all of the pre-determined questions. The guide also enabled me to respect the way the teacher responded to the questions by having her perspective lead the conversation rather than my own (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p.144). I asked follow-up questions that were specifically relevant to the teacher’s response to the original question. I strived to have brief questions and encourage long, detailed, specific answers. Each interview took slightly over an hour to complete and the teacher determined the day, time, and location of the meeting. The interviews took place in Harrisburg, early in February, 2012 and were held less than a week after the difficult parent-teacher conference took place.

**Diaries**

Western social science has favored spoken words over the written and written over nonverbal behaviors with the assumption that words provide greater access to an individual’s internal mental and emotional states (Hodder, 2000). Meaning is not found inherently within the text but from the writing and reading of it (Hodder, 2000). However, written words are an artifact that “allows language and meanings to be controlled” (Hodder, 2000, p.705). The solicited diary entries included question
prompts to ensure that responses would be useful for research purposes and attempted to encourage writing that represented the teacher’s “privately represented thoughts” (Bell, 1998, p.77). The pre-conference diary entries were written less than 24 hours before the conference. Jennifer and Nancy wrote their post-diary entries less than an hour after the conference. Sarah wrote her post-conference diary five hours after the conference.

I requested and received the diary journals prior to the interview. This enabled me to read the entries and be prepared to ask relevant questions during the interview. Having the diary journals also allowed me to ask follow-up questions to clarify what they wrote.

**The Sample**

The three teachers chosen for this study were selected from the teachers who completed 30 hours of CARE training during the 2010-2011 school year. There were 52 teachers recruited from schools in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania to be a part of the larger CARE study. Of these teachers:

- Teachers were randomly assigned to CARE or a wait list control condition with 23 teachers selected to participate in the CARE training.
- Before and after the CARE training, all study participants completed a battery of self-report measures to assess their well-being, efficacy, and mindfulness.
• After the CARE training, trained research staff, blind to the participants’ assignment, observed teachers in both groups and coded them using the CLASS and the Teaching Style Rating Scale.

• Comparisons between the CARE treatment group and control group were made after the CARE training using covariance adjusted means. The mean comparisons were made on each self-report questionnaire after controlling for its baseline measurement from the recruitment self-report questionnaire.

**Sampling Method**

Of the 23 teachers who participated in the CARE training, I used “purposeful sampling” (Mason, 2002) in the selection of the three teachers for my sub-study. Upon completion of my study, each teacher received a $50.00 Amazon gift card for their participation. The criteria for the selection of the teachers for my study were that the teacher must:

* be an early childhood teacher (Licensing in the state of Pennsylvania has designated early childhood as pre-kindergarten through fourth grade.)

* have completed CARE training during the 2010-2011 school year

* be currently teaching

* statistically show a positive impact from the CARE training based upon averaging all of the measures
Since breathing, mindful listening, setting intention, and caring practices are CARE strategies that could be used before and during a difficult parent-teacher conference, I wanted to choose from the group of study participants who reported practicing these strategies. I hypothesized that teachers who reported practicing the CARE strategies would be likely to utilize them during the parent-teacher conference. As a way to determine who was using the CARE strategies, a questionnaire was sent to all of the teachers at the start of the 2011-2012 school year. It was based upon the responses to this questionnaire that I selected the three teachers to participate in this current study.

Jennifer reported that she used the CARE strategy of breathing two to three times a week. She utilized caring practices one time a week and set intention two to three times a month. She practices mindful listening less than one time a month.

Sarah self-reported using four of the seven CARE strategies each day. Of the four that I was specifically looking for she used breathing, setting intention, and caring practice every day.

The most often that Nancy did any of the CARE strategies was once a week. In fact, she reported that she used breathing, setting intention, and caring practices once a week. Nancy never used mindful listening.
Data Analysis

The data analysis relied upon the quality of the interview and the diary prompts. Thus, my intention was to encourage thoughtful writing in the teacher’s diaries and reflective responses during the interview. My goal was to read the data both literally and interpretively. Through reading literally, I focused on the words and language used as well as the literal content. My understanding of the data using an interpretive lens was to determine what I could infer from the data (Mason, 2002).

The coding process entailed analyzing the interview transcripts and diary entries line-by-line to identify themes. I continued this process by re-reading and re-listening to the audio recorded interviews until data saturation was achieved which was determined when “no new themes, findings, concepts, or problems” (Francis, Johnston, Robertson, Glidewell, Entwistle, Eccles, & Grinshaw, 2010, p.1229) were evident in the data. The coding also included my written field notes that I kept in conjunction with the interview. These notes consisted of insights such as recurring comments and gestures and vocal intonations that reflected my thinking about what I saw, heard, and read so that I was more than a “recording machine” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p.151).

Following the analysis protocol of Braun and Clarke (2006), I analyzed the data through six phases: (1) familiarizing myself with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, (6) producing the report.
Phase I: Familiarizing myself with the data

I knew that I would use many copies of each interview for the data analysis, thus, my first step was to make several copies of the transcribed interviews. Since I had the interviews professionally transcribed, my initial analysis of the data included listening to the interviews while reading the transcriptions making sure the transcripts were precise. Although there were only a few, I did need to make some changes to the transcripts because they were not completely accurate. I listened to the interviews several times in order to become familiar with the content. While I listened, I made notes in the margins that included my initial thoughts, wonderings, and questions.

Phase II: Generating initial codes

Using one of the copies of the transcribed interviews, I used colored pencils to highlight words or statements which I designated as my initial codes. These codes were generated to answer the research questions. After reading the transcriptions and journal entries, I found 27 initial codes which represented the primary content from the teachers’ responses. I went through the transcriptions and diaries another time searching for responses that did not relate to the research questions but appeared worthy of a code.

Phase III: Searching for themes

I categorized the codes into themes that related to my research questions. Some of the themes that first emerged included: setting intention, breathing, caring practices, preparation for the conference, stressors from the job not related to the parent-teacher
conference, emotions felt before the conference, emotions felt during the conference, emotions felt after the conference, support from others, and CARE strategies in their personal lives.

Phase IV: Reviewing themes

In phase four, I re-looked at the themes I had established and ensured the data I used to create the theme was appropriate. In addition, I looked at my themes and found that I was able to condense some of the themes into one theme. For example, the themes that pertained to the teachers’ thinking, feelings, and behaviors as well as their expectations for the conference, were combined in the theme labeled setting intention. I also realized from looking at the themes that some of the themes did not have enough data to designate it as a theme. This happened with the theme I created labeled parent’s description of the student and teachers’ stress from the job not related to the parent-teacher conference. Thus, I removed these themes from my analysis findings.

I did find a theme that was not relevant to answering any of the research questions but I believed it to be worthy to include as it related to the teachers’ use of the CARE strategies in their personal lives.

Phase V: Defining and naming themes

During the fifth phase of analysis, I focused on the themes that were relevant to the research questions and on the theme that was significant to the teachers but not applicable to answering any of the research questions. To ensure that I had data to elaborate on the validity of the theme, I went back to the copy of my transcribed interviews that had the colored pencil markings for my analysis. I generated a list of
which parts of the interview and diary were relevant to each theme as a way to make the writing phase more fluid. The themes that I found to answer the research questions were: setting intention, breathing, caring practices, teachers' awareness and response to their emotions during the conference, empathy and compassion towards parents, teachers' evaluation of parenting decisions, and CARE strategies used in the teachers' personal lives.

Phase VI: Producing the report

The answers to the research questions represent the completion of my data analysis. Chapter five details my specific findings. I used direct quotes from the interview transcripts to enable the reader to understand the teachers' teaching environment and to accurately express the teacher's beliefs and feelings about parent-teacher conferences, parents, the students, and their use of CARE.

Validity

As a researcher, I needed to ensure that I was accurately interpreting the data from the diary entries and interviews (Freeman, de Marrais, Preissle, Roulston, St. Pierre, 2007). This statement reminded me that I have an obligation to the field of early childhood education to remember that the findings from this study are inductive and undetermined at the outset. As a way to ensure that my analysis accurately reflected their impressions and experience, I used member checking as the strategy to ensure validity (Cresell & Miller). Thus, the three teachers read what I wrote about their parent-teacher conference. They were asked to confirm that the writing correctly portrayed what they thought and felt before, during, and after the conference (Hodder,
2000; Marshall & Rossman, 2011) and notify me if changes were needed. I heard from all three teachers. In fact, Jennifer responded by saying, “this is exactly how Nate and his mother behaved which is why I get so frustrated”. Sarah’s response after reading about her parent-teacher conferences was, “you nailed me!”. The only change that needed to be made was the age of Sarah’s children when she began her teaching career.

Thus, I utilized the interview and diary prompts to elicit the teachers’ beliefs, perceptions, and understandings of:

1. How do three early childhood teachers who demonstrated positive effects of CARE and reported they applied CARE strategies, describe the use of the CARE strategies during a parent-teacher conference that they expect to be difficult?

2. What CARE strategies do teachers use to self-regulate their emotions during parent-teacher conferences?

3. Do teachers express empathy and compassion towards parents?

**Conclusion**

In summary, the qualitative study that I completed focused on three early childhood teachers who participated in CARE training during the 2010-2011 school year as part of a larger randomized trial. Since for some teachers, interacting with parents’ causes tremendous amounts of stress, this study intended to discover if these three teachers used the CARE strategies they learned to improve the social-emotional climate of their classroom during their difficult parent-teacher conferences. Because this study
will appeal to those whose objective is to increase and improve the relationship between teachers and parents, it may be useful to educational leaders and professional development strategists.

However, it must be reiterated, as the next chapter will detail, the three teachers who participated in this study were employed in an urban school district. I made deliberate attempts to learn what the teachers believed to be the demographics of their students and families. Thus, location of the school may need to be considered by educational leaders and professional development strategists when considering the use of CARE as a professional development tool. This is recommended because more may need to be included in a professional development program focused on CARE. For instance, strategies to acknowledge and understand the differences in parental beliefs as they relate to parenting appear to warrant consideration.
CHAPTER FOUR: THE TEACHERS

For the purpose of this study, I refer to the three teachers involved in this study with pseudonyms: Jennifer, Sarah, and Nancy. These teachers were similar yet different in many ways. Each of the teachers was a white, middle class woman who although unsolicited, spoke of themselves during the interview in relation to their family either as a mother, wife, daughter, or sibling. Jennifer has taught for ten years and Sarah has taught for five years although they both are new or relatively new to the current school building.

All three women appeared comfortable expressing their thoughts and perceptions of the students and parents enrolled in their class as well as those associated with the difficult parent-teacher conference. Jennifer’s preference to be alone in most situations both professionally and personally is different than Sarah and Nancy. Sarah and Nancy quickly turn to others during difficult times for support and encouragement. In fact, Nancy described a colleague as not only her confidant but her best friend. Sarah was the only teacher of the three who continues to work an exorbitant number of hours each day since the CARE training. She arrives to school early each morning and does not leave until 6:00 p.m.

As a way to know more about the teachers I began the interview with questions to get an understanding of their classroom and students. This chapter will describe each of the teachers and give a glimpse into their classroom reality and the teacher’s perception of the student and parents associated with the difficult conference.
Jennifer

Jennifer is a fourth grade teacher. She is currently in her tenth year of teaching, all of which have been in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. This is her second year in the current school building. She described her students as having “many behavior issues” such that “I can’t take my eyes off this crew for a minute because somebody will throw something at somebody or look at somebody funny”.

For this study, Jennifer decided to write and talk about the conference with Nate’s parents. Prior to the conference with Nate’s mother and step-father, she wrote in her diary that she expected the parents to be “angry and upset with Nate’s grades and behaviors”. She anticipated the parents would be “getting after him and also coming after me”. She predicted this behavior because “they have done this in the past”.

Five days after the parent-teacher conference with Nate’s parents, Jennifer and I met for the interview. We met in Jennifer’s classroom and sat at a kidney-shaped table with Jennifer sitting in the indented section and me directly across from her. This placement mirrored how she and Nate’s parents sat during their time together just a few days prior. As we talked, there was classical music playing quietly in the background. Jennifer said she has this music playing throughout the day as a way to create a calm classroom environment. Although this was a strategy presented during the CARE training, Jennifer stated she has had classical, soothing music playing in her classroom for many years.
When I asked Jennifer why she chose to discuss Nate and his parents for this study, Jennifer said Nate had “gone to a number of different schools and he is a big behavior problem”. She continued:

I knew that the parents had contact with teachers previously in his other schools, so I knew what I was going to say wouldn’t be a surprise. However, from my interactions with her, I know that she doesn’t deal with it. She knows her child, so she’s not in denial, but yet she talks a good game. He is the step-father, so he doesn’t really do a whole lot. They are great at talking the talk. They just don’t do anything about it. So I knew it wasn’t going to be an easy conference at all. And that is what kept me up all night. I woke up at 3:00 a.m. and couldn’t go back to sleep because I knew what was coming (February, 2012).

When Jennifer and I began to talk about her conference with Nate’s mom, she quickly described the experience, her thinking, and her emotions.

I was very anxious. Parent-teacher conferences are my least favorite time of year. It’s very stressful. I was very anxious with this Mom, just waiting for her to come after me for her child’s grades. Actually, if I think about it, there is also anger on my part. Like I spent my whole day working with this child, giving him expectations, giving instructions, he doesn’t do anything. And when I call you, you don’t do anything (February, 2012).

Jennifer experienced multiple emotions both prior to and during the conference with Nate’s mother. In fact, she articulated that the emotions were directed at or because of what she expected from this woman.

Sarah

Although not a new teacher, Sarah felt like one. Sarah was a teacher who began her teaching career later in life, after her own children were in their elementary years.
Thus, she had eleven years of teaching experience but was in the middle of her first year at this particular school. She has taught second grade for five years and acknowledged that “I am the new teacher in the building. Not that I am a new teacher but I really had to earn the trust of these kids and even the parents because they don’t know me, they don’t know if I’m a good teacher or what I am”. Sarah wondered in her pre-conference diary if Penny’s parents would question her findings about their daughter because Sarah was in her first year at the school. Even though Sarah was not a rookie, she hypothesized that the parents would question her competence as a way to disregard the deficiencies of Penny and blame their second graders’ academic struggle on Sarah.

Sarah described the students in her class as “unbelievable, they just suck the energy out of you; it is a crew of kids unlike any other in our building. They don’t just come in and sit down and listen and do whatever. They are constantly challenging and wanting to argue and I’m like good grief, how about I just be teacher for the day? I seriously think this year I’m training to run a marathon at the end of the year; it’s how I feel. I come home absolutely exhausted and drained. I spend so many hours at school and I don’t get home until like 5:30 or 6:00 p.m.”.

When I asked Sarah to describe the students who attend the school, she replied, “The school is over 50% free and reduced lunches, it’s low socio-economic and everyone obviously lives in a small town. I could maybe count on one hand the number of kids in my room that have both sets of parents raising them in the same household. It’s a poor school; they just make ends meet”.
Sarah discussed the reason she expected the conference with Penny’s parents to be difficult. She explained that the year before Penny was in a classroom with a young teacher who had “twelve good students so she didn’t have to really have any classroom management”. Penny was one of three students in that class that Sarah believed should have been retained because they all are now struggling in second grade. A couple of weeks prior to the parent-teacher conference, Penny’s parents went online to check Penny’s grades and saw she had a D minus in reading. They were baffled because the prior year she consistently had B’s in the same subject area. Sarah said mom “sends me this e-mail and of course she’s up in arms which I don’t blame her. I don’t want to say she was attacking me, but it was very strong”. Thus, the conference that Sarah wrote about in her diary and talked to me about during the interview was the first time she interacted with these parents since they learned of the difficulties their daughter was having with reading.

Sarah was asked what she was thinking prior to the conference knowing it potentially would be difficult because of the information she was going to share with the parents about the academic struggles their daughter was having. Sarah responded, “That’s really stressful to me, and that’s the part of conferences I don’t like. I really can get a stressful headache. I hate it, hate it”. She described herself as unsettled when she does not have good news to share with a parent. When asked to elaborate on the unsettled feeling, she described it as “not good, just off balance. I think I ate six cupcakes the week when I wrote this set of comments on the report cards. During the conference, I was the one inside that was very uptight because I was the one getting the e-mails that were rather direct”.
Throughout the interview, Sarah asked, “Do you know what I mean?” almost as if she were struggling to make her point clear and hoping I would say I understood. To ensure that I did not misinterpret what she was and was not saying, I replied, “no, not really”, as a strategy to make her thinking audible. As I listened and watched Sarah, it appeared as if the interview provided her with a chance to verbalize thoughts that had been percolating in her mind but had never spoken. She told many stories of other students in her class as if she were grateful to have someone who would listen to her life as a teacher.

Nancy

The last teacher I met with was Nancy. Nancy is a third grade teacher in her seventh year of teaching. I asked Nancy to describe the families with whom she works. She said, “These types of people that live in Harrisburg City, and their kids that come to our schools, typically live in poverty and they have a lot going on so they are angry about a lot of things”.

Nancy wrote in her pre-conference diary that she expected the parent-teacher conference to be difficult because she anticipated the parents to request specific details about grades or any other topic that would be discussed about their son. She had these thoughts because of the conference she had with this family in the fall in which she found herself “caught off guard”. It was during the November conference that David’s father and step-father came together, along with David, to meet with Nancy. Nancy remembered that due to the questions from the men, the conference was “very
detailed”. She described the dads as continually wanting to know how she calculated the numbers for David’s grades.

During the conference, Nancy described herself as a

chicken with my head cut off because I had to get up and walk to my desk a couple of times because they wanted to see work, which I wasn’t really prepared for. I knew I didn’t have it and I’m walking over to my desk anyway to act like I’m going to look for it (February, 2012).

She portrayed her attempt to search for examples of her descriptions of David’s lack of work ethic as a Hail Mary, “let me see if there is anything over here, knowing that there probably wasn’t going to be”. Nancy felt as if the dads were drilling, judging, and bullying her. Her overall description of the conference was that she “felt like I was on the child’s side of the table rather than the adult side”.

With these memories of the last conference, Nancy discussed during our interview that she “made sure that I had all my ducks in a row” and would “be able to come up with examples of work”. She “double checked his grades and made sure they were calculated correctly”.

Nancy “geared up” for the conference with the men and “was relieved because it wasn’t them”. For this conference, David’s mother was the only person to arrive. Nancy still felt some apprehension because as she explained, “I wasn’t sure how she was going to be. So I wasn’t 100% relieved, but it turned into a different type of nervous. Now I’m nervous because I don’t know you rather than nervous because I know what’s coming”. Soon after the conference began, Nancy said David’s mother
“agreed with everything I was saying and didn’t question me, was supportive of anything I had to say to her, agreed with me about some things about his behavior. So it was great. It wasn’t at all, explain this number to me. I felt comfortable talking to her about some concerns that I have that I probably would not have mentioned at the first conference. She was on my side sort of and said, yeah, I see him doing those things at home too”. Nancy was also aware of the non-verbal responses that David’s mother exhibited during the conference. “She was smiling and shaking her head. Just her demeanor in general, she’s not looking angry; really just her whole face let me know that she was going to take it well”.

Clearly, David’s mother never challenged or asked for clarification or justification for what Nancy reported about her son. Actually, she affirmed Nancy's observations by acknowledging that she saw the same behaviors at home. When Nancy told David’s mother that she was no longer doing what David’s step-father recommended as a way to improve David’s attention during class, a short discussion followed concluding with the mother agreeing to Nancy’s decision. The support Nancy felt throughout the conference enabled her to “feel great” and say “now we are friends.” Nancy summarized the conference by recognizing the “personal connection” that was made. This connection is an example of two microsystems working cohesively together to enable the best educational experience for David. Although Nancy expected and was prepared for this conference to be difficult, with the absence of the two fathers, it ended up being quite enjoyable for her.
CHAPTER FIVE: ANSWERING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study utilized an exploratory case study approach. The teacher’s responses to questions during a one-on-one interview and diary entries were the data that was examined and categorized into themes to learn about these three early childhood teacher’s expression of their use of CARE strategies during a difficult parent-teacher conference. The interviews and diaries represent each teacher’s perception of the conference and parents.

Research Question 1

How do three early childhood teachers who demonstrated positive effects of CARE and reported they applied CARE strategies, describe the use of the CARE strategies during a parent-teacher conference that they expect to be difficult?

Research question one was specifically designed to determine these three teachers’ use of CARE strategies during the difficult parent-teacher conference. However, I discovered from listening to the interviews and analyzing the data that the teachers used the CARE strategies not only during the conference, but prior to the conference as well. Also, as I analyzed the data, it became apparent that research questions one and two need to be answered simultaneously.

Research Question 2

What CARE strategies do teachers use to self-regulate their emotions during parent-teacher conferences?
Research question two centered on the specific CARE strategies the teachers utilized during the conference. The themes that emerged in the data that answer the first two research questions were: (a) setting intention, (b) breathing, (c) caring practices and (c) awareness and response to their emotions during the conference. In order to accurately share the voice of each teacher and describe their explanation of how they used the CARE strategies, all three teachers will be individually highlighted.

Setting Intention

Since the three teachers knew they were potentially going to encounter a difficult parent-teacher conference, they all made great efforts to prepare. This preparation was evidence of the use of the CARE strategy the teachers learned for setting an intention. Setting an intention enables the teachers to determine the thinking and/or actions they will strive to exhibit that day. CARE participants were encouraged to set an intention each day based upon the vision they had of themselves and their students. Several times a day the teachers self-evaluated themselves to determine if their thoughts and actions were congruent with their intention. If they were not, the check-in enabled them to make necessary changes and continue to work in alignment with their intention. This exercise was designed to provide teachers with an opportunity to see the value of their work and sustain the changes they strived to make in their lives. The three teachers spoke and wrote in their pre-conference diary of the accusations they expected from the parents about their ineffectiveness as a teacher. Each teacher used many descriptions during the interview as to how she was sure that all of the paperwork was ready in order to respond and counteract any accusations from the parents. The teachers spoke about the intention and the reason for the immense amount of time they spent preparing
for the conference—namely, they did not want to be blamed for the concern they had with the student.

Seven different times throughout the interview with Jennifer, she described the preparation she did to ensure a successful parent-teacher conference. Examples of these descriptors were “I had all my ducks in a row”, “I had all the evidence to show how he earned his grades”, “I had everything sitting right here” and “I had all my paperwork ready to show them”. Jennifer came to the conference with Nate’s papers that were graded with A’s and B’s. To explain why his grades on the report card were D’s and F’s, she had a list. Strategically organized was a compilation of all the assignments that Nate did not turn in. She was ready to explain how the average of many incompletes and the couple of A’s and B’s accurately calculated to D and F grades.

To further support Jennifer’s concern about Nate’s behaviors during class and match her intention of being prepared so as to not be held responsible for Nate’s behaviors, she had a note that was given to her by a substitute teacher. The substitute taught her class during Jennifer’s absence a few weeks earlier. Jennifer described the note that Nate and a classmate wrote as containing foul language and extremely inappropriate. At the conference, Nate was utterly surprised that Jennifer had the note since she had never spoken to him or the other student about it. Jennifer said she “wished she had popcorn as she pushed her seat back and just sat back and watched them” as the mother reprimanded Nate about the note. Clearly, Jennifer’s efforts to ensure that Nate’s mother kept her focus and accusations on Nate rather than Jennifer were successful.
In addition to Jennifer’s preparation for the conference as related to her setting of intention, she also had the intention of not taking work home with her. She spoke about doing things for herself without feeling guilty which was a new lifestyle she adopted since participating in the CARE training. CARE encourages teachers to balance their professional and personal lives in order to “renew their inner strength” (Jennings, 2011). Jennifer attributed smoother parent-teacher conferences to this new way of life because she was in a “better frame of mind”. She acknowledged that she knew the conferences were still going to be difficult, but because she was not as stressed, since she no longer took work home with her as she had done in previous years, she did not feel as overwhelmed.

“Setting intention” were the words used by Sarah to describe how she dealt with the “stress ahead of time to make sure I have every single thing done”. However, Sarah’s description of setting intention was similar to Jennifer’s focus on preparation. “So I try to set my intentions, like I’m going to get this data, I’m going to show them this, I’m going to talk to them about this which kind of goes back to being prepared”. During my hour-long interview with Sarah, there were six different times Sarah mentioned how she prepares for conferences. For example, she said “these parents are very unique and you better know what you are talking about, have documentation and have examples to use”.

Since Sarah had fifteen conferences back-to-back, her second intention was to focus on one conference at a time. The last intention Sarah spoke about was motivated by her concern that Penny’s parents would blame her for Penny’s reading difficulties. Thus, Sarah also invited two reading specialists to the conference. Sarah’s intention for
including these specialists was to have them contribute and affirm what Sarah said during the conference. Sarah concluded that if the two reading specialists had not been there, the conference would have gone very differently. Specifically, she said the parents would have been accusing her and responding with “What’s wrong with the teacher?” rather than realizing where the problem lies.

Since Nancy’s prior conference with David’s father and step-father was unsettling, Nancy was astutely prepared for the second conference. Nancy perceived the men during the first conference as demanding and constantly requested Nancy to explain how she calculated David’s scores. Thus, she wanted to be ready for a repeat type of conference. She double checked his grades to make sure she had scored them correctly and had all of his work graded and in a folder ready for the parents to review.

What was most striking from all three interviews was the immense effort and time each teacher put into preparing for the conference. Interestingly, though, the motivation for their efforts was to ensure that they had all they needed to respond to any accusatory questions or judgments the parents might have of their teaching ability. It was clear that each teacher’s goal was for the parents to remain focused on the student and the issues that the teacher presented about the student. If however, the parent veered off discussing the student, the teacher had data and examples to direct the parent back to her agenda.

Although the teachers labeled what they did before the conference as setting intention, it appeared as if the motivation was more focused on being prepared. Preparation is defined as doing what is necessary to “make ready beforehand for a
specific purpose” (Morris, W., 1978). Setting intention was included in the CARE training so that teachers would recognize the value of their work. Although these three teachers labeled their immense preparation for the conference as setting intention, the hours spent gathering and organizing the student’s data did not provide the teachers with the sense of their value to that particular student or parent. Rather, the teachers were motivated by fear; fear that the parents would accuse them of the student’s shortcomings which motivated them to protect themselves with the student’s data. Thus, setting intention was not successfully activated or utilized by these three teachers.

**Breathing**

Jennifer’s schedule entailed ten, back-to-back conferences with little time between conferences to mentally prepare for the next one. However, Jennifer had a few quiet moments at the start of each conference which she described as her “one or two minutes of peace” when she sat quietly, took deep breaths, and did not think about anything. She was also able to do this while the parents looked at and read the report card Jennifer gave them upon their arrival. She said this time enabled her to “readjust” and “realign” for the conversation that would soon begin.

Prior to the conference with Nate’s parents, Jennifer said she took a few deep breaths as a way to calm her nerves, “get me centered, and help me move from the last conference so that I am mentally ready to handle this one”. Early in the interview with me, Jennifer talked about the insomnia she experienced the night before the conference with Nate’s mother. I asked her to talk about what she did during this wakeful portion of
her night. "I actually do one of my CARE techniques. Basically, I just try to clear my mind, like I did the breathing, ten deep breaths and just focused on my breathing. I fell back asleep, but I was up for two hours".

Hearing that Jennifer relied on a CARE’s breathing strategy in the middle of the night, I was curious what strategy she used to circumvent the stress and anxiety she experienced during the conference. Again, she described the use of CARE’s breath awareness strategy.

I took a few deep breaths before I opened my mouth to just calm my nerves, get me centered, and helped me move from my last conference. I knew I needed to calm myself down and focus myself, so I needed to leave what I had been doing previously behind and just get mentally ready to handle this one. So, again, the breathing, it really does work, and then just taking a moment to think about something other than the situation I’m in, just taking myself out of that situation, even just for a moment (February, 2012).

Breath awareness was introduced and practiced throughout the CARE trainings because it is a basic form of mindful-awareness practice. Since breath is always with us, teachers are taught to sit in an upright posture and concentrate on their breathing as a way to calm their heart rate and nervous system. Teachers were warned that it is not unusual for their minds to wander off the concentration on their breath. However, they were instructed to be aware when the distractions occurred, accept that their thoughts drifted, and return to the breathing practice. However, the breathing that Jennifer did during the conference was another breathing technique presented to the participants. This breathing entails taking deep conscious breaths during everyday situations when relying on the sustained concentration on breathing is not appropriate or practical.
Sarah spoke candidly about her impression of the CARE training when I began to ask her for more information about the stress she said she felt prior to and the uptightness she experienced during the conference with Penny’s parents. She immediately brought up the CARE training with some skepticism.

Well, you know, like this part of CARE. I have to be the first one to admit when I first started that, I would leave there thinking I don’t know where we are headed with this and I’m not sure I’m buying into it, any of the things that we were doing, because I’m not grasping or making connections with anything. I think it was after it was all over. I think I needed processing time to realize that I was slowly doing the things they taught us, but I think I’m used to you learn something and then you go home and apply it and you practice it. And that’s not how it is, it has this way of getting in under your skin, and I don’t mean it in a bad way, but it wasn’t until it was over that I started to realize it (February, 2012).

Once Sarah explained her first impression of CARE she then elaborated how she relied on the deep breath strategy prior to the conference with Penny’s parents. Penny’s parents arrived early and met Sarah as she was “running up the hall to go to the bathroom”. Sarah remembered she “did take deep breaths come to think of it when I walked in the bathroom”. During the conference, however, she identified the strategy that she equated to deep breathing, “I just kind of stay silent, I think that’s my version of breathing. I’m kind of taking my own inner deep breath I guess until I can have my presence again”. She said that it is during the silence that she can recognize her tension and realize she has a choice as to how to respond.

My interview with Nancy was very different than the other two interviews. Since Nancy’s expectations and pre-conference focus was drastically different than what
actually transpired, this interview also included Nancy’s vivid memories of the conference with David’s father and step-father that took place three months prior. When Nancy was asked if she used any CARE strategies during the conference with the men, she said “I did the breathing a lot, deliberately taking deep breaths”.

**Caring Practices**

Each teacher spoke about their need to take care of themselves. However, the way in which they did this caring was different. For Jennifer, she recognized her need to utilize her home as her “haven”. Home was the place where she promised herself she would not bring any of her school work or issues; she made a physical and mental divide between her classroom and home. Jennifer described her home as my saving grace because I can’t, you’ll drive yourself insane sitting thinking about all the stuff that you need to do or needs to be done or how to deal with this child or what’s going on and thinking about what these kids live with. It may be unfeeling, but you have to set up boundaries; I personally cannot think about it anymore. I love going home. I look forward to it from the time I get in here to the time I go (February, 2012).

Sarah interjected how she takes care of herself while she answered one of the interview questions. She said she “kind of decompresses” and walks her dog as well as goes to Curves to complete the 30 minute weight workout because it “requires no brain mentality”. She described her walk with the dog encompassing some thoughts about school and then told how “I look at nature and the snow and stuff on the ground and people’s curtains and it just totally clears and cleanses my mind and soul”.

For Nancy, she knew she needed her friend and colleague as a way to take care of herself. She talks to Becky “just to vent because she is in the same situation”.
Nancy said her friendship with Becky was built because they needed each other at school. She said she does not think if they were separated that she would be able to get the same “relief and the same result” by talking to another teacher. She concluded her discussion about Becky by saying, “I don’t know what other teachers do, but I need her. If I didn’t have her, I would be a basket case”.

**Awareness and response to their emotions during the conference**

Even though Jennifer said she felt anxious, angry, and frustrated during the conference with Nate’s mother, she described herself as more relaxed as a result of the CARE training. For instance, she acknowledged that she felt angry because she did not believe that Nate’s mother would do anything to change Nate's inappropriate classroom behaviors. Jennifer expounded that she now recognizes that she angry but must work hard to suppress her feelings because “that’s my issue” for if she were to expose how she felt, there would be “World War III”. Based upon what she learned through CARE, her resolution to the anger is “just to stop, I have to take a minute and regroup by taking deep breaths”.

Sarah described herself as feeling unsettled during the conference with Penny’s parents. When asked for clarification as to what she meant by unsettled, she explained it as “not feeling good” and “off balance”. Sarah said an ideal conference is “even kilter”. She explained how this difficult conference forced her to balance the stress she was feeling with the desire to let the stress go and remember to stay tactful yet prepared for whatever critical comment the parents might say.
Later, Sarah remembered feeling up-tight during the conference. Her belief that the parents did not trust her competence as a teacher was continually lurking in the back of her mind. She cautiously waited for the parents to attack since the tone of the e-mails from Penny’s mom throughout the prior month continuously became more and more direct. Sarah said she was aware of her internal tension, but as a way to stay calm through her “up-tight” feelings, she made a mental choice not to let the tension overpower her and effect her interactions with the people in the conference.

Sarah described a concept she learned during the CARE training that involved an elevator. The elevator was used as a metaphor of how our emotions go up and down. With awareness, we can regulate ourselves so our elevator does not “go through the roof”. Sarah equated the training she learned from CARE with her new-found definition of herself as stoic. She elaborated that it was CARE that taught her to not let things bother her to the point that she is going to “get so excited that I am going to scream”. Sarah relied on her stoic demeanor during the conference with Penny’s parents because she realized that when she remains calm, it creates a more comfortable environment for everyone.

You know, and I always through CARE, and this isn’t a bad thing, I think I just became more stoic towards things where I just don’t let things bother me to the point of, I’m going to allow it to elevate my elevator. And this is the part of CARE that I don’t get. It’s so good but I don’t know how they got this into me where you just let it go. Why, what’s it going to do to raise your elevator? Nothing good will come from having a nervous breakdown. I think when I am calm, it calms the parents and I build a rapport with them. It’s not that I’m lackadaisical, like I don’t care because I do but at some point you just let it go. It’s like I was hypnotized and
didn’t realize it; what they did to my mind is a good thing (February, 2012).

Sarah spoke about the ways she and her colleagues practiced being aware of their thoughts and emotions during the CARE trainings. She attributed these CARE exercises to her ability to “let it go and re-focus” which she felt she did successfully during the parent-teacher conference. Sarah said that her recognition of what she was feeling, her choice to stay silent as her breathing strategy, and her stoic composure were done automatically and had become a natural part of her interactions with others.

Nancy said that for her, the most valuable part of CARE was learning about how your brain works with the emotions and why things happen that way. If a parent is reacting, you are not going to get me excited about that, so I’m just going to be over here and my response to you is going to be calculated and smart, not my emotions. I feel the emotions coming on and I recognize it now and I don’t act on it. It’s not so much that I can make it go away quickly; I just wait it out (February, 2012).

Nancy was referring to the aspect of the CARE training that discussed the seven universal emotions which include happy, sad, anger, fear, disgust, surprise, and contempt (Ekman, 1992). During the training, teachers were provided opportunities to mindfully experience and label various emotions to help them become more conscious of and better able to manage their emotional responses rather than unconsciously react to situations.

When thinking about her emotions prior to the conference with David’s family, Nancy spoke about feeling unsettled. She said she felt this because of her memories of the first conference with the two men and because of a surprise visit by David’s step-father.
Nancy talked about the afternoon just a few days prior to the parent teacher conference. Nancy was standing in the front of the classroom teaching a lesson. She recalled seeing someone peering into the classroom doorway and soon realized it was David’s step-father. He remained in the hall a few minutes and eventually, since it was the end of the day, walked into the classroom. He approached Nancy and told her that he noticed David was not paying attention during the lesson. He made a statement that David’s seat needed to be changed. Nancy spoke about her confusion with the step-father’s ability to get up to her classroom without notifying the office personnel and then the office personnel not notifying her of his interest in observing. This unannounced visit in conjunction with the previous parent-teacher conference in which Nancy felt interrogated and bullied caused Nancy angst as she thought about the up-coming second conference with this family.

Nancy also spoke about how she could feel herself become defensive when she felt the men did not believe what she was saying. She remembered tightness in her chest, and she responded by taking a deep breath. In addition to feeling defensive, Nancy spoke about the frustration and anger she felt during the conference. What was new for her, though, was the fact that she paid attention to the emotion. She attributed the CARE training to her deliberate recognition of her feelings. She elaborated by explaining that she is now able to feel the emotions coming on, recognize what she is feeling, and choose not to act on them. She acknowledged that she is not able to make the feelings go away quickly, but by breathing it deescalates what is inside her. Thus, affirming the usefulness of the strategies she learned through CARE.
The parent-teacher conference for David that my study intended to focus on was completely opposite of what Nancy expected. In the post-conference diary entry, Nancy described herself during the conference as confident but a little nervous at the start. Once she realized that David’s mom wasn’t being critical, she was “able to relax and really focus on what I needed to say about her son”.

These three teachers epitomize the emotions associated with teaching. All three of them acknowledge that it was the CARE training that taught them how to recognize when their emotions were beginning to percolate within them. In addition, CARE taught them to be aware of “scripts” which are the unsuccessful, immediate responses they have used in the past. The intention of the CARE training and what the teachers successfully strived to do during the conference was to respond so that their emotions would not be exposed in a way that could be detrimental to the establishment or continuance of a positive parent-teacher relationship.

Research Question 3

Do teachers express empathy and compassion towards parents?

Empathy and compassion was the theme I generated after examining the data in order to answer the third question. However, while seeking the teachers’ responses for empathy and compassion, I noticed a second theme which was the teachers’ evaluation of parenting decisions.

As a way to decipher the level of empathy and compassion the three teachers had toward the parents before and after the conference, the pre and post diary entries
included prompts as one way to elicit this information. The pre-and post conference prompts were:

My thoughts about the parent(s) who are scheduled to attend this conference are:

My thoughts about the parents after the conference are:

This was the only question that was identical in both diary journals. In addition to the information from the diaries, the interviews with the teachers after the parent-teacher conference were analyzed to determine their level of empathy and compassion. The reason I looked for evidence of empathy and compassion is because mindful awareness may support the development of empathy (Block-Lerner, et al, 2007). In addition, the portion of the CARE training that encourages teachers to examine and develop new emotional responses is intended to increase their compassion towards others (Jennings, 2011). Thus, if the teachers expressed empathy and compassion, it would be evidenced by what the teachers learned and understood from the parents about their specific situation.

I compared Jennifer’s perception of Nate’s mother before and after the conference by reading her pre- and post diary entries and found both answers to be quite similar. In her pre-conference diary she concluded the sentence My thoughts about the parents are . . . : “They often say they’ll do things, but they don’t”. In the post-conference entry she wrote, “She talks a good game, but what is she going to do about it? I don’t think she follows through with her threats and he knows it”. During my interview with Jennifer she explained why she had these perceptions as she described Nate’s behavior during the conference when Nate’s “livid” mother confronted him about the
inappropriate note he passed during class. “He just sat there, no fear, no remorse; he has no, what is the word, I almost think of like a psychopath with absolutely no sense of right and wrong, no remorse”. Her assessment of Nate’s response was that this “tells me he gets no consequences at home, because if you are getting a consequence and knew it was coming, there would be some sort of emotion. Mom talks a big game, but it is evident in his actions, it makes it evident, that it’s all talk”.

Nearly five minutes later, though, Jennifer talked about the communication that was initiated by Nate’s mother.

Now, she did surprise me. She did send a note the following Monday, and in the note, she’s so abrupt. It’s just so foreign to me. If I was sending a note to a teacher asking, wanting her to add to her day, or wanting her to do something for me, I would ask nicely, with question marks, her asking is a command. Like you must move him; he needs to move, I need the journal Monday, Wednesday, Friday, provide a notebook, and send it home Monday, Wednesday, Friday. There is never anything nice about it. Please and thank you go so far. I was very surprised to get the note. Little miffed that it was so abrupt, but again, it’s her. So I should not be surprised. I was impressed that she carried it that far. In a way, it sounds like she’s attempting to follow through here and to do something. Again, I have very low expectations for how successful that’s going to be just from what I’ve seen for the first half of the year (February, 2012).

The initiative that Nate’s mother took to write the note “surprised” Jennifer. This mother was clearly requesting that she be informed three times a week about Nate’s behavior in the classroom. In addition, her recommendation to move Nate’s seat to the front of the classroom indicated her attempt to offer suggestions as a way to help her son. However, Jennifer viewed this attempt by the mother as not likely to succeed which is contrary to what she wrote in her pre-conference journal which stated she
“hoped they (the parents) get motivated to become involved in his life and start following through”.

During my interview with Jennifer she spoke quite candidly about Nate’s mother. She said,

She is very abrupt, very coarse, rough which comes about from living in the city, the ghetto to be precise. People who grow up, many who grow up in this environment, in this area, in the city of Harrisburg, in the ghetto part of it, low social-economic status, their life for some has been pretty rough. Many of my kids have a parent that’s incarcerated or dead, so then the parent that’s still alive has got eight kids she’s got to handle. Many did not graduate from high school. They have minimum wage jobs if they have a job. Many are on welfare. I have kids for the first time ever in my ten years of teaching say I don’t need to go to high school; I’m not going to college. Well, don’t you want a job? Why, my mom doesn’t have a job, we still have money. I’m thinking, I just paid for that. I’ve seen it in a lot of parents, the parents that are really, I hate to use the word ghetto, but they are really born and raised here. They just aren’t happy with their life, miserable, but aren’t doing a whole lot to change the situation (February, 2012).

The description Jennifer had of Nate’s mother as abrupt and coarse along with her commentary about not believing that the words or perceived efforts made by Nate’s mother will improve Nate’s behavior at school do not elicit evidence of empathy or compassion towards this parent. On the contrary, Jennifer’s sarcastic tone when talking about Nate and his parents were more indicative of judgment.

As I listened to Jennifer talk about the perceptions and images she has of not only Nate’s parents but other parents who live in the ‘ghetto’ of Harrisburg, I was struck by how easy it was for Jennifer to describe her thinking. I was aware of my immediate
reaction to her generalizations and stereotyping. I wondered how Jennifer could take these perceptions of parents and successfully interact and partner with Nate’s mom to ensure the best educational experience for Nate.

Thus, from listening and reading Jennifer’s perceptions of not only Nate’s mother but her students’ parents in general, it could not be said that Jennifer shows empathy and compassion towards parents. On the contrary, even Jennifer stopped herself when she realized that she was on a tangent about her frustrations with “the inner city”.

Sarah’s pre-conference diary entry began the theme that continued throughout her data. Sarah wrote in her pre-conference diary: “The acorn usually does fall close to the tree and this little girl is a bit ditzy”. A portion of her entry in the post-conference diary included: “Dad’s non-responsiveness was odd; but quite honestly, their daughter is a bit odd also”.

Sarah said dad did not make eye contact with her or anyone at the conference. In addition, he was silent the entire time. She described him as “unreadable” and made assumptions about his behavior. Sarah thought maybe he was mad that he had to come to the conference. Maybe “he’s just kind of that way and kind of a little different and didn’t have the personality or sociability that I thought, or maybe he thought the teachers know what they are doing since they are the experts”. Sarah discussed dad’s mannerisms several times during the interview and acknowledged at one point that she could not look at him because he made her uncomfortable.
At one point during the parent-teacher conference with Sarah and Penny’s parents, Sarah realized that Penny’s mother had tears in her eyes. When I asked what Sarah was thinking and feeling when she saw the tears, Sarah responded,

I glanced over and of course you feel so bad. I don’t think I realized just how hard it was for her to see because for us it’s every day, we see it, she had no idea. The more I think about it, they were pretty blindsided because all seemed well in their eyes. I felt really bad and like I said, the truth hurts and it wasn’t meant to be hurtful, it was just sharing our data so that they see (February, 2012).

Sarah displayed a level of empathy when she described how she thought about Penny’s parents receiving information about Penny’s academic struggles. However, Sarah did not indicate to the mother that she saw the tears nor did she make an effort either through words or actions to alleviate the mother’s suffering, both of which would have been evidence of compassion.

Sarah shared that, at the conclusion of the conference, she reflected back over it and tried to determine if there was anything she could have done differently to make the conference better for her “client”. She said that her interactions and goals with parents are similar to customer service for a business. She wants to ensure that the parents, the client, see that their child is getting the best services and that the parents are satisfied when they leave. Hearing Sarah refer to the parents as clients did not correlate to an expression motivated by empathy or compassion.

As Sarah continued to talk, almost to herself, she remembered thinking a few days after the conference that she wanted to e-mail or call Penny’s mom. She wanted to touch base with the mom to let her know she and the reading specialists are still available and did not disappear just because the conference was finished.
When I define compassion as the desire to alleviate another’s suffering and empathy as the ability to feel as others feel, I see some evidence that Sarah is empathetic towards parents. However, I cannot make the conclusion, based upon anything that Sarah wrote or said that she is empathetic due to the CARE trainings.

When Nancy explained what she wrote in the pre-conference diary in response to the question, My thoughts about the parent(s) who are scheduled to attend this conference are… she had new thoughts and perceptions about the men.

You know, they are dads. So I just kind of thought, numbers, dads and numbers, maybe they just wanted to focus on numbers because men like numbers. It seemed to make sense to me that that would have been a reason to be so involved with the report card to that extent and that relieved some of my anxiety about the two of them coming in for this conference (February, 2012).

Nancy also described how the pre-conference diary writing was a way for her to think about the men and help her realize how I really think about them and it sort of helped me to control my own feelings and realize why they are maybe doing that and then I can remember that it’s less of them attacking me than so much that they want to either appear like they are really interested or maybe they really are and they really want to understand where the numbers come from. Either way, no matter what it is, they are not trying to attack me (February, 2012).

She no longer believed that the men intended to bully or attack her or that they were insincerely motivated to appear involved in David’s schoolwork. Rather, a level of empathy was displayed as Nancy re-concluded the motivation for the father’s behavior during the last conference as them genuinely interested in the details of David’s grades.
Although this self-reflection resulted in a level of empathy, the question appeared to have led Nancy to this realization rather than her making this discovery from her interaction with the parents during the conference. The way in which this question influenced Nancy’s thinking is indicative of my need as a future researcher to ensure that my questions are not unintentionally influencing the results of my study.

While talking about the fathers, Nancy excitedly asked if she could tell me about a poverty simulation workshop the administrators of her school organized. Nancy said that prior to the workshop, she believed the parents in her school district just needed to take initiative and get a job as a way to leave their poverty situation. She described the workshop as taking place in the school’s gymnasium where businesses, agencies, organizations, and a jail were set up to depict an inner city. Teachers were grouped in a way to represent a family. In addition, they were told how much money and what types of belongings they had. The object of the simulation was for the teachers to experience the conditions typical for their students’ families. This exercise changed Nancy’s perspective about her students’ parents. She said she is now more likely to “give people the benefit of the doubt” and be “more understanding of their emotions when she meets with them”. She can now equate the anger she may see from the parents as not necessarily directed at her, but as a result of their life situation. With this new knowledge and understanding about the families, she said it helped her to not get upset during conferences with parents.

Ironically though, later during the interview, Nancy talked about the family dynamics of the students in her class and how she interprets behaviors she sees from parents during parent-teacher conferences. Specifically, if parents do not talk during
the conference, Nancy infers that they are uninterested and she will not make any effort to communicate with them outside of the conference. She explained:

Situations always change with students in our schools. One minute you talk to dad and the next minute, you don’t talk to dad anymore, you talk to mom. So you never know what’s going on if they don’t come and tell you. Parent-teacher conferences are really telling about a parent. If you don’t talk to me when you are in front of me, you are not going to answer your phone. You are not going to talk when I call you and you are not going to do anything about what I call you about. So, I’m not going to call you. When I have to talk to them about areas that their child needs to improve, they will react negatively, that they are not going to believe me and they are going to say, well, what is everyone else in the class doing, are they distracting him? There is a concern that they are going to say, what’s going on in your classroom? Then it feels like they are attacking me because I don’t have classroom management. Then I get defensive. So I’m thinking they are going to not believe me, not take my word for it, blame it on someone else, and blame it on me (February, 2012).

A level of empathy was revealed through Nancy’s pre-conference diary and her experience with the poverty simulation. However, the conversation during the interview revealed a lack of empathy. Thus, it is difficult to discern Nancy’s level of empathy towards parents. Conversely, there was no evidence of compassion towards parents from either the diary entries or the interview.

The Teachers’ Evaluation of Parenting Decisions

After intently analyzing the data for evidence of empathy and compassion, I discovered that the teachers had specific, evaluative, and comparative statements about the parents’ parenting choices. Since these judgments were so glaring, it made me wonder if the teacher’s expectations and disagreement with the parenting decisions they witnessed impacted their level of empathy and compassion towards them.
Jennifer interjected her dissatisfaction many times throughout our interview as to how she believed her students are parented. For instance, Jennifer stated that she has to teach her students manners such as saying hello in response to someone who says hello to them and the etiquette of having eye contact. She said these interpersonal skills should be, but are not, taught at home as her parents taught her.

Jennifer said her specific issue is Nate’s mother’s lack of following through and how this lack of parenting relates to Nate’s behavior in class. When Nate acts out during class, Jennifer said she gets frustrated and angry because he is interfering with not only his, but 29 other student’s education. Jennifer attributed Nate’s inappropriate behavior in the classroom to his mother’s inability to control him.

When Jennifer talked about the effort that school administrators put into organizing and enticing parents to attend parent-teacher conferences and family events at the school, Jennifer was not in agreement with their tactics. Jennifer said that parents should not need food as a way to motivate them to come to conferences. She believed that parents should recognize that “This is your child, invest in them, we shouldn’t have to bribe you with food”. She then said, “I’m getting on a tangent; these are my own issues with the inner city”.

Sarah, like Jennifer, had thoughts about the parenting decisions of her student’s parents. Sarah mimicked the head shaking Penny’s parents did during the parent-teacher conference as their way to acknowledge that they, too, see their child doing the inappropriate behavior Sarah described. However, Sarah said their decision to ground the student or take things away as a discipline technique did not mesh with Sarah’s
views. Rather, Sarah wished the parents would be “more on top of it” by teaching their child a set of rules for behavior that is appropriate for inside the home and behaviors for outside the home. Sarah also compared her home as a child to the home of her students. Sarah’s memory of her childhood home was that it was in a “nice, family neighborhood” whereas her students live in Section 8 housing which is subsidized housing for people who meet income qualifications.

What struck me with Sarah were the numerous times she compared the parents she worked with to her own parents. For instance, she said “they are not parents like when I was a kid” as she contrasted their non-working life style to her parents’ dedicated work ethic. In addition she mentioned the parent’s inability to assist with homework which she said her parents did regularly. She also remembered that when she was a child, parents believed anything that a teacher said, and if a child were to get in trouble at school, the parents inflicted twice the punishment at home. Her experience as a teacher is just the opposite in regards to parents’ support.

Sarah spoke about the school being in the center of a small town. Thus, she believed that because the parents could walk, there could be “no excuse” for the parents not to attend the conference. She also emphasized that a majority of the parents do not work and since they had open availability they would not have a good reason for not attending the conference. Clearly, Sarah disregarded the life constraints that may hinder a parents’ attendance at a conference. These obstacles may include the need for child care while the parent is at the conference or the distance to the school may be difficult for the parent to walk based upon physical limitations.
Even though Nancy participated in and gave an in-depth description of how the poverty simulation positively impacted her, she, too, along with Jennifer and Sarah discussed parenting. She compared the parenting decisions she saw her students’ parents make to what she thought would have been a better parenting choice. Specifically, Nancy talked about the afternoon when David’s father observed from the hall and then entered the classroom. David’s father said he wanted David moved to a table by himself whenever Nancy was teaching a lesson. Nancy responded that the decision to move David was not “the consequence I would have used or how I would have done it”. Rather, she believed the father should have taken the knowledge that David was not behaving and given David a consequence at home as well as discuss with him appropriate ways to behave.

Although these teachers displayed judgments towards the parents which is contrary to one of the goals of practicing mindfulness, CARE provided them with strategies to support them during the difficult parent-teacher conference. The strategies of setting intention, breathing, and awareness of their emotions proved valuable based upon the teacher’s descriptions. However, based upon my conversations with the teachers, they not only rely on CARE strategies in their role as a teacher, but in their personal life as well.

**CARE strategies in the teacher’s personal life**

It became clear after analyzing the data that all three teachers utilize the CARE strategies in situations not associated with their teaching responsibilities. Each teacher
discussed how valuable the strategies were to their personal life. Thus, a theme not pertinent to answering any of the research questions emerged.

Jennifer spoke about her utilization of her newfound ability to place boundaries between her professional and personal life; a lifestyle change that she attributed to CARE. Prior to CARE, she worked each night until eight or ten o’clock with her motivation being that there were “so many kids that haven’t been saved yet”. However, in conjunction with CARE, and when she realized that she was on the verge of burning out, she knew she could no longer keep the excessive hours. Since altering her hours to ensure that she leaves school at her scheduled time with nothing in her hands that is school related, she feels less frazzled and perceives herself as a better person and better teacher. In addition, she spoke of how this new routine affected her personal life. In the past, she could not visit her brother because she was tired and did not like to see her nieces “because they are kids”. However, this stance created tension between she and her brother. Now that she is no longer working the heinous hours, she is more ready to spend time with family. In fact, the weekend after our interview, she had a trip planned to visit her brother and family and described it as “finally, not dreading the weekend”.

Approximately a month after meeting with Sarah for the interview, I received an e-mail from her. She wanted to tell me about a terrible car accident her son was involved with the night before. Although his car was demolished, he walked away from the accident with only a few minor injuries. Sarah contacted me because she wanted me to know how thankful she was to have the CARE strategy of deep breathing to assist her with the troubling phone call. She described how she laid on the floor and
took deep breathes, just as she had done during the training. She concluded the e-mail by writing, “I truly credit CARE for the calmness in which I handled the situation”.

Jennifer talked about CARE’s benefit with her husband. When issues arise at school Jennifer has learned that “venting to my husband does not work”. She said her husband does not understand and gets angry if a parent is disrespectful to her. His response is to encourage Jennifer to stand up for herself and determine how to make the wrong right. However, Jennifer has learned that is not what she wants or needs. She would prefer that he listen to her and say, “That’s horrible honey”. CARE has helped Jennifer realize and accept what her husband can and cannot do for her emotionally when it comes to school issues. Jennifer is grateful for her colleague who is the one she goes to in order to hear what she needs.

In relating what I learned from the teachers about their experience with a difficult parent-teacher conference, and how uncomfortable I felt in response to the critical perspective the three teachers had of parents, I was curious how my findings correlated with symbolic interactionism, Hargreaves’ emotional geographies, as well as Brofenbrenner’s Ecological Theory. My intention in re-examining these theories and comparing them to what I learned from the teachers was to enable me to understand how it is possible for teachers to have potentially unrealistic expectations and critical judgments of parents. Thus, the following section is how I dissected the theories to further understand my data and the teachers.
CHAPTER SIX: SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM AND THE FIVE EMOTIONAL GEOGRAPHIES

My research focus was centered on parents because of the positive experience I had when I worked, grew, and genuinely connected with parents as the director of Overfield Early Childhood Program in Troy, Ohio. Thus, I recognized my own emotional responses during the interviews and while I read the teacher’s diary entries that pertained to their negative perceptions of parents. As a way to grapple with my discomfort, I turned to the theorists whose work grounded this research. What follows is my attempt to understand the teachers and relate my research questions through the lens of these theorists.

The connection between symbolic interactionism and Hargreaves (2000) five emotional geographies of teaching resonated in the teacher’s responses. For instance, the sociocultural geography recognizes that teachers are often times economically distanced from their students and parents. The ramification of this separation is that teachers tend to stereotype parents and parents tend to stereotype teachers. Symbolic interactionism believes that interactions between people are based upon the meanings people have for each other and the meanings are developed from their interactions (Schwandt, 2007). Some of the meanings these three teachers had of the parents who live in this urban school district came from their descriptions of parents. Parents were said to be angry, abrupt, commanding, uneducated, unemployed, have a sense of entitlement, unique, demanding, and uninvolved. These derogatory descriptors that define the image teachers have of parents may contribute to the strained relationship between the adults. Although some of the mindful strategies that the teachers learned
through CARE were intended to develop a non-judgmental attitude within the teachers towards students, based upon these descriptions of parents, it does not appear that this benefit of mindfulness was applied to their relationship with their student’s parents.

In addition to the sociocultural geography, the interviews exposed the four other geographies of teaching through the symbolic interactionism lens. For instance, the moral geography was prominent throughout the teachers’ responses about the parents. There was a clear difference in what the teachers and parents believed were best for the students. As Jennifer expressed during her interview, she knew she had to suppress her thought that Nate’s mother was doing a terrible job as a mother. Sarah stated that the parents are not parents like when she was a child as she tried to explain her reason for saying the parents are unique. Nancy labeled the step-father’s choice of a consequence for David as one she would not have used. These evaluative remarks represent another example of how the mindful strategies of CARE did not appear to promote a non-judgmental acceptance of parents within the teachers.

The professional geography represents the social distance between parents and teachers. Professional geography is most evident when parents challenge the teachers’ expertise. The three teachers experienced this geography because they entered the parent-teacher conference with the expectation that the parents would question their report about the student. Furthermore, teachers perceived the questions from the parents as an indication that the parents doubted their teaching abilities and judgment. This geography was apparent from listening to the teachers interpret the remarks, questions, and requests from the parents as evaluating their teaching. Thus, anxiety was felt by the teachers both before and during the conference. The teachers used the
CARE strategies of setting intention and breathing to prepare and respond to what they perceived as challenging remarks from the parents.

The political geography component entailed the emotion that the teachers’ experienced in relation to the power they perceived they deserved or relinquished unwillingly to the parents. Nancy reminisced during the interview that she was not leading the conference with the two fathers; rather they were the ones in charge. Finding herself in this situation is unusual because as Nancy explained, forfeiting that role during a conference was not something she relinquishes because “I’m holding the conference, I’m leading the meeting. You can talk, certainly, and ask me questions”. Sarah spoke during the interview about her reliance on either the school’s guidance counselor or Title I reading teacher. She described her reasoning for including them in a parent-teacher conference as a way to provide her with support and a sense of a team as they talk with parents. This coupling represents a sense of power. When there are more than one person giving examples and affirming a finding, it is much more difficult for a parent to dispute. Although it may be unintentional, it represents a distribution of power that benefits the teacher.

The last geography which is the physical component amplifies the disconnect between parents and teachers. This geography represents the time that is essential for parents and teachers to spend together in order to know and understand one another. The parent-teacher conferences take place two times a year for 20 to 30 minutes. Nancy’s words when she saw David’s mother entering the room for the conference were very telling. She had prepared herself to meet with David’s fathers but when she did not see the men but only the mother she realized that her nervousness was attributed to her
not knowing the woman. This conference between the two ladies took place in February, more than five months since the start of the school year; how unfortunate that this amount of time had passed and Nancy did not know the mother of the student with whom Nancy had concerns.

**Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory**

If the tenets of Bronfenbrenner’s theory are to be realized for these three students, it is clear that the physical geography of teaching must be addressed. In Bronfennbrenner’s Ecological Theory, both the teacher and parent represent a microsystem. The face-to-face experiences that the developing person is exposed to from the microsystems initiates and sustains their development. (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). When these two microsystems interact they support the developing child’s growth and are an important contributor to children’s academic and social-emotional success (Iruka, Winn, Kingsley, & Orthodoxou, 2011). In order for the student to experience the benefits that are possible when the two microsystems connect, spending time together appears to be essential.

However, time together is not the only contributor to the disconnect between the parents and teachers. The socioeconomic and ethnic differences between the parents and teachers were prevalent in all three teacher’s interviews. When examining the ethnic demographics of the schools in the United States in 2005, minorities made up 33% of the U.S. population. Hispanics were the largest minority group, representing 14% of the population and Blacks represented 12%. It is predicted that minorities will
encompass 39% to the total population by 2020 (NCES, 2007). During the 2007-2008 school year, there were a total of 3,898,420 teachers in public and private schools in the United States. Of those teachers:

83.5%=White  6.7%=Black  0.5%=American Indian  1.3%=Asian  6.9%=Hispanic (NCES, 2009).

Of the teachers working in city schools during the 2007-2008 school year:

88.2%=White  12%=Black  0.4%=American Indian  2.2%=Asian  13.1%=Hispanic (NCES, 2009).

There is a clear ethnical discrepancy between the students currently and projected to be enrolled in the classrooms and the teachers who are teaching these students. Of the Harrisburg teachers who participated in the CARE training, 100% of them were white. Of the students enrolled in the Harrisburg schools, 80% qualified for reduced lunches (PA Department of Education). The intention of CARE was to provide teachers with mindful awareness strategies to support caring interactions with students and support teachers to be more sensitive to students’ needs (Jennings, Snowberg, Cobia, & Greenberg, 2011). While teachers did appear to apply CARE strategies to take care of their own stresses associated with the conference, it does not appear that the training enabled the teachers to cultivate care or sensitivity towards the parents they interacted with during the difficult parent-teacher conference.
CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study evaluated three early childhood teacher's descriptions of their emotional state before and during a difficult parent-teacher conference and sought to discover if the teachers consciously tried to regulate their emotions during the conference. Since these teachers completed CARE training during the previous school year, I was curious to know if they used any of the CARE strategies during their preparation for or during a difficult parent-teacher conference. Since the development of empathy and compassion toward others are two of the anticipated results of the mindful awareness techniques these teachers learned during the CARE trainings, this study also sought to determine if the teachers expressed evidence of empathy and compassion towards the parents.

While each teacher anticipated the conference with some anxiety, they all had different concerns for their angst. This chapter will:

1. summarize the findings
2. discuss my experience as a researcher
3. determine strengths and limitations of the study
4. provide suggestions for implication
5. conclude with suggestions for future research
Summary of findings

All three early childhood teachers expressed commitment to their profession and diligence in providing the best for their students. Thematic analysis provided a way for me to learn how three early childhood teachers used CARE strategies and regulated their emotions during a difficult parent-teacher conference. The four themes that I discovered were: (a) setting intention, (b) breathing, (c) caring practices, and (d) awareness and response to their emotions during the conference. These four themes were used to answer my first two research questions.

One of the CARE strategies that I hypothesized may be utilized by the teachers was mindful listening. However, once I saw the results of the self-reported questionnaire the teachers completed in the fall of 2011, I found that this strategy was not often used by two of the three teachers. Specifically, Jennifer practiced mindful listening less than one time a month, Sarah reported doing it two to three times a week, and Nancy reported that she never utilized mindful listening. Thus, it was not surprising that since these teachers do not typically use mindful listening, they did not rely on it during the difficult parent-teacher conference.

Setting Intention

What struck me about the teachers’ consistent reliance on setting intention was the motivation they had for their intention. Each of the three teachers described how they anticipated an attack by the parents. As a way to avoid the confrontation, Jennifer had paperwork ready as evidence so that Nate’s mother could not “argue with it”. The way Sarah set intention was to put her focus on what needed to be presented and
shared this organized data with the parents. Sarah also relied on her reading specialists to discuss their findings. She strategized that if there was a “support system” of more than one person telling Penny’s parents of her academic struggles, the parents would be less accusatory. Nancy expected David’s father and step-father to be at the conference and worked meticulously to have David’s work ready at the table with them so that she would not have to experience another “power struggle” with the men. Fortunately, from Nancy’s perspective, the men did not attend.

The three teachers defined their pre-conference work as their way to set intention. Upon analysis of the diary entries and interview transcripts it became evident that the motivation and outcome of this work was not congruent with the benefits of setting intention. Rather, the teachers were determined to be prepared for their self-preservation from accusatory statements that they feared would come from the parents.

**Breathing**

Jennifer, Sarah, and Nancy attributed their reliance on breathing with the CARE training. When Jennifer felt herself getting annoyed and anxious she recognized that she needed to stop. However, getting up from the conference was not possible; so she took deep breaths as a way to “take myself out of the situation, even just for a moment”. She described the breaths as a way to calm her nerves and get her centered to be able to continue with the conference. Sarah said she adapted a version of the breathing strategy by “staying silent and taking my own inner deep breath”. She found this helpful as a way to not say something that she may later regret. Nancy recognized that it is
when she felt tightness in her chest that she took a deep breath as a way to relax her body.

**Caring Practices**

Jennifer was the most vocal of the three teachers about the caring practice she now does for herself that she attributes the CARE training for instilling in her. Specifically and repeatedly, Jennifer spoke about the boundary she now has between work and home. She described her home as a haven and has established a rule that she will not bring school work into her haven. However, she chuckled as she said that during report card grading times, the rule may be broken. Jennifer also acknowledged that she has learned this year that “the key for me to having a good start to the day is not thinking about work until I get there”. Thus, when she experienced insomnia the night before Nate’s conference, she deliberately had to change her thoughts. Purposely, rather than allow her thoughts to focus on what she expected would take place during the conference, she concentrated on what was currently happening inside her home.

Although Sarah said she fights herself for having to stay so late each day after school, she described her self-caring practice as the time she walks her dog. She equated walking her dog with the mindful walking technique of CARE. For it is when she walked her dog that her mind and soul was “clear and cleansed”.

Nancy’s outgoing personality was opposite of Jennifer and Sarah’s more reserved presence. Thus, it was not surprising that Nancy’s self-care strategy was connecting with her best friend and colleague. Nancy was able to articulate that she
needed a place to vent when things became difficult at school. Hence, her confidant is also the person she spends time with outside of school.

**Awareness and response to their emotions during the conference**

Of the three teachers, Jennifer was the one who spoke most often of her feelings throughout the conference. During the hour long interview with Jennifer, she described herself during the parent-teacher conference emotionally as anxious three times, as angry three times, and frustrated and annoyed both one time. When I asked her to elaborate on these feelings, she was consistent in responding that she acknowledged she was experiencing the feelings but made deliberate efforts to not expose them to Nate’s mother. Thus, her reliance on the breathing strategy from CARE enabled her to let the emotions go.

Sarah’s emotions were most discussed while she prepared for the conferences. She described the anticipation of knowing she had to tell parents about the academic issues with their child as “really stressful”. As a way to deal with the stress prior to the CARE training, she used to avoid the work needed to prepare for the conference until there was no more time to organize her materials. When it came to that point she would isolate herself and not allow herself to leave her home until the conference was ready. Sarah attributes the CARE strategies to her new found ability to eliminate the stress from her mind when preparing for difficult conferences. She now thinks about something else and mentally “shuts the door” on what is causing the stress and focuses on preparing for the conference.
For Nancy, she spoke about two conferences because the second conference, which was to be the focus of this study, ended up being with David’s mother. Since David’s mother was in agreement with Nancy’s report about David, the conference was completely different than the first conference that took place a couple of months earlier with David’s father and step-father. Nancy described her emotions with David’s mother as comfortable, connected, relieved, and nervous not because of her anticipation of a difficult conference but because she did not know the woman. However, the emotions Nancy felt during the first conference with the men were not as positive. Specifically, Nancy spoke of being afraid, defensive, tense, angry, attacked and four different times she spoke of being nervous.

I asked Nancy to describe what happens when she experiences these emotions. She spoke about how she pays attention to her feelings by recognizing the feeling and choosing not to act on them. She described this ability to stay non-reactive as the most valuable part of the CARE training and what has changed her the most.

Thus, CARE did have a positive impact on these teachers. Specifically, all three teachers relied upon and individualized the CARE strategies in ways that were most beneficial to them. Each teacher reported using and finding value in CARE’s strategy of breathing, caring practices, and emotional awareness.

The third research question generated two themes. When seeking to discover if the teachers expressed empathy and compassion towards parents I created one theme that was evidence of or lack of empathy and compassion and a second theme that was the teachers’ evaluation of parenting decisions.
Empathy and compassion

My curiosity to learn if the teachers expressed empathy and compassion towards parents was because one of the possible outcomes of mindfulness awareness is the development of empathy and compassion. If the teachers were compassionate I would have heard their desire to alleviate the parent’s suffering. If the teachers were empathetic, I would have had evidence that they were feeling as the parents felt.

It was the data that was generated for this theme that was most disturbing to me as a researcher. Of the three teachers, Sarah was the only one who exhibited a level of empathy towards Penny’s parents. Both Jennifer and Nancy’s interviews and diary journals did not produce evidence that could be categorized as empathy or compassion. While there were some empathetic statements from Nancy as she described the poverty simulation that her school provided to the teachers, the empathy did not appear to carry over to her description of David’s family.

One part of Jennifer’s interview that stood out was her stance, expectation, and description of Nate’s parents. For instance, Jennifer said, “He’s the step-father, so he doesn’t do a whole lot”. It sounded as if this was her judgment of step-fathers in general since she did not give any evidence to this statement that was specific to Nate’s step-father. Jennifer described the interaction between Nate and his mother when Nate answered his mother’s question by saying it was she who he heard and learned the foul language. Although the mother immediately denied the accusation, Jennifer’s thought was that it would not surprise her if it was the mother who modeled the inappropriate language. Jennifer then expounded by saying she pushed her chair back and wished
she had popcorn as she watched the dynamics between Nate and his mother as they discussed the offensive note. Jennifer felt relieved that she was “not the one in the hot seat”. This lack of empathy and compassion was a consistent theme in Jennifer’s interview.

**Teachers’ evaluation of parenting decisions**

A second theme was realized as I searched for evidence of empathy and compassion. All three teachers made comparisons to how they were parented, how they parent, or they made judgments about the parenting decisions they saw from their students’ parents. For instance, Jennifer equated Nate’s lack of response to his mother’s reprimand about the inappropriate note as evidence that Nate and his mother have “no interactions at home or there is no consequence for his behaviors”. Jennifer’s commentary about the note was that “the way she handled it was so different than the way I would handle it”. Sarah described parents as “a different breed”. She elaborated by saying parents are different than when she was a child. For instance, she verbalized her wish that parents would stop the misbehavior of their child “now to make them great kids and get the behavior under control”. However, she says this does not happen because the “kids are a different breed”. She elaborated by saying the students don’t “come in and sit down and listen. They are constantly challenging and wanting to argue”. Nancy remarked that David’s parents “don’t really keep up on their kid’s homework like my parents used to do”.
Experience as a researcher

As I write this paper that details my research journey, I am reminded as to how this research opportunity began. It was a privilege to attend all 30 hours of the CARE trainings in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania during the 2010-2011 school year. What I learned, while I observed and participated, solidified my interest to discover more about CARE and the possible impact it could have on parent-teacher relationships. What intrigued me about CARE was the commitment the developers of this program had to support and teach teachers ways to emotionally navigate the demands of their classrooms. The strategies teachers were taught were motivated by the developers’ desire to improve teachers’ mindful awareness capabilities which in turn would improve their emotional and physical well-being. These, in combination, would then enable the teachers to create a classroom environment within which they would successfully put their best efforts each day. I wondered if these goals for teachers and their classrooms could be transferred to parent-teacher relationships, specifically for this study, during parent-teacher conferences.

What surprised me the most from talking with the teachers was the emotional toil they each encountered in anticipation of the difficult parent-teacher conference. I did not expect to hear how they struggled as they thought about the potential confrontation with the parents. What was consistent with each of the three teachers was that they expected the criticism and negativity of the conference to be directed at them. They assumed parents would question their abilities as a teacher rather than recognize how the student was responsible for the poor grades. As a way to respond and counter the accusations, each teacher overly prepared for the conference. All three teachers had
extensive documentation and samples of the students’ work. The preparation was motivated by their desire to have evidence that would show that it was the student who needed to be the focus of the conversation.

This research also reinforced my desire to understand the dynamics of parent and teacher relationships. As I listened to these three teachers talk about the parents, I could not help but be stunned by their impressions of parents. These teachers work in schools that serve families who would be categorized in the lower socioeconomic level. The teachers would be classified as middle-class. My impression was that the teachers generalized and stereotyped these parents based upon where these families lived, which two of the teachers described as “the ghetto”. I realize that each person has their own understanding of what a ghetto is and what it represents. Although I did not ask for clarification, I cannot help but believe that the images and expectations of people who live in a ghetto would not be positive and, in fact, quite derogatory. It made me question how much of this image that the teachers have of these families influences how they interact and what they expect from these parents. In addition, since there clearly was a cultural and economic difference between the teachers and the families, I wonder if this influenced how each of the adults perceived the role of the parent and the level of empathy and compassion the teachers had towards the parents. Clearly, the teachers were consistent in believing that if the parents did what the teachers thought they should do, the teachers would then be able to do their job as the child’s teacher.

This thinking and mindset is dangerous. Additionally, this judgmental attitude is contrary to the goals of CARE. As educators, we have an obligation to all students to provide the best education possible. To alleviate teachers’ negativity that comes from
their belief that they know what parents should do, parents and teachers must work together as specified through Bronfenbrenner’s ecology of human development theory. Thus, it would be worthy to evaluate if empathy, compassion, understanding, and a partnership could be an outcome of parents and teachers participating in the CARE trainings together.

This research accentuated the fact that these teachers are human beings. Sarah and Nancy are parents. Sarah’s two children have graduated from college and Nancy’s daughter is three years old. Jennifer lives by herself but has family close by. Now that she has control over the demands of her job, she is able to visit her brother and her nieces and nephews. This unsolicited family information was brought up during each of the interviews. The inclusion of their family while answering the interview questions spoke to the fact that there is no separation of themselves as a teacher and as a member of a family, either as a wife, mother, sister or daughter. Their humanness was exposed while discussing their work. It reminded me that a teacher’s whole self is present in her classroom, not just herself as the teacher.

The time spent with these three teachers affirmed how CARE has impacted them in their classroom and how their students are on their mind. Although none of my questions were intended to elicit information about their classroom and students, each teacher did speak of their reliance on CARE strategies as a teacher. For instance, Jennifer talked about her reliance with mindful walking. She said when she begins to feel anxious or annoyed, she knows she needs to “just stop, I have to just take a minute and regroup”. She explained that she mindfully walks out into the hall, does a u-turn,
and returns to the classroom. Jennifer has also introduced this strategy to her students. She explained that she tells them it is a way to get a new start and a new attitude.

Sarah described times in her classroom when “there is a crisis that the kids think is this major crisis”. Rather than responding in a way that continues the feeling of a crisis, Sarah is deliberate in her actions. She takes a few deep breaths and then acts as if she is going “on her merry way”. She has found that approach is successful because it “calms them and has settled them and I build a rapport with them”.

Nancy reminisced of a similar situation in her classroom. “I mean it happens all the time with my kids. I see my kids flip out over something which is small and I am able to not flip out at them, which would have happened in the past, and I'm able to just stay calm, I don’t even get excited, I’m not feeling that emotion”. She detailed how she uses the breathing and “counts to ten once in a while in my head” to enable her to no longer react to these types of scenarios that are a regular occurrence in her classroom.

As I review my findings, it is evident that the CARE training made a positive impact on helping these teachers learn strategies to assist them with the emotional aspects of their teaching, in particular, during a difficult parent-teacher conference. This success should be considered when professional development planners seek ways to support and keep quality teachers in the classroom. However, this study also found a need to provide teachers with strategies to help them develop a non-judgmental attitude towards people who have different values, beliefs, and who come from different socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds.
Strengths and limitations

There were several strengths that contributed to the success of this research. First, since diaries and interviews were used as the source for gathering data, they generated different and helpful information to enable me to answer the research questions. Since the diary writing was done immediately before and very soon after the conference, it enabled the teachers to accurately remember and document what took place.

Not only were the diaries completed in a time frame that allowed for the greatest memory, the interviews were scheduled to enable easy recall as well. I met with each of the teachers within five days of the conference. Thus, the teachers had no problem recollecting what took place during the conference. It was actually impressive to hear the details the teachers included about the conference since they each had completed nearly 20 conferences within two days.

The contribution this research makes to the existing findings about CARE’s impact with teachers is also a strength. CARE has been found to positively impact teachers’ utilization of mindfulness strategies and enables teachers to develop a greater awareness of their stress and typical emotional responses as it relates to their work in the classroom (Jennings et al, 2011). This study found that these three teachers were able to recognize their emotions during the difficult parent-teacher conference and utilized what they learned from the CARE training to assist them in their interactions with parents. The intent of this research is not to declare CARE as the answer to the difficulties that are associated with some parent and teacher encounters,
but it sheds light as to its worthiness and impact with work with parents. Thus, future CARE trainings can include suggestions to teachers to not only use the mindful awareness activities in their classroom, but during interactions with parents as well.

One of the limitations of this study was the number of participants. Since the criteria necessary to be a part of the study limited who could be included, the number dwindled even smaller based upon who showed an interest in participating. Thus, what this study found does not allow for generalization to larger populations of teachers.

Secondly, of the teachers who did participate, they all taught within the Harrisburg, Pennsylvania school district. This school system is situated in a high poverty area, with many students labeled with behavioral and academic difficulties (Jennings, et al, 2011). Thus, these teachers had similar classroom constraints and issues which would not necessarily be the same with teachers from other types of school districts. Hence, it is necessity to consider this study to be more of an exploratory investigation of the impact of CARE with parent and teacher interactions.

Another limitation of this study was the distance between me and the three teachers. We were over an hour apart from each other. Had the distance not been a hindrance, there would have been value to my research and understanding if I had been able to observe each of the students who were the focus of the difficult parent-teacher conferences. The insight I would have gained from meeting and watching these students would have given me a better perspective of these individuals as students within the classroom rather than hearing about them as causes of turmoil between the teacher and the student’s parents.
It must be acknowledged that an additional limitation of this study may include the time between when the teacher’s participated and finished the CARE training and when these difficult parent-teacher conferences took place. The teachers attended the CARE trainings during the 2010-2011 school year. The parent-teacher conferences were in February of the 2011-2012 school year. Thus, since the conferences did not take place during the same school year as the trainings, we do not know the short-term impact of the training to difficult parent-teacher conferences.

I deliberately chose not to observe the conference because I felt that my presence might alter what would have taken place. However, as I reflect back on the method I used for this study, I feel that I might have been able to learn more about the parent-teacher conference if there been an audible or visible way for me to view the meeting. Hearing and/or seeing the conference would have enabled me to more closely experience the interactions that took place between the parents and teachers. This documentation method would have allowed me to generate more questions specific to each conference. Also, I wonder, if I had asked the prepared questions as I did, and then re-asked or re-worded a similar question after the teacher and I listened or viewed a portion of the conference that related to the question, would the teacher’s answer remain the same or change based upon what she heard or saw from the recording. I’m curious to know, if the teachers had listened or seen the conference from either of the documentation methods, whether their answers would have changed. If the answers were different, I wonder if they would have expressed evidence of empathy and compassion toward parents.
Implications for Practice

Forty-six percent of the nation’s teachers are expected to leave the profession by their fifth year in the classroom (NCTAF, 2007). This alarming percentage must serve as a wakeup call to creators of educational policy and school administrators. It is a mistake to ignore the costs to schools, both, financially and personally, of the high turnover rate. The loss is apparent in “time and resources, school cohesion and community, teaching effectiveness, and students’ achievement (Cochran-Smith, 2004). The exodus of teachers from the classroom is due to the pressures from administrators, students, and parents. As a way to persevere, teachers use their emotions to interpret the demands that are placed upon them (O’Connor, 2006). Educational leaders have an obligation to assist teachers in recognizing the emotions associated with teaching and provide strategies for them to rely upon when they encounter an emotional situation. The need for emotionally intelligent teachers to provide excellent teaching is paramount during the current accountability culture that has engulfed our schools.

Thus, the results from this study have implications for the professional development needs of early childhood teachers. Since research has found that interactions with parents are one of the main stress inducers for teachers, teacher education programs must include more preparatory experiences for pre-service teachers. Too often the focus of teacher preparation programs is on the academic skills the prospective teachers must acquire to ensure success in their future students. This focus disregards a major component of teaching, the emotional dynamics that take place each day with students, administrators and parents. Rather than including a small segment about parent-teacher relationships to an existing course, teacher preparation programs would
serve pre-service teachers well by including an entire course to this topic. The course should profess the emotional aspects of teaching and introduce strategies, such as those taught in CARE, that the pre-service teachers could rely on during emotionally demanding situations when they have their own classrooms and encounter difficult parents. In addition, this study accentuates the need for coursework and professional development opportunities for teachers to include ways for them to learn about and understand the realities of parents whose life experiences are completely different from those of their own.

Secondly, administrators and professional development organizers need to understand the value of including mindful awareness professional development opportunities to teachers. This could be achieved if administrators were trained in mindful awareness strategies. Ideally, they too would reap the same benefits that were found with the teachers, namely, a change in mindfulness and time urgency. Hence, administrators and professional development organizers would see the impact emotions have on teaching. This knowledge would enable them to see that once a teacher’s emotions are acknowledged and cared for, the professional development trainings that are more academically focused would be presented to teachers who are more emotionally healthy.

In addition, mindful awareness and emotional training needs to be contextualized. The CARE strategies were presented to teachers for their use in the classroom. Additional training that includes ways for the mindful awareness and emotional training strategies to be used during interactions with parents may enable teachers to manage their stress and improve their relationship with parents. Ideally, this will allow the
interactions teachers have with parents and students to be less volatile and more suited to respectful interactions.

A final implication from the findings of this study and the benefit of offering mindful awareness opportunities to teachers would be that high quality teachers would remain in the classroom. Teachers may experience burnout as a result of stress (Montgomery & Rupp, 2005). CARE offers teachers ways to counteract the stress associated with teaching because mindful awareness has been found to:

1. promote a less defensive and more willing response to challenging events.
2. support the ability to cope with situations perceived as challenging (Weinstein, Brown, & Ryan, 2009).

Thus, teachers would be able to experience and respond to stressful encounters with better emotional understanding.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

These three teachers’ use of CARE was evident and consistent. Breathing before and during the difficult parent-teacher conference was relied upon and useful for each of the educators. What was also apparent with the three teachers was their perceptions of the families that live in lower socioeconomic conditions in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

Research by Annette Lareau found that “working- class and poor parents typically are deferential rather than demanding toward school personnel and they seek guidance from educators rather than giving advice to them” (Lareau, 2003, p.198). This
statement contradicts what my research revealed. On the contrary, two of the three parents were perceived by the teachers as demanding either before, during and/or after the parent-teacher conference.

Can it be that within the last ten years there has been a shift in the thinking of working-class and poor parents in regard to their role in education? Do these parents feel a need to be more verbal and outspoken about their expectations when it relates to their child’s education? If this is so, teachers need to respond to the advocacy efforts by/for marginalized families in a respectful, culturally sensitive (Auerback, 2007) way rather than perceive parents’ requests as course and abrupt.

Lareau’s work also claims that:

There are underlying elements of resistance to the deference working-class and poor parents exhibit toward educators. Mothers who nod in silent agreement during a parent-teacher conference may at home, and within earshot of their children, denounce the educator as unfair, untrustworthy, or mean (Lareau, 2003 p. 199).

As Lareau found, this acknowledgement of what Nancy was saying may have been her “silent agreement” but what she truly believed was expressed once she returned home.

In contradiction to Lareau’s findings, two of the families that were associated with my research made a choice to question and make requests of their child’s teacher. The third mother appeared to be in agreement with all that Nancy said based upon the mother’s verbal and physical responses. However, we are unsure, especially in the light of Laureau’s findings, if the outward appearance of agreement is a true reflection of what the mother was thinking. Thus, future research that included interviews with
parents would provide a way to learn how these parents’ perceive their child’s teacher and their role in the education of their child.

Not only would it be beneficial to interview the parents about how they view themselves in relation to their child’s teacher and education, it would be informative to know how parents feel both before and during the parent-teacher conference. Firstly, it would be helpful to know if the parents anticipate that the conference will be difficult and if so, what they believe the reasons are for why it will be difficult. Their answer in comparison to the teacher’s reason for her labeling the conference as difficult will provide insight as to what each adult is thinking, believing, and bringing to the conference. Secondly, it was evident throughout each interview that the teachers experienced great stress and anxiety in anticipation of the difficult parent-teacher conference. It would be helpful to know if the parents were experiencing similar emotions. Being aware of each adult’s emotions would assist educational leaders in knowing how best to improve the dynamics of a parent-teacher conference.

Conclusion

The ultimate goal for parent-teacher conferences is for the most important adults in a child’s life to convene for thirty minutes to discuss and plan how to enable the greatest success for the child. Although the focus is the child, the emotions between the adults during the conference may interfere with the goal. Teachers’ frustration and anger towards parents may be a precursor to inappropriate responses during the conferences. As my research found, teachers who were trained in CARE utilized
several strategies to assist them when they noticed their emotions escalating. The benefit of using the CARE strategies was evident in many ways:

1. All three teachers experienced anguish when preparing and thinking about the up-coming difficult parent-teacher conference and used a CARE strategy of setting intention to help them alleviate the anguish.

2. Teachers attributed the CARE training to their conscious awareness of what they were feeling. Thus, they acknowledge the feeling they were experiencing before and during the conference and made a deliberate choice in how to de-escalate the emotion.

3. Teachers consistently relied on the breathing technique from CARE when they felt their emotions were intensifying.

Pre-service teachers earn their degrees and enter classrooms academically equipped to teach their students. However, instruction in ways to help teachers recognize and understand their emotions has not been a focus for pre-service training or professional development programs. This neglect may contribute to the exodus of quality teachers leaving the profession.

Policies and mandates require parent-teacher partnerships. However, educational administrators and developers of policy must acknowledge the emotional demands put on teachers. Often times, the emotional friction teachers experience is with parents. Educational leaders must become attentive to the correlation between teacher stress and teacher turn-over. Once this awareness is understood, these leaders will realize the value and necessity of incorporating mindful awareness training
into both pre-service and on-going professional development programs. Thus, quality teachers will remain in classrooms and provide the best for all students. This is essential since the quality of parent-teacher relationships is apparent in student achievement, motivation, and emotional, social, and behavioral adjustment (Walker & Dotger, 2012). Thus, affirming Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Theory of the tremendous impact there is on a student’s overall development when parents and teachers have a connection.

The intent of my research and the findings from my interviews further my interest and commitment to do all I can to be the voice for teachers who deserve knowledge to help them navigate the emotional demands of teaching. When parents and teachers have strategies to assist them with their emotional turbulences and can truly partner together, they, along with their students, will be beneficiaries of priceless life-changing results.
References


PA Department of Education (2012). [http://www.education.state.pa.us](http://www.education.state.pa.us)


APPENDICES

Appendix A: Modification Request Form

MODIFICATION REQUEST FORM

Form Instructions:
- To complete the form, press TAB or SHIFT TAB between boxes and enter an ‘X’ or text. For assistance, contact the Office for Research Protections.
- Since this form does not require signatures, the Modification Request Form and other revised documents may be submitted as separate email attachments.
- Submit any revised or new recruitment materials, informed consent forms, and all other materials as attachments to the application. Do NOT include within the application.
- Handwritten applications will NOT be accepted.

IRB Number: 28900

Project Title: Improving Classroom Learning Environments by Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE)

Principal Investigator: Patricia Jennings  PSU User ID (e.g., abc123): paj16

University Status (Faculty, Staff, Student, etc.): Faculty  Telephone Number: 863-8207
Email Address: paj16@psu.edu                Dept: Prevention Research Center

College: Health and Human Development          Campus: UP

Mailing Address: S126 Henderson Bldg., University Park PA 16802

1. Is this study permanently closed to enrollment?
   _____ No → Skip to Question 3
   ___X___ Yes → Answer Question 2

2. Is participant enrollment being re-opened via this modification request?
   _____ No
   ___X___ Yes

3. Provide the following information:
   - Total number of participants/samples currently approved for enrollment: 190
   - Number of participants/samples enrolled/entered: 149
   - Approved age range of participants: 18-65

4. Choose all of the changes that will be made. Describe the requested changes in #2 below.
   _____ Location changes
   _____ Title change → Provide new title: ______
   _____ Conflicts of interest changes
   _____ Removing personnel
   _____ Inclusion criteria changes
   ___X___ Increasing participant numbers → Indicate number to be added: ___14___
   _____ Exclusion criteria changes
   _____ Decreasing participant numbers → Indicate number to be removed: ______
   ___X___ Recruitment – Advertisement
   ___X___ Study procedures
   ___X___ Compensation
   ___X___ Informed consent form
Adding a funding source  

Include a copy of the grant  

Removing a funding source

Adding personnel → provide the following information below for each person:

- Name
- PSU User ID, if applicable (e.g., xyz123)
- Email address
- Office/mailing address
- Telephone number
- Experience/training received to perform the procedures/techniques (e.g., coursework completed, other research activity)
- Procedures/techniques each person will perform

Has each person completed the required training? If not, training is available at the following locations:
- Basic Training on the Protection of Human Participants: [http://www.research.psu.edu/orp/education/modules/irb/index.asp](http://www.research.psu.edu/orp/education/modules/irb/index.asp)
- HIPAA Training, if applicable: [http://www.research.psu.edu/orp/education/modules/hipaa/index.asp](http://www.research.psu.edu/orp/education/modules/hipaa/index.asp)

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<th>PSU User ID</th>
<th>Mailing Address</th>
<th>Phone</th>
<th>Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer Sharp</td>
<td><a href="mailto:jes552@psu.edu">jes552@psu.edu</a></td>
<td>jes552</td>
<td>S126C Henderson</td>
<td>814-867-3016</td>
<td>Data</td>
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<tr>
<td>collector</td>
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<tr>
<td>Karen L. McCoy</td>
<td><a href="mailto:klm501@psu.edu">klm501@psu.edu</a></td>
<td>klm501</td>
<td>S126C Henderson</td>
<td>814-867-3016</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>collector</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If making changes to the informed consent form(s), recruitment materials and/or instruments, submit the revised forms for review.

5. Briefly describe the anticipated modifications.

We would like to recruit and interview two separate sub-samples from our current participants, one to provide further reflections on their use of skills learned in the CARE program; the other to provide reflections on their use of skills learned in the CARE program in the context of parent-teacher conferences.

All current participants will be sent a preliminary questionnaire (attached) via email (script attached) to determine current work situation and current use of skills learned in the CARE program. Participants who complete and return this initial questionnaire will receive a $5 iTunes gift card via email.
Upon review of the returned preliminary questionnaires, two sub-samples will be contacted and asked to participate in the interviews. Details are below.

Sub-sample #1:

Jennifer Sharp will select 6-10 participants to volunteer to participate in face-to-face, audio recorded interviews, 60 to 90 minutes in length. Jennifer will select the participants from the results of the initial survey based on their reported level of change after participating in the CARE program and then contact them via email (sample script attached). Interested participants will have consent details explained to them over the phone, and consent forms (attached) will be sent to them via email or regular mail to sign and return. Jennifer will conduct the interviews in Harrisburg, in participating teachers’ classrooms. The interviews will ask participants to reflect upon their involvement in the CARE program and their use of skills learned in the program (interview questions attached). Each participant will be compensated with a $50 gift card to Amazon.com upon completion of the interview.

Sub-sample #2:

Up to four participants will be selected to volunteer to participate in face-to-face, audio recorded interviews, 60 to 90 minutes in length. Karen McCoy will contact chosen participants via email (sample script attached) and interested participants will have consent details explained to them over the phone, and consent forms (attached) will be sent to them via email or regular mail to sign and return. Consented participants will also be asked (email scripts attached) to keep a diary before and after their parent-teacher conferences (diary page sample attached). Interviews will be conducted by Karen in the teachers' classrooms in Harrisburg. The interviews will focus on utilization and usefulness of strategies learned in the CARE program during parent-teacher conferences (questions attached), and the diary pages will be collected. Each participant will be compensated with a $50 gift card to Amazon.com upon completion of the interview.

Consent documents for both sub-samples contain the statement that participants may be contacted 2-3 weeks following the initial interview via phone or email with brief follow-up questions. Because these follow-up questions will be based on participants’ initial interviews, new questions, scripts, and contact protocol will be submitted as a new modification after the initial interviews. No participants will be contacted for follow-up until approval has been granted from ORP.

6. Describe the reason(s) for the anticipated modifications.

We would like to learn more about teachers’ utilization of skills learned in the CARE program in various contexts. These data will be used in Jennifer Sharp’s and Karen McCoy’s dissertations.
7. Does this modification affect the risk(s) to participants?

   ___ No

   Yes → Explain how the modification affects the risk(s) to participants: ______

8. Does this modification affect the benefits to participants?

   ___ No

   Yes → Explain how the modification affects the benefits to participants: ______

9. Will this modification affect currently enrolled participants’ willingness to continue in the study (i.e., revised study procedures, changes in compensation, etc.)?

   No currently enrolled participants → Skip to Question 11

   ___ No → Skip to Question 11

   Yes → Answer Question 10

10. How will currently enrolled participants be informed about the changes requested in this modification?

    Participants will complete a new informed consent form. → Submit the new informed consent form for review.

    Participants will complete an addendum informed consent form. → Submit the addendum informed consent form for review.

11. Is an informed consent form being submitted with this modification?

    No → Finished with the “Modification Request Form”

    ___ Yes → Answer Questions 12 and 13

12. Is an existing and previously approved informed consent(s) form being revised and/or replaced?

    ___ No –
____ Yes \(\rightarrow\) Which consent form(s) are being revised and/or replaced? If possible, identify by Document Number.

13. Is a new informed consent form(s) being added to the existing, previously approved consent form(s)?

_____ No

\[\_X\_\text{ Yes}\]
Appendix B: Recruitment Script

1. Original CARE sample participants will be emailed an initial survey with the following script:

“We would like to assess your current use of the skills learned in the CARE for Teachers program that you participated in during the (semester, year) semester. Would you please take a few minutes to fill out the attached survey and email it back to us? Upon completion of the survey, you will receive a $5 iTunes gift card for your time. Thanks very much!”

2. Potential sub-sample participants will be contacted via phone or email with the following script:

“Your responses to a recent CARE survey indicate that you were positively impacted in some way by your participation in the CARE for Teachers program. Based on your responses, I’d like to talk with you to learn more about the ways in which you use the skills you learned in CARE. Would you allow me to interview you to reflect on your involvement in CARE now that you’ve completed the program? I am requesting 60-90 minutes of your time, and realize your time is valuable. In appreciation of your time, you will receive a $50 Amazon.com gift card upon completion of the interview. Do you have any questions? Would you like to participate?”

3. Sub-sample #2 participants will be emailed a request for taking notes pre- and post-parent-teacher conferences with the following script:

“In preparation for our interview, please choose three parent-teacher conferences to concentrate on. You will be asked questions about this conference in our interview. Please fill out the attached diary entries directly before and after this conference, and I will collect them from you at the interview. Please let me know if you have any questions. Thank you!”
Appendix C: Fall 2010 Questionnaire

Dear CARE participants,

We hope the school year is going well for you! As we continue our work, we would like to get updated information from you. Upon completion and receipt of this questionnaire, you will receive a $5.00 iTunes gift card.

Name:_____________________ e-mail:_____________________

1. Are you currently teaching?  Y   N
If no, what is your current position?: ______________________
If yes:
Current school district:______________________________
Current School:____________________________________
Grade level:_______________________________________

2. To what extent are you using CARE skills? (Place an “X” on the scale below)

   1_________________________________________5
   None                                           Rarely                                                   Daily

3. If you are using CARE skills, what are you using and how often?
   ____Breathing   How often___________________________
   ____Setting intention  How often____________________
   ____Mindful walking/standing during class  How often_______
   ____Mindful listening    How often____________________
   ____Caring practice to self and others    How often________
   ____Body Scan     How often________________________}_{
   ____Mindful eating  How often________________________}_{

We may soon contact you to offer you the opportunity to participate in an interview about your use of CARE skills.

If you participate in an interview, you will receive a $50 gift certificate from Amazon.com. Thank you!
Appendix D: Jennifer’s use of CARE strategies

Jennifer’s use of CARE strategies as self-reported in the fall of 2011:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Breathing</th>
<th>Setting Intention</th>
<th>Mindful Walking</th>
<th>Mindful Listening</th>
<th>Caring Practice</th>
<th>Body Scan</th>
<th>Mindful Eating</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daily</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2-3x/wk.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1x/wk.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3x/mth.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 1x/mth.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
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### Appendix E: Sarah’s use of CARE strategies

Sarah’s use of CARE strategies as self-reported in the fall of 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Breathing</th>
<th>Setting Intention</th>
<th>Mindful Walking</th>
<th>Mindful Listening</th>
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<th>Body Scan</th>
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<td>2-3x/wk.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1x/wk.</td>
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<td>✔️</td>
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Appendix F: Nancy’s use of CARE strategies

Nancy’s use of CARE strategies as self-reported in the fall of 2011

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Daily</th>
<th>2-3x/wk.</th>
<th>1x/wk.</th>
<th>2-3x/mth.</th>
<th>Less than 1x/mth.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Breathing</td>
<td>Setting Intention</td>
<td>Mindful Walking</td>
<td>Mindful Listening</td>
<td>Caring Practice</td>
<td>Body Scan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Nancy used Breathing and Setting Intention daily.
- Nancy used Mindful Walking and Mindful Listening 2-3x/wk.
- Nancy used Caring Practice and Body Scan 1x/wk.
- Nancy used Mindful Eating 2-3x/mth.
- Nancy used Mindful Practice and Body Scan less than 1x/mth.
- Nancy never used Body Scan and Mindful Eating.
Appendix G: Interview Guide

These eight questions will be asked of each teacher with follow-up questions to be determined based upon each teacher's response.

1. Talk to me about your expectations, thoughts and feelings about parents as you prepared for the parent-teacher conference.

2. Can you describe in as much detail as possible what happened during the parent-teacher conference?

3. What did you experience and feel during the conference?

4. What did you do in response to what you were feeling?

5. How is what you chose to do during the conference the same or different than what you had done during conferences prior to your involvement with CARE?

6. If you used a CARE strategy during the conference, what was the result of using it?

7. How would you describe the emotional climate of the conference?

8. Can you tell me what your thoughts and feelings are about parents now that the conference is finished?
Appendix H: Pre-Conference Diary Prompt

Teacher’s Study ID: ______________________________

Conference #____________________________________

My expectation(s) for this conference is:

I have this/these expectations because:

I hope…
Appendix I: CARE Post-Conference Diary Prompt

Teacher’s Study ID: ____________________________

Conference #______________________________

Compared to what I expected, the conference…

During the conference, I…

My thoughts about the parents after the conference are…

I would describe the atmosphere of the conference as…
Appendix J: Initial Codes and Themes

Initial Codes:

Thinking before conference
Behaviors before conference
Description of parents before
Description of parents after
Feelings during conference
Expectations-words from parents
Use of CARE during
CARE use in the classroom
Stressors from the job
Description of socio/econ. level
How they were parented
Preparation for conference
Benefits of CARE
Training focused on socio-economic differences

Feelings before conference
Expectations for conference
Description of parents during
Feelings before conference
Feelings after conference
Use of CARE before
Parents’ description of students
CARE use in personal life
Description of students
Parenting decisions
Strategies used besides CARE
Interactions during conference
Future interactions with parents

Initial Themes:

Setting intention
Caring practices
Stressors from the job (not p-t conf.)
Emotions felt during conference
Support from others
Teachers’ evaluation of parenting decisions
Parents’ descriptions of the student

Breathing
Preparation for the conference
Emotions felt before conference
Emotions felt after conference
CARE in personal lives
Vita
Karen L. McCoy

FORMAL EDUCATION

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<tr>
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<th>Degree</th>
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<td>The Pennsylvania State University</td>
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<td>PhD-C&amp;I-Early Childhood</td>
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<tr>
<td>The University of Dayton</td>
<td>1999</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ohio University</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Masters in Family Life/Child Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ohio University</td>
<td>1982</td>
<td>Bachelors in Elementary/Early Childhood Ed.</td>
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Higher Education Teaching

Defiance College                      | Defiance, Ohio         | 2012-present                                |
                                          |                        | Assistant Professor of Early Childhood Education |

The Pennsylvania State University      | State College, Pa.     | 2010-2012                                  |
                                          |                        | As part of my assistantship, I teach undergraduate, early childhood courses as well as supervise pre-service teachers in early childhood programs throughout the community. |
Wright State University                | Dayton, Ohio           | 2002-2007                                  |
                                          |                        | Part-time Instructor of Graduate classes in Early Childhood Education. |
                                          |                        | Part-time supervisor of prospective elementary teachers in elementary classrooms. |
Edison State Community College          | Piqua, Ohio            | 2000-2009                                  |
                                          |                        | Part-time Instructor teaching courses focusing on special education, Reggio Emilia, and curriculum. |

Administration

Overfield Early Childhood Program      | Troy, Ohio             | 1999-2009                                  |
                                          |                        | Director of a non-profit, early childhood program for children between the ages of two through kindergarten. The philosophy was inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach. |
                                          |                        | Responsibilities: curriculum, budget, hiring, organize professional development opportunities, marketing, grant writing, NAEYC re-accredited twice during my tenure. |

Lawnview School                       | Urbana, Ohio           | 1993-1999                                  |
                                          |                        | Director of Education for a program serving children birth up to the age of 22 with developmental disabilities. |
                                          |                        | Responsibilities: ensured legal requirements were followed for all qualified students, worked with special education supervisors from around the county to keep them informed of their student's needs, supervised a staff of 45, oversaw budget and expenses, wrote grants to support teacher/student needs, and organized professional development opportunities. |

Presentations
