PROFESSIONAL IDENTITIES:
A NARRATIVE INQUIRY OF PUBLIC PRESCHOOL TEACHERS

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Using narrative inquiry, the researcher examined how five public preschool teachers’ understand and negotiate their professional identities within the context of a major metropolitan school district. Based on the premise that identities are socially constructed, individually understood, and negotiated within social spaces, the researcher examined participants’ lived stories through the three dimensions of space: backward/forwards, inward/outward, and situated in place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). These three dimensions provided insight into how participants have come to understand their professional identities throughout their life experiences and how they choose to author their identities in response to multiple constructs of what is professional.

Findings from this narrative inquiry suggest that participants draw from their personal histories to understand the significance of relationships and knowledge to their professional work. Findings also suggest that how participants understood relationships and knowledge were often competing with the constructs promoted by the district through dominant discourses. As a response, participants enacted their own understandings of their professional identities by asserting acts of agency within their classrooms and within social spaces.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Much like any morning, many of the children from the preschool program were already present and were actively involved in morning activity centers when I arrived. This integrated preschool classroom consisting of six children from the County Board of MR/DD and six children from the Head Start program was located in the center of an urban housing project. Our classroom was part of a wider collaboration that brought together preschool children from the County Board of MR/DD, two local Head Start agencies, and the metropolitan public preschool program and existed across three different locations within the county.

The children from the county special education program were brought to school by a bus that usually did not arrive until 20 minutes past eight o’clock. It was now eight o’clock and the morning ritual was just the same as any other morning. When I walked through the door, I could usually count on hearing my name ring throughout the classroom as a stampede of little people raced to greet me. As always, I would greet them with excitement as I gave each of them a hug and a thank you for the nice warm welcome. Yes, everything was typical, even the look of despair on my co-teacher, Mrs. Thomas’, face, as we made eye contact during the commotion of my arrival. I finished greeting the children and went over to meet her at our cluttered desk space. In between the piles of books and paperwork nestled between the computer and the sink was a box and a memo from the Head Start headquarters.
Although we worked for two different agencies, Mrs. Thomas for Head Start that served children who were considered “at risk,” and I for the county board of MR/DD that served children with special needs, we worked as equals in a co-teaching relationship that viewed our students as a single classroom community within this shared space. While there were many more classrooms like ours throughout the larger collaboration, we were the only classroom in this particular building that had this special relationship; the rest of the classrooms were strictly preschool classrooms.

It was clear that there were different notions about the abilities and roles of teachers across the different programs. Within the county board of MR/DD, teachers were often brought to the table to discuss planning and assessment procedures, whereas teachers were not included in these discussions within either of the Head Start agencies or the public preschool program. It was common for Mrs. Thomas and other teachers who worked for these programs to only hear about mandatory changes through memos and scheduled trainings.

I can still hear Mrs. Thomas’ voice of despair as she said, “Look at what they are making me do this time.” The memo announced new planning procedures that were to be aligned with the new packaged curriculum model and state standards. The new requirements included multiple recording forms that made it very challenging for us to continue with the emergent curriculum we had been developing with the children all year.

Outraged I responded with a long list of reasons of why I thought the new mandates were not appropriate for our classroom and our shared philosophy. Although
Mrs. Thomas agreed, she believed there was nothing we could do. Determined to do what I thought was best for the children in our classroom I told Mrs. Thomas that we would just have to find another way. Wary of the consequences of our resistance to the mandate, Mrs. Thomas reluctantly agreed to work toward creating our own planning tools. Once we were happy with our new design that included the required aspects from each agency but also allowed us to continue with our emergent curriculum practice, I placed a call to my coordinator to schedule a meeting with both agency coordinators. Whereas the office of MR/DD was very excited that we had taken the time to work toward making our partnership more effective, we did not hear back from the Head Start agency’s corporate office. The only word of approval we received from the Head Start agency was via word of mouth through the MR/DD coordinator.

Whereas we celebrated a small victory in defining our own professional roles in establishing our own planning tools, we were well aware of our marginalized position as teachers. Although I resigned the next year, Mrs. Thomas continues to teach within the integrated classroom. The next school year I asked her if she was continuing with the innovations we developed. She sighed and then reminded me of the position she was in where her compliance to agency directives meant job security.

This vignette is an account of a struggle that my co-teacher and I faced as we strived to define our professional identities. As I have continued to refer back to this and similar instances throughout my career, it is now with the lens of a researcher that I have become more curious about such struggles that teachers face.
Statement of the Problem

The literature suggests many different notions about what is professional (e.g., Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Henderson & Gornik, 2007; Osgood, 2004). My ideas about my professional roles as a teacher were quite different than what the Head Start agency or the public school district expected from teachers. Such a diverse array of interpretations of what is professional can cause struggles for educators as they attempt to define themselves as professionals. As such, I conducted a narrative study to better understand how five public preschool teachers understand and negotiate their professional identities within a major metropolitan public school district.

Purpose of the Study

Studying how five public preschool teachers understand and negotiate their professional identities within a major metropolitan school district is important because there are many different and sometimes competing notions about the roles and characteristics of a professional. While public preschool teachers exist within a shared school context that promote particular notions about what is professional, teachers are autonomous individuals that may also encounter and embrace other notions about what is professional. As such, it is important to study how public preschool teachers understand and negotiate their professional identities through the shared stories of their lived experiences.

The scope of the literature that discusses the characteristics of a professional is vast and suggests that what is professional is interpreted in many different ways. Various notions of what it means to be professional are often born out of broader discourses that
privilege particular ways of knowing, doing, being, and behaving. For example: a rationality discourse of professional has given rise to the notion of professional as knowledgeable of scientifically proven theory (e.g., United States Department of Education). A managerial discourse of professional has given rise to the notion of professional as a technician (Devaney & Sykes, 1988; Mead, 2008; United States Department of Education, 2001), entrepreneur (Groundwater-Smith & Sachs, 2002; Osgood, 2004, 2006b; Sachs, 2000, 2001) and service provider (e.g., Sisson, 2009). An emotionality discourse of professional has given rise to the notion of professional as caring (e.g., James, 2006; Noddings, 2006; Osgood, 2004, 2006b; Vogt, 2002) and passionate (e.g., Hargreaves, 1998; Moyles, 2001) and a democratic discourse of professional has given rise to the notion of professional as a democratic leader (e.g., Henderson & Gornik, 2007; Henderson & Kesson, 2004; Noddings, 2006; Rodd, 2006), critically reflective (Brookfield, 1995; Osgood, 2006a; Schön, 1983) and an activist (e.g., Groundwater-Smith & Sachs, 2002; hooks, 1994; Freire, 2007; Osgood, 2006a; Sachs, 2000, 2001).

The context of public schools is unique for preschool teachers as a growing emphasis on efficiency and accountability in American public schools has led to a characterization of a professional as efficient which often places them in the role of a technician that follows standardized procedures. Educational policies that govern the public school context send a particular message about the professional role of the teacher. The emphasis on efficiency in the current No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB; United States Department of Education, 2001) emphasizes performance, standardized
approaches, and accountability as a way to ensure quality of education (Osgood, 2004, 2006a, 2006b; Sachs, 2001; Woodrow, 2008).

As part of this larger trend of emphasizing quality in terms of performance, standardization, and accountability, early childhood education has gained greater attention by politicians and business leaders as an essential component in students’ school success and in the overall health of the nation’s economy (Mitchell, 2007). Of particular concern have been children between the ages of three and five who are from low-income or minority families. Legislation such as the NCLB (United States Department of Education, 2001) and its sister policy, Good Start, Grow Smart of 2002 (United States Department of Education, 2006) have placed emphasis on minimizing the gap between minority children and their peers and have identified the preschool years as being important in this endeavor.

Many states have responded to this issue by providing funding to local school districts that provide public preschool programs for low-income and minority children. Currently 55% of the children in the United States who attend publicly funded preschool programs attend those operated by public school districts (Mead, 2008). As such, the context of a major metropolitan school district to study how five public preschool teachers understand and negotiate their professional identities served as an appropriate research site as it is more closely representative of this population of teachers and the environment in which they work.

The association of preschool with public primary schools resembles a similar move made by kindergarten in the early 20th century. While kindergarten educators did
receive an increase in professional status and wages in becoming more aligned with the 
academic goals of primary school, the influence of particular notions of what is 
considered professional within public schools impacted the professional actions of 
kindergarten teachers at the cost of some of their foundational philosophical beliefs that 
originally informed the characteristics of kindergarten professionals (Beatty, 1995; 
Bloch, 1987). In understanding that professional actions and professional identities hold 
a reciprocal relationship (Watson, 2006) and with a growing number of preschool 
classrooms being incorporated into public school systems, the question that remains is, 
how do preschool teachers make sense of and negotiate their professional identities 
within this unique context. In particular, the field must wrestle with what is lost and/or 
gained through such association.

Given the broad range of different and sometimes competing interpretations of 
professional roles and characteristics and the current context of public preschools, I 
focused this narrative study on how five public preschool teachers understand and 
negotiate their professional identities within a major metropolitan school district. Below 
I discuss the focus of this research highlighting my theoretical understanding of identity, 
research method, and research questions.

Theoretical Perspective

For this narrative research I draw on cultural models theory (Holland, Lachicotte, 
Skinner, & Cain, 1998) to understand professional identities. Cultural models theory 
suggests that professional identities are socially constructed, individually understood, and 
negotiated in social spaces. In drawing on Vygotsky’s (1978, 1997) social constructivist
perspective and Bakhtin’s (1981) notion of dialogism, cultural models theory is used to
describe the significance of context as figured worlds; individuals understanding of
identity as historically situated; and the use of agency in the negotiation of identities.

I believe that how individuals understand their own professional identities is in
part influenced by the practices, beliefs, and values they experience in social settings.
Holland and her colleagues (1998) build from Vygotsky’s (1997) discussion of the
imaginative world of play to describe the significance of context as figured worlds.
Imaginative or figured worlds are social and cultural spaces where individuals often share
particular beliefs and values and choose to act accordingly. Figured worlds are the social
spaces where individuals are involved in interoperating social matters of worth, status,
and value of individuals, actions, and artifacts (Holland et al., 1998). While figured
worlds are significant, professional identities are not merely social constructs that are
bestowed onto individuals. There is an internal component that informs how individuals
understand and negotiate professional identities.

In using cultural models theory I believe that professional identities are
historically situated in that how they are socially constructed is influenced and shaped by
each figured world that includes a local history of experience, culture, discourse, and
relationships that have also been influenced by broader historical struggles (Holland &
Lave, 2001). Individuals enter into figured worlds with their own personal histories.
How individuals understand their own professional identities within any given figured
world is influenced by their own personal history of experiences from multiple figured
worlds. Individuals can draw on past experiences from multiple figured worlds to enact
their understanding of their professional identities. As individuals enact a particular understanding of their professional identities they are also making a claim for a particular vision for the future (Holland & Lave, 2001). As there are multiple versions for the future, individuals may find themselves in a position where they must negotiate their understanding of professional identity in particular figured worlds.

Holland and her colleagues (1998) drew on Bakhtin (1981) to describe the use of agency in the negotiation of identities. Individuals are always in a state of being “addressed” and in the process of “answering” (Holland et al., 1998; Holquist, 2001). Individual understandings and acts of negotiation are realized through the language and practices that we undertake. The language and practices individuals use to “answer” or author their professional identities within a particular figured world derive from their personal histories and are connected to a vision of the future (Holland et al., 1998; Holland & Lave, 2001). Agency is significant to the discussion of professional identities because individuals are autonomous; while some may choose to embody social constructs others may choose to reject or improvise. With a theoretical perspective derived from cultural models theory I now discuss the research focus and questions for this narrative study.

**Research Focus and Questions**

I engaged in a narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) to study how five public preschool teachers understand and negotiate their professional identities within a major metropolitan school district. I chose the narrative inquiry approach because it allowed me to understand how public preschool teachers make sense of and negotiate the
multiple and sometimes competing notions of professional. The narrative approach is unique because it provides a space for public preschool teachers’ voices to be heard. In understanding the construction and negotiation of professional identities as a social phenomenon, the narrative approach allowed me to explore how individuals make sense of the multiple messages they receive about what is professional through the stories that they shared. The nature of narrative inquiry is to focus on depth rather than breadth, thus I have chosen to focus this research on five public preschool teachers.

**Narrative Inquiry**

In supporting my theoretical understanding of professional identities, narrative inquiry provided a useful framework for studying how participants’ past, present, and future contexts influenced their own understandings of their professional identities. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggested a three dimensional framework to explore not only the contextual influences (situated in place) but to also explore influences from teachers’ past experiences and future goals (backward and forward) as well as individual teachers’ internal understandings and responses to outside influences (inward and outward) through their stories of their experiences.

In focusing on the individual shared stories of public preschool teachers I recognized that each participant is an embodiment of lived stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). My goal in this narrative research was to provide a space for the voice of public preschool teachers to be heard as they shared stories that represented their understandings and negotiations of their professional identities.
The focus of this narrative research was on the stories of five public preschool teachers who worked in a major metropolitan public school district located in the Midwest. Focusing on the stories of teachers within the same school district allowed me to understand how different individuals made sense of this shared context. Being that any given school within this major metropolitan public school district only housed a limited number of preschool classrooms with two to three public preschool teachers, I decided to study two groups of teachers from two different schools. In placing a call for participants I only received interest from a total of five teachers across two schools that were available to participate. While purposeful sampling was used in choosing the type of school district, I used convenience sampling in choosing to include all five volunteer participants (Creswell, 2007). Including only five participants allowed me to explore in-depth the individual stories of five teachers’ experiences within two sites through the three dimensions of space described. What follows is a brief description of the main and supporting research questions for this project.

**Main and Supporting Research Questions**

The main research question for this research project was: “How do five public preschool teachers understand and negotiate their professional identities within a major metropolitan public school district?”

I developed five subsidiary research questions to reflect the three dimensions of space identified by Clandinin and Connelly (2000). In looking forward/backward I was interested in understanding how individuals’ life histories and visions for the future inform how they currently understand and negotiate their professional identities. In
looking inward/outward I was interested in understanding how individuals internalize, make sense of, and respond to the outside messages they receive about their professional identities. In situating this study in place I was interested in understanding the influence of the particular context. Each supporting question and dimension of space is further outlined in Table 1.

Table 1

*Dimensions of Space and Supporting Questions*

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<tr>
<th>Dimension of Space</th>
<th>Supporting Research Questions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Backward</td>
<td>How does public preschool teachers’ biographical context contribute to their understanding about the roles(s) and/or characteristics of the teacher as a professional?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forward</td>
<td>What professional goals do public preschool teachers have for themselves?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inward</td>
<td>In what ways do these five public preschool teachers reflect upon how their understanding of their professional identities positions themselves in the context of public school education?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outward</td>
<td>How do public preschool teachers understand and respond to the contextual messages they receive about their roles as professionals?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situated in Place</td>
<td>What challenges and supports do public preschool teachers feel they have as they strive to implement their understandings of their roles and professional identities in the public school context?</td>
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With an understanding of my main and supporting research questions I now discuss the contribution this study makes to the research literature.

**Contribution to the Research Literature**

Individual teachers understand and negotiate their professional identities in different ways. Inspired by my own experience as a preschool teacher this narrative
research contributes to the literature on teachers’ professional identities by providing a space for the lived stories of public preschool teachers to be heard. Researchers agree that the voice of teachers who work with our youngest children has been underrepresented within the research on professional identities (McGillivrary, 2008; Mitchell, 2007).

While some research focuses on the professional identities of preschool teachers (Osgood, 2004; Sachs, 2001; Vogt, 2002; Woodrow, 2008), these researchers have focused more broadly on the shared professional identities of a wider group of preschool teachers and thus research methods have focused on understanding breadth rather than depth. The construction of professional identities is complex. Sharing the lived stories of how five public preschool teachers understand and negotiate their professional identities provides an understanding of how social constructs of professional identities are actually realized by individuals.

The existing literature suggests that there are many different interpretations about what is professional. While some researchers show a growing concern for competing notions of professional, the literature I reviewed more narrowly focuses on the opposition between an entrepreneur professional identity and caring professional identity (Osgood, 2004; Woodrow, 2008) and entrepreneur professional identity and activist professional identity (Sachs, 2001). The research I present here contributes to the body of literature concerned with competing notions of professional by exploring the multiple constructs that each participant draws upon and how they negotiated their professional identities within a shared context of one metropolitan school district.
Studying the professional identities of public preschool teachers, specifically those who teach in a major metropolitan public school district, was important because these teachers represent the larger population of public preschool teachers where 55% of all children who attend publicly funded preschools attend those operated by public school systems (Mead, 2008). Whereas this study was not designed to be generalized, in providing rich descriptions of the stories of five public preschool teachers from a large metropolitan school district, readers will be able to make their own connections as they relate to their own contexts.

**Definition of Terms**

A description of key terms used throughout this research is necessary at this juncture in the discussion on the professional identities of public preschool teachers. Here I have chosen to define these terms as I understand them and use them within the parameters of this research proposal.

**Co-teacher:** One partner in a teaching team where team members have the same or equal responsibilities.

**Curriculum:** There is a wide variety of definitions of curriculum. For the purpose of this study I used Eisner’s (2002) definition of curriculum as, “a series of planned events that are intended to have educational consequences for one or more students” (p. 31). Eisner’s definition of curriculum includes the intended or planned aspect of curriculum as well as the operational or experienced aspect of curriculum. The distinction between planned and experienced curriculum is important because plans are
not always actualized in the way they were intended nor do they always live up to the expectations conceived.

The term, packaged curriculum, refers to a planned curriculum that has been designed by a third party and distributed to different educational settings to be followed by teachers.

Democracy: While democracy is often used to refer to a form of government it is used throughout this document to describe a model of associated living where members take equal responsibility for the wellbeing of others to promote equity and social justice (Dewey, 1916/2005). Being democratic means that someone has taken on the responsibilities noted in a democracy.

Discourse: A shared language that promotes particular values about knowledge and ways of being that include particular rules, values, goals, matters of worth, artifacts, and characters. Dominant discourses, taken-for-granted as “truth,” privilege certain ways of knowing and being over others, thus marginalizing individuals with discourse that are different (Holland et al., 1998). Discourses can be very powerful in informing an understanding of professional identities. Discourses connect values and beliefs with particular ways of being through a shared language and use of artifacts. Artifacts and discourses, however, can only sustain meaning through the acts of individuals who choose to embody or sustain their particular meanings.

Early childhood education: Refers to programs that focus on the education and care of young children from birth to age eight (Morgan, 2007). Early childhood educational programs may include nursery schools, day care centers, public and private
preschool, primary school, and kindergarten, just to name a few. For the purpose of this research I used the term early childhood education to refer to the broader field that works with children birth to age eight. However, when specifically discussing the context of this study distinction is made to refer to the particular context of public preschool.

Figured worlds: Social spaces that are developed with a common discourse that includes particular rules, values, goals, matters of worth, artifacts and characters. Figured worlds are spaces where individuals understand identities as they relate to their understanding of the beliefs of the group and their position within the group (Holland et al., 1998).

Public preschool special education teacher: Teachers who teach public preschool children who have been identified as having a special need.

Public preschool teachers: Teachers who teach preschool children between the ages of three and five in the public school context.

Road Map of the Document

Within chapter 2 of this dissertation, Understanding the Literature, I explore the context of public preschools as they are experienced today and make the case for focusing this narrative study on public preschool teachers in particular. I then describe four discourses of professional that have given rise to multiple constructs of professional. Next I provide a discussion of the body of literature that has assisted me in understanding the construction of professional identities.

In chapter 3, Methodology, I further describe the use of the narrative approach for this study and carefully outline the main and supporting research questions. I then
describe methods used for participant selection, data collection, analysis, and ethics. I also include a discussion on how I established trustworthiness of this study.

Within chapters 4, 5, and 6 I present the findings from this narrative inquiry. In chapter 4 I discuss *The Importance of Relationships* paying particular attention to the stories of participants’ personal histories that have influenced their understanding of the importance of relationships and how they described the importance of relationships with students, families, principals, and colleagues in their professional work. Within chapter 5, *Knowledge*, I discuss how participants understand the importance of knowledge in their professional work. In doing so, I also discuss how participants’ constructs of knowledge competed with those that stemmed from district wide discourses. In chapter 6, *Negotiating Professional Identities*, I discuss how participants assert agency in enacting their professional identities within a context that promoted professional roles and characteristics that were competing with their own understandings of who they were as professionals. As such I describe examples of how participants enacted agency within the confined spaces of their classrooms and within the more social spaces of faculty meetings.

Within the final chapter, *Discussion and Implications*, I discuss the implications this research has in informing future teacher education programs and public preschool teachers. In particular I focus on findings that make a contribution to the understanding of personal histories on teachers’ practices as well as the struggles that teachers faced in a context that promoted professional roles and characteristics that were competing to their own constructs of their professional identities.
CHAPTER II
UNDERSTANDING THE LITERATURE

Within this chapter, I discuss the literature that has assisted me in understanding the significance of studying public preschool teachers’ professional identities. I describe the significance of this study as it is situated within a unique context and informed by multiple discourses, and bring to light the complexities in understanding professional identity.

In the first section, Understanding the Context of Public Preschool, I discuss the context of public preschool and how the historical move of kindergarten teachers to affiliate with primary schools resembles the relationship between preschool teachers and public schools. This literature sheds some light on the significance in studying preschool teachers’ professional identities in the context of public school districts.

In the second section, Understanding Multiple Constructs of Professional, I describe four discourses of professional that have given rise to particular roles and characteristics of professionals. Here I provide a sample of the wide range of interpretations of what is professional. I then discuss some of the literature that has been concerned with the issue of competing constructs of professional.

Within the final section, Understanding the Construction of Professional Identities, I discuss the literature that has assisted me in understanding the nature of professional identities. In drawing from the literature on cultural models theory and narrative inquiry I discuss the importance of context, temporality, and point of view in understanding how professional identities are understood and negotiated.
Understanding the Context of Public Preschool

Public preschool is situated within a broader context described as the field of early childhood education. There are many different conceptions of what is early childhood education. For the purposes of this dissertation I draw on the distinction made by Morgan (2007) and my state licensure to mean programs of education and care that serve children from birth to age eight. Many different programs fall into the scope of early childhood education including public and private preschool, nursery school, day care centers, kindergarten, primary school grades first through third, and home-based care, just to name a few. Whereas there are many different histories at play amongst the different programs in the field of early childhood education, their histories are also connected (Morgan, 2007; Spodek, Saracho, & Peters, 1988). In understanding the significance in studying the professional identities of public preschool teachers in particular, I first discuss the emergence of preschools in the public primary school sector. I then describe the historical pursuit of kindergarten educators in associating with public primary schools in an attempt to draw some parallels to the inclusion of preschool in public primary schools.

Public Preschool

The emergence of public preschool has grown out of the concern for future school success. The quality of early education has been particularly recognized by politicians and business leaders as an essential component in students’ later learning in school and to the overall health of the nation’s economy (Mitchell, 2007). Of particular concern, outlined in current legislation such as No Child Left Behind 2001 (NCLB) and Good
Start Grow Smart of 2002 (U. S. Department of Education, 2006), has been children between the ages of three and five who are from low-income or minority families. Created by politicians with concerns to minimize the educational gap between minority students and their peers, NCLB (U.S. Department of Education, 2001) mandates the use of scientifically proven curriculum and standardized tests to measure students’ success for public school grades kindergarten through grade 12, whereas GSGS (U. S. Department of Education, 2006) is designed to prepare children for kindergarten, strengthen Head Start and other funded preschool programs, and to provide parents, educators, and caregivers with scientific research. Under GSGS states are encouraged to develop early learning guidelines that align with the kindergarten through grade 12 standards as well as address early childhood teacher professional development needs (Martinez-Beck & Zaslow, 2006).

In response to the focus on preschool as having the potential to minimize the educational gap between minority students and their peers, many states now provide funding to local school districts that provide public preschool programs for this target group. Currently 55% of all children in the United States who attend publicly funded preschool programs attend those operated by public school districts (Mead, 2008). The unique context of public primary schools for preschool education raises some concerns. Historically, preschool has been characterized by informal play based and “child-centered approaches” to curriculum (Bloch, Seward, & Seidlinger, 2001, p. 17) whereas public primary schools have traditionally been academically driven and characterized by standardized approaches and assessments (Devaney & Sykes, 1988). As preschools
become more associated with public schools they “seem to gradually adopt more formal academic curricula” (Bloch et al., 2001, p. 18)

The inclusion of preschool classrooms into public primary schools resembles a similar move made by kindergarten educators during the early 20th century. While some kindergarten educators were concerned with improving their professional status, many educational leaders viewed the association of kindergarten with primary schools in terms of the potential of kindergarten to prepare students for future schooling (Beatty, 1995; Bloch, 1987). To further understand the concerns related to incorporating preschools into public primary schools I discuss the historical move made by kindergarten educators to affiliate with primary schools.

**Historical Pursuit for Professional Status**

Historically, teachers who work with our youngest children have not been viewed as having a high professional status. Teachers who work with children under the age of five are among the lowest-status and valued workers in the social structure receiving relatively low pay (Barbour & Lash, 2009; Finkelstein, 1988; Rust, 2003; Spodek et al., 1988). The pursuit for a higher professional status was the motive behind many kindergarten educators’ push toward association with primary schools (Bloch, 1987).

Margarethe Schurz brought Friedrich Froebel’s kindergarten methods to the United States in 1856 where the approach caught the attention of educators such as Elizabeth Peabody and Susan Blow (Beatty, 1995; Bloch, 1987; Genishi, Ryan, Ochsner, & Yarnall, 2001; Gordon & Browne, 2007). Froebel’s kindergarten was based on his understanding of the importance of nurturing teachers and the role of play for children’s
healthy development. The role of the teacher in Froebel’s kindergarten was to be knowledgeable and skillful in providing children with a nurturing and safe environment that would allow children’s development to flourish. Froebel believed that as learners, children should be free to engage in the environment and to form their own understanding through play (Beatty, 1995; Morgan, 2007).

While kindergarten began as an affiliation with charitable organizations and nursery schools as an integral part of the social welfare movement to assist children from poor and immigrant families, it quickly caught the attention among many other educational leaders. As Froebel’s ideas of kindergarten were growing in popularity in the United States there was increasing interest among leaders and educators about the relationship between kindergarten and primary school education. For many educators kindergarten curriculum was a welcomed alternative to academic instruction (Beatty, 1995). Elizabeth Peabody emphasized the role of play in kindergarten and suggested that play was a critical element missing in primary education and from many home environments of poor children, whereas others such as William Harris suggested that the kindergarten materials were not only effective in teaching elementary geometry, numbers, art, and crafts but they were effective in preparing muscles for future work in the industry (Beatty, 1995; Bloch, 1987). Still others, such as Felix Adler, maintained the importance of kindergarten in creating moral citizens (Bloch, 1987) while many educators advocated for kindergarten as they felt it would serve as a transitional period for children to become more adjusted to the order and discipline of the primary schools (Beatty, 1995; Bloch et al., 2001).
By the early 20th century, kindergarten educators concerned with achieving a higher professional status began to affiliate themselves with primary schools and as a result disaffiliated with the social welfare nursery movement (Bloch, 1987). In viewing children’s development in terms of stages, the subcommittee on curriculum of the Bureau of Education Committee of the international kindergarten Union (1919) firmly suggested that the curriculum of kindergarten be closely connected to the curriculum of first grade (Bloch et al., 2001). By the late 1920s more kindergarten programs were being included into public primary schools and were thus shaped by primary schools.

Although there were many supporters of public school kindergarten, there were also individuals who were apprehensive of its purpose (Beatty, 1995). As the public continued to debate the necessity of public school kindergarten, educators felt increased pressures to justify the importance of kindergarten in the public sector and thus responded by focusing research on the academic achievements kindergarten children made in later primary grades (e.g., Gard, 1924; Peters, 1923; Risser & Elder, 1927). Such studies in turn placed further emphasis on narrowing the kindergarten curriculum to resemble the academic focus of public primary schools. Although kindergarten was founded on a philosophy that valued a more informal and socially-oriented curriculum that focused on children’s needs, interests, and play, these attributes became muddled as educational leaders developed new curriculum models, such as the conduct curriculum, that were designed to focus on helping children learn “teacher-defined desirable habits and conduct” (Bloch, 1987, p. 47).
Understanding how the professional practice or actions of kindergarten teachers changed is significant to understanding professional identity as there is a reciprocal relationship between professional action and professional identity. Watson (2006) suggested that not only do individuals’ sense of professional identity influence their actions but their professional actions also influence their sense of professional identity. As the history of kindergarten demonstrates, the affiliation with public primary schools had a major impact on the actions of kindergarten teachers. In studying how five public preschool teachers understand and negotiate their professional identities within a major metropolitan school district I bring to light a better understanding of how the affiliation with public primary schools influences the professional actions and thus the professional identities of these five public preschool teachers.

Although kindergarten educators were able to achieve a higher professional status and increased wages by affiliating with primary schools, at cost were the foundational philosophical beliefs that originally informed the characteristics of kindergarten professionals as they adopted more standardized curriculum and measurement practices of the primary schools (Beatty, 1995; Bloch, 1987). While professionals are associated with occupying a favored position that includes higher pay, prestige, and autonomy, exhibiting characteristics of a professional does not always equate to a professional status.

My goal in this narrative study was not to contemplate the professional status of public preschool teachers but to understand the roles and characteristics public preschool teachers draw on in understanding and negotiating their professional identities in the
public school context. Roles and characteristics of a professional, however, cannot be clearly and simply defined as there are a wide variety of constructs of professional (Helsby, 1995). As such I now turn my attention to a discussion of the literature that has assisted me in understanding multiple constructs of professional.

**Understanding Multiple Constructs of Professional**

Individuals understand and negotiate their professional identities in many different ways. Within this section of the literature review my goal was to demonstrate the complexities involved in understanding professional identities. While there is a multitude of diverse interpretations about characteristics and roles of a professional I only address those that stem from four discourses that I found most prominent in the literature and relevant to the context of this research. I further address those that participants named as findings. For the purposes of the literature review, however, I address the professional roles that teachers are positioned in through the discourses of *rationality*, *managerial*, *emotionality*, and *democratic*. I then discuss the literature that focuses on the complexities between competing ideas about professional roles and characteristics that are promoted through multiple discourses.

**Rationality Discourse of Professional**

The rationality discourse is grounded in modernity beliefs about the nature of knowledge (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2007). Modernity beliefs are positivist in nature and are based on the premise that the world is predictable and ordered and thus values science as having the ability to provide a true account of ourselves and the world. A rationality discourse emphasizes professional knowledge as being scientifically based and
committed to generating objective forms of knowledge and thus has given rise to the notion of professional as scientifically knowledgeable.

**Professional as scientifically knowledgeable.** The association between professional status, knowledge, and the application of scientific theory began during the late 19th and 20th centuries (Schön, 1983). Many fields, including early childhood education, turned to science to inform practice as a desire to be seen as a profession. During the 19th and 20th centuries the field of early childhood began to turn toward scientifically generated information about children’s development to build practice (Beatty, 1995; Bloch et al., 2001). The rationality discourse of professional has given rise to the notion of professional as knowledgeable of scientifically proven theory. Among the science based theories that have, in particular, shaped early childhood education and the role of the teacher as a professional are Freud and Erikson’s psychodynamic theories, Watson and Skinner’s behaviorist learning theories, and Piaget’s constructivist theory about cognitive development.

Psychoanalysts Freud and Erikson advocated for the importance of the attachment between infants and mothers through their psychodynamic theories. The basic premise of psychodynamic theory is that human behavior and relationships are shaped by influences that are both conscious and unconscious. Conscious and unconscious motives, Gordon and Browne (2007) wrote, “are the underlying forces that influence human thinking and behavior and provide the foundation for universal stages of development” (p. 118). Psychodynamic theory emphasizes the role of relationships, especially between the mother and child, and the movement through stages as being influential to the
development of one’s personality and emotional health (Crain, 2005; Gordon & Browne, 2007).

Beginning in the 1920s behaviorism emerged within the field of early childhood education. The basic assumption of the behaviorist learning theory is that intellectual development is a set of learned facts and behaviors (Copple, De Lisi, & Sigel, 1982). From a behaviorist perspective children are viewed as a “responder” or “behaver,” thus the role of the teacher as a professional is to bestow knowledge and train children for particular outcomes (Genishi et al., 2001). Behaviorists Watson and Skinner were interested in models of conditioned or learned responses. Teachers of preschool and other early childhood classrooms that draw on behavioral learning theory use techniques such as positive/negative reinforcement and rewards/punishments to increase desired behaviors and reduce undesired behaviors (Gordon & Browne, 2007).

Piaget’s constructivist theory of cognitive development is another theory that emphasizes a rational and scientific understanding of the world. Piaget’s theory of cognitive development is based on the premise that learning is influenced by the interactions between maturational factors and environmental factors (Gordon & Browne, 2007). Piaget claimed that learning develops in a particular pattern. Piaget organized this pattern into the four stages of cognitive development: sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational, and formal operational (Crain, 2005; Gordon & Browne, 2007; Mooney, 2000). Although Piaget believed that the rate in which individuals advanced through these stages can vary depending on the individual and their experiences, he stressed that the sequence of the stages were firm.
Piaget believed that children learn best through active involvement in experiences and play. The role of the teacher as a professional, according to Piaget’s constructivist perspective, is to create a stimulating environment and rich experiences for children to construct meaning and to progress throughout the stages of development (Gordon & Browne, 2007).

In early childhood education a discourse of rationality has given rise to the notion that professionals are knowledgeable of scientifically proven theory developed by researchers and scientists. The role of the teacher as a professional thus becomes the implementer of scientific theories and methods. The presence of a rationality discourse in early childhood education continues to exist and promote scientifically proven theory. These scientifically proven theories serve to inform teacher education, standards of practice (e.g., State Early Learning Content Standards) as well as curriculum models (e.g., Creative Curriculum and High Scope). The role of the teacher as a knowledgeable implementer of scientific theory, however, is not the only professional role that is perpetuated through discourse in the field of early childhood education. I now turn my attention to a discussion on the professional roles that are promoted through a managerial discourse of professional.

Managerial Discourse of Professional

The managerial discourse of professional stems from the ideas of the business world and industry that emphasize competition, consumerism, efficiency, and accountability. Like a rationality discourse, a managerial discourse also draws from the modernity beliefs of the world as “knowable and ordered” and the ability of science to
provide a true account of ourselves (Dahlberg et al., 2007). Managerial discourses of professional have been used to describe the teacher as professional in terms of their roles as technicians, entrepreneurs, and service providers.

**Professional as technician.** A product of the industrial revolution, the managerial discourse intertwines with the rationality discourse as individuals draw on scientific ways of knowing to inform standardized practice and curriculum models as a way to ensure efficiency. The industrial revolution marked a time when science and technology were seminal in the efficiency of mass production. In education, the focus of efficient production of institutionally determined educational outcomes requires a hierarchical structure where teachers are to assume a technical role (Dahlberg et al., 2007). As a technician, teachers use methods that center on predetermined norms and standards with the goal of advancing children through stages of development. The managerial discourse of efficiency is used in the United States through educational policy mandates that require all federally and state funded early childhood education programs to use scientifically proven curriculum and state standards (U. S. Department of Education, 2001).

**Professional as entrepreneurial.** Also deriving from a managerial discourse is the notion of teacher as an entrepreneurial professional. Efficiency and standardization also have an important role for an entrepreneurial professional where rationality discourses of child development and learning theories are equated with program quality. Drawing heavily on the language of the business world, an entrepreneurial professional places high value on competition. Sachs (2001) suggested that the market
world plays an important role in how an entrepreneurial professional identity is constructed. For example, many states have adopted a star rating system to judge the quality of early childhood programs that are licensed through the Department of Jobs and Family Services (e.g., Ohio Step Up to Quality). Early childhood programs are judged based on particular standards that are used to suggest quality, from which their star rating is then publicized to consumer parents. Such competitive ethos, as those generated from star rating programs, is designed to motivate improvement of quality as programs strive to meet higher ratings to compete for consumer parents.

**Professional as service provider.** In earlier research I have found that a consumer centric mentality placed teachers in the role of a service provider (Sisson, 2009). As a service provider, however, teachers felt that they were not respected as professionals. Teachers reported feelings of trepidation over some of the consumer demands made by parents. Managerial discourses that describe the professional characteristics of teachers in terms of efficiency, entrepreneur, and service provider are prevalent throughout educational policy (e.g., NCLB [U. S. Department of Education, 2001]; GSGS [U. S. Department of Education, 2006]). As managerial discourses intertwine with rational discourses they privilege particular ways of knowing and being as professional. In understanding the broad spectrum of ideas about professional knowledge and professional ways of being I now turn my attention to the emotionality discourse of professional.
Emotionality Discourse of Professional

An emotionality discourse is based on the premise that professional knowledge and decision making in early childhood education are often motivated by emotional qualities. Emotional qualities, such as caring and passionate, have been identified by researchers and educators within the field of early childhood education as necessary in working with young children and their families (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998; Hargreaves, 1998; Moyles, 2001; Osgood, 2006b; Vogt, 2002). Emotions drive behavior and are often called upon when making important decisions that require more than a standardized response such as the decisions often required in early childhood classrooms where young children, families, and teachers have unique interests, experiences, and needs. The non-standardized decisions that teachers make are informed by teachers’ personal practical knowledge. Connelly and Clandinin (1999) suggested that teachers’ personal practical knowledge hold moral and emotional dimensions as they derive from teachers’ past experiences as they relate to their present state and future goals.

In an emotionality discourse of professional, relationships are influential and play a major role in how professional roles are conceived and lived. As such, collaboration is preferred over individuality within an emotionality discourse of professional (Osgood, 2004). It is through collaborative relationships that professionals share multiple perspectives that are then used to inform group decisions.

Emotionality is often attributed as a feminine quality and has been associated with characteristics of mothering that are assumed to be natural (James, 2006; Moyles, 2001; Osgood, 2006b). In being a predominately female occupation, individuals within the
field of early childhood education have drawn on the discourse of emotionality to describe the professional characteristics of teachers as caring and passionate.

**Professional as caring.** The professional characteristic of teachers described as caring focuses on the nature of the work in early childhood to demand strong feelings toward protecting and supporting individual children and their families as well as caring and supporting colleagues. Although emotionality and care have been associated as being feminine traits, Vogt (2002) found that an ethics of care has been reported as being essential to the work of early childhood teachers by both male and female teachers. There are many different interpretations and ways that teachers choose to care (James, 2006; Vogt, 2002). In working with young children, teachers are responsible for not only the physical care of their young students but also emotional, intellectual, social, moral, socio-cultural, and spiritual (James, 2006). Early childhood teachers not only care for the children in their classrooms but the nature of their work often calls upon teachers to care for the families of young children, their communities, and their colleagues.

In a study of early childhood teachers’ professional identities, Osgood (2004) found that an ethics of care and emotional labor are cornerstones to early childhood teachers’ understanding of their professional identities. In caring for children, families, and their communities, teachers felt that they were contributing to the greater good of society. While caring for their colleagues teachers worked collaboratively toward a shared effort in improving practice (Osgood, 2004).

Being a caring professional, however, can be interpreted in a variety of ways. Vogt’s (2002) study on teachers’ conceptions of caring found that teachers understood
care in a range of ways: caring as commitment; caring as relatedness; caring as physical care; caring expressed by giving cuddle; caring as parenting; and caring as mothering. Regardless of how care is conceived, care is understood as an important professional quality of teachers by many researchers and educators (Edwards et al., 1998; James, 2006; Noddings, 2006; Osgood, 2004, 2006a, 2006b; Vogt, 2002).

**Professional as passionate.** Passion is also a professional quality noted within a discourse of emotionality. Moyles (2001) suggested, “Passion is part of the nature of professionalism within and outside of education” (p. 82). Passion is a strong emotion that drives individual’s decision making. The notion of teachers as passionate professionals suggests that teaching requires more than subject matter knowledge and standardized techniques. Being a passionate professional often requires positive emotions that drive teachers to go above and beyond what is required of them. For instance, teachers go above and beyond to connect with their students and to create joy, creativity, and challenging experiences within the classroom (Hargreaves, 1998). With an understanding of the emotional discourse of professional I now present the democratic discourse of professional.

**Democratic Discourse of Professional**

In drawing from a postmodern perspective, educators using a democratic discourse of professional understand knowledge as derived from multiple sources working together. A postmodern perspective is based on the premise that knowledge is contextual, incomplete, and a matter of perspective (Dahlberg et al., 2007). Sachs (2001) suggested that within a democratic discourse of professional teachers, researchers,
academics, and other educational stakeholders understand the limits of each others’ work and perspectives in isolation and therefore hold high regard to knowledge not only generated from scientific research but also knowledge generated from classroom practices.

A democratic discourse of professional is centered on ideas of democracy. A democracy is an associated living where members take equal responsibility for the wellbeing of others to promote equity and social justice (Dewey, 1916/2005). The democratic discourse of professional intertwines with the emotional discourse of professional as caring. In Henderson and Kesson’s (2004) construction being democratic and living in a democratic way requires an ethics of caring for one another. In a democratic society individuals are responsible not only for their own actions but also to understand the consequence of actions on others. Much like the discourses of emotionality, the democratic discourse places high value on relationships and collaboration. Within a democratic discourse there are many roles of the teacher as a professional; three professional roles in particular include professional as democratic leader, professional as critically reflective, and professional as activist.

Professional as democratic leader. The importance in teachers’ application of knowledge in practice in the form of wise judgments has been notably recognized as an important leadership quality for professionals (Dewey, 1938/1998; Eisner, 2002; Henderson & Kesson, 2004). Classrooms are diverse places with diverse learners that require complex decision making informed by the autonomy of teachers’ wise judgments. Dewey (1938/1998; 1916/2005) stressed the importance of educational experiences as
social processes and the active role of teachers in creating these experiences. Dewey (1938/1998) held firm convictions that the teacher’s role is to “be aware of the general principle of the shaping of actual experiences by environing conditions but that they also recognize in the concrete that surroundings are conducive to having experiences that lead to growth” (p. 35). This conception of the teacher as professional requires judgment that is based on wisdom. The knowledge that democratic leaders draw on to make wise decisions derives from a collaboration of multiple sources of knowledge such as other teachers, researchers, academics, parents, and students (Dewey, 1938/1998).

In a democratic discourse of professional teachers are valued for the knowledge that they bring to teaching. Eisner (2002) suggested the decisions that teachers must make are like those of an artist where judgments are based largely on “qualities that unfold during the course of action” (p. 155). In this sense, teachers must make judgments based on qualities that unfold such as individual differences between learners and context which result in unique learning experiences for each new group of learners. Like artists, teachers must draw from past experiences to develop a repertoire of techniques that they can call upon to make informed and wise decisions.

Concerned with the development of curriculum, Henderson and Kesson (2004) described the professional characteristics of teachers as making wise decisions in terms of “curriculum wisdom.” Henderson and Kesson (2004) suggested that, “Curriculum matters cannot be handled through simple technical procedures: they require sophisticated professional judgment” (p. 3). Curriculum comprises of not only the educational plans made by teachers for students but also includes what is experienced by
the students. In a democratic discourse of professional as a democratic leader who makes wise judgments requires that teachers are also critically reflective.

**Professional as critically reflective.** Knowledge is not to be taken for granted as sacred in democratic discourses of professional. Being a professional, within democratic discourses, requires that teachers critically reflect and analyze their work, ideas, problems, and policies (Brookfield, 1995; Henderson & Gornik, 2007; Sachs, 2001). Through critical reflection teachers construct new understandings and knowledge that is further used to inform practice. It is within acts of critical reflection as well as a commitment to collaborative problem solving that teachers drawing on democratic discourses of professional show democratic responsibility.

Being critically reflective is about seeing our practice as teachers from multiple perspectives. Teachers are critically reflective in many different ways. Brookfield (1995) suggested that teachers can practice critical reflection by examining their practice through four distinct and interconnected lenses: autobiographical reflection, reflection through the students’ eyes, reflection through colleagues’ perceptions and experiences, and reflection through the lens of literature. Critical reflection is used to “signify action that is grounded in a serious examination of the root causes of injustice and that is oriented toward human liberation and equity” (Henderson & Kesson, 2004, p. 52).

For Henderson and Kesson (2004) critical reflection is one piece of a larger vision within a democratic discourse of professional. As professionals, teachers must use critical reflection in conjunction with: a reflective multiperspective inquiry to consider multiple perspectives, a reflective ethical inquiry to maintain ethical and collaborative
relationships in defining and solving problems, a reflective political inquiry to consider the relationship between political and moral standards in governing behavior, and a reflective theoretical inquiry to bring to bear intellectual theories on all situations. With an understanding of the professional as critically reflective I now discuss the notion of professional as activist.

**Professional as an activist.** Also deriving from a democratic discourse of professional is the notion of professional as being an activist. Activist professionals, “hold the best interests of the clientele at heart in recognition that needs vary, are contextualized, and require careful and thoughtful decision making” (Groundwater-Smith & Sachs, 2002). An activist professional has clear emancipatory aims concerned with the reduction and elimination of exploitation, inequalities, and oppression (Sachs, 2001).

In being activists professional teachers are also critically reflective. Teachers must be critically reflective of conditions that may work to marginalize and oppress individuals and groups based on culture, race, economics, or gender (Freire, 2007; hooks, 1994; Miller, 2005). Being an activist professional requires teachers to work toward social justice, not just for their students but also for themselves. bell hooks (1994) suggested, “Teachers must be actively committed to a process of self-actualization that promotes their own wellbeing if they are to teach in a manner that empowers students” (p. 15).

Being an activist professional requires active participation within a deliberative democracy. A deliberative democracy involves both citizens and officials in judging public policy and the outcome of public policy for all people. An activist professional
identity is “negotiated, collaborative, socially critical, future oriented, strategic and tactical” (Groundwater-Smith & Sachs, 2002, p. 353). Sachs (2000) suggested eight principles of practices for activist professionals that provide a way of thinking and acting in the best interest of all those who are involved in education; inclusiveness of all individuals invested in education, collective and collaborative action, effective communication of aims and expectations, recognition of the expertise of all parties involved, creating an environment of trust and mutual respect, being responsive and responsible, acting with passion, and experiencing pleasure and fun.

Thus far I have described four discourses of professional. In further understanding the complexities of professional identities I now discuss the research on competing constructs of professional.

**Competing Constructs of Professional**

Given the diversity of constructs of professional, teachers may find themselves ascribing to more than one; however, some constructs of professional are at odds with each other. Authors and researchers in education suggest that there is a paradox that exists for early childhood teachers as they are positioned between competing constructs of professional (Moyles, 2001; Osgood, 2004; Sachs, 2001; Woodrow, 2008). Much of this literature focuses on the opposition between particular notions of professional stemming from rationality/managerial discourses and emotionality/democratic discourse.

In drawing on data from two qualitative studies, Osgood (2004) wrote about early childhood teachers’ response to the entrepreneurial approach to professionalism that exists within educational policies in the United Kingdom. Osgood found that teachers
reported trepidation with undertaking an entrepreneurial professional identity as it was in direct opposition to their understanding of professional as caring and collaborative. Although teachers did not welcome the “new professional identity” Osgood wrote that teachers were only passive in their resistance as they reported feelings of powerlessness in the face of educational policy mandates.

Woodrow (2008) similarly wrote about concerns for the imposition of an entrepreneurial professional identity on early childhood teachers in Australia. Woodrow suggested that the dominance of the notion of professional as an entrepreneur within educational policies and increase in corporate childcare has been “shaping the production of limited and limiting professional identities” (p. 275). In particular, Woodrow named the struggle teachers felt in limiting a caring professional identity.

Sachs (2001) suggested that in being situated between competing discourses of professional teachers find themselves moving between multiple professional identities. Sachs focused primarily on the imbalance between an entrepreneur and activist professional identities. In a study on the impact of national education policy and policy change on teachers’ work and professional development, Osborn (2006) found that English teachers felt a fragmented professional identity as they struggled to maintain their own goals as professionals to care for students and meet their individual needs while policy efforts focused on making them “expert technicians” who used prescribed teaching methods.

The existing literature suggests that there are a multitude of notions about what it means to be a professional. In studying how five public preschool teachers understand
and negotiate their professional identities within a major metropolitan school district I bring to light the particular discourses that exist within their shared context as well as the constructs of professional individual teachers actually draw from as they define themselves as professionals. While the literature presented here shows a growing concern for the negotiation of competing ideas about professional roles these researchers focused more narrowly on the opposition between an entrepreneur professional identity and caring professional identity (Osgood, 2004; Woodrow, 2008) and entrepreneur professional identity and activist professional identity (Sachs, 2001). The research I present here contributes to the body of literature concerned with competing constructs of professional by exploring the multiple professional roles that each participant draws upon and how they negotiate their professional identities within a shared context of one metropolitan school district.

A multitude of discourses describe different interpretations of what is professional. Thus far I have briefly outlined the professional roles and characteristics that are promoted through four discourses: rationality, managerial, emotionally, and democratic. In describing four different discourses of professional I have illustrated that teachers’ professional identities are conceived in many different ways. The range of discourses of professional are diverse; whereas some intertwine to inform new professional roles and characteristics, others are at stark opposition.

Within the final body of literature I have shown that there are also complexities for the understanding of professional identity when discourses promote professional roles and characteristics that are competing with teachers’ own ideas about who they are as
professionals. Researchers and authors who are concerned with competing constructs of professional have focused on professional identity as a social construct. As teachers are faced with many diverse and sometimes competing discourses I began to question what influences their own understanding of their professional identities and how they negotiate their own understandings in a context with particular dominant discourses of professional. Within the next section I explore the literature that assisted me in understanding professional identities and how they are socially constructed, individually understood, and negotiated within diverse contexts.

**Understanding the Construction of Professional Identities**

This narrative research is informed by cultural models theory (Holland et al., 1998). In drawing from the social constructivist perspective of Vygotsky (1978, 1931/1997) and Bakhtin’s (1981) notion of dialogism, Holland et al.’s (1998) description of cultural models theory suggest that professional identities are socially constructed, individually understood, and negotiated within social spaces. In coming from a cultural models theoretical perspective, the use of Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) narrative inquiry for this research serves as a complementary fit as both recognize the significance of social context and temporality but place heavy emphasis on individual’s own understanding.

Within this section I describe my theoretical understanding of the construction and negotiation of professional identities as informed by cultural models theory. In doing so, I also demonstrate how cultural models theory and the methodology of narrative inquiry work together in complementary ways. As such I first describe how I understand
professional identities as socially constructed through a discussion on the significance of 

*Context as Figured Worlds*. Next, I describe the significance of temporality on the understanding of professional identities through a discussion on *Professional Identities as Historically Situated*. In an effort to describe the significance of point of view in struggles for power and agency for professional identities I describe the *Negotiation of Professional Identities*.

**Context as Figured Worlds**

With a narrative frame of mind and a cultural models theoretical lens I understand context as necessary in understanding experience as individuals always exist within context (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Holland et al., 1998). Holland et al. draw from Vygotsky’s theory of social constructivism to describe the significance of context. Vygotsky’s theory of social constructivism is situated in the premise that our understanding of the world and of ourselves is situated in our interactions and relationships with others (Schwandt, 1994; Scribner, 1990). In drawing from the social constructivist perspective, I believe that how individuals develop and understand their own professional identities is largely influenced by the practices and discourses they experience in social settings. In drawing on Vygotsky, Holland and her colleagues (1998) described figured worlds as social spaces where multiple meanings and certain values of worth and significance can be associated with artifacts. For instance a poker chip can also take on the meaning of sobriety in the figured world of alcoholics anonymous. Meanings associated with artifacts are established through dominate discourses within a particular figured world (Holland et al., 1998). Imaginative or
figured worlds are socially and culturally constructed spaces where participants are involved in interpretation of social matters of worth, status, and value of individuals, actions, and artifacts (Holland et al., 1998). Figured worlds are spaces inhabited by agents who engage in acts deemed meaningful by particular values where individuals understand a sense of self (or identities) as it relates to their understanding of the beliefs of the group and their position within the group. Individuals can leave these “figured worlds” and re-enter them at any time or can enter into new “figured worlds” where they may associate with a new role and artifacts.

**The use of artifacts and discourse.** Artifacts can become powerful symbols of theory and beliefs that are embodied by individuals when they are socially accepted and practiced over a period of time (Holland et al., 1998). For example, in the figured worlds of traditional education and educational policy, artifacts include standardized tests, textbooks, and grade scores (Pennington, 2007; Robinson, 2007). In the figured worlds of mentor teachers in Kroeger, Pech, and Cope’s (2009) study, artifacts include standardized assessments and packaged curriculum that are maintained through a discourse of kindergarten readiness.

Artifacts become accepted understandings of important elements in figured worlds such as those in education. As particular artifacts become trusted symbols of an embodied understanding within the figured world, they become taken-for-granted as “real” or “tangible” rather than understood as social and cultural constructions (Hatt, 2007, p. 151). Discourses are then used to maintain dominate meanings of artifacts thus perpetuating the dynamics of the figured world.
Discourses communicate socially shared or collective understandings of typified roles or ways of being (identities) that are associated with shared values and knowledge and are communicated through a shared understanding of meaning behind particular ways of being, talking, and knowing within a given figured world (Mac Naughton, 2005). Discourses are much like artifacts in that they become accepted and understood over time and thus often become taken-for-granted as reality or truth (Holland et al., 1998).

In drawing on Foucault, Holland and her colleagues (1998) suggested that dominant discourses are “taken-for-granted” as “truth” where specific ways of being and knowing are valued and used to judge one’s self and others and privilege certain ways of knowing and being over others thus marginalizing individuals with discourses that are different (Holland et al., 1998). For example, Kroeger et al. (2009) discussed the discourse of kindergarten readiness that was “taken-for-granted” as “truth” in the figured worlds of the mentor teachers they studied. The artifacts of standardized assessments and curriculum were valued as important tools through the discourse of kindergarten readiness and thus positioned mentor teachers as implementers of these tools in order to meet the goal of kindergarten readiness.

Discourses can be very powerful in informing an understanding of professional identities. Discourses reflect values and beliefs to construct particular ways of being through a shared language and use of artifacts. Artifacts and discourses, however, can only sustain meaning through the acts of individuals who choose to embody or sustain their particular meanings.
**The embodied construct.** Individuals are often drawn and bounded to particular figured worlds through common assumptions and beliefs. Pennington (2007) focused on the “boundedness” of figured worlds suggesting that the boundaries of communities, participants, and principles help to guide an understanding of events, artifacts, and sense of self. For example, in the figured world of educational policy, high regard is given to scientific and quantifiable ways of knowing. This shared premise guides policy makers’ understanding of student learning as being achieved through scientifically proven curriculum (Pennington, 2007). Those who spend extended periods of time within a particular figured world often come to “inhabit this imagined space, embody its perspectives, and act according to its local order” (Jurow, 2005, p. 39).

Figured worlds and the individuals that inhabit them do not exist within a bubble frozen in time. Individuals and the figured worlds they inhabit are historically situated. In understanding the importance of temporality in the construction of professional identities I now turn to a discussion on professional identities as historically situated.

**Professional Identities as Historically Situated**

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) drew on Dewey’s (1938/1998) notion of continuity as discussed in his criteria of experience to describe the narrative aspect of temporality. Dewey (1938/1998) described continuity as an experiential continuum that includes a past, present, and future trajectory. Continuity is significant in narrative inquiry for understanding experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The concept of time has also been noted within the theory of cultural models (Holland et al., 1998; Holland & Lave, 2001). In further understanding the role of temporality for the professional
identities of public preschool teachers I discuss the influence of the past and the future on the present.

**Influence of past histories on professional identities.** Individuals exist within and come in and out of multiple figured worlds throughout the history of their lives. How an individual understands his or her own present professional identity is thus informed by their own personal history of experiences in social figured worlds. Identity is thus a figurative combination of one’s personal/intimate and historically situated world with the social/collective and historically situated figured worlds they share with others (Holland et al., 1998). Vygotsky described the role of history in the social construction of identities by stating that:

We might say that through others we become ourselves, and this rule refers not only to the individual as a whole, but also to the history of each separate function. This also comprises the essence of the process of cultural development expressed in a purely logical form. The individual becomes for himself what he is in himself through what he manifests for others. (1931/1997, p. 105)

In drawing on the social constructivist views of Vygotsky (1931/1997), cultural models theorists Holland and her colleagues (1998) suggested that professional identities are historically situated in that how they are socially constructed is influenced and shaped by each context that includes a history of experience, culture, discourse, and relationships.

Holland and Lave (2001) suggested that individual’s own personal histories or “history in person” and the broader social histories both inform each other through
contentious local practices carried out in figured worlds. The histories of local institutional structures are the sites where a history of broader cultural beliefs are locally realized and sustained in current discourses of practice. When individuals enter into the figured world of local institutions they also bring with them a “history in person” that includes their experiences from multiple other figured worlds that have settled within them and are also informing their sense of self.

While the impact histories can have on individuals present understanding of their professional identities is significant so too are their visions for the future.

Influence of visions for the future on professional identities. Holland and Lave (2001) suggested that the past and the present inform each other. Vygotsky (1978) also understood the connection between the past, present, and future and understood language as an important tool in which individuals could draw upon the past to intimately imagine possibilities for the future and thus control one’s own behavior in negotiating professional identities. Tensions, however, can arise when histories and visions for the future are conflicting between individuals and the social figured worlds they enter.

Social figured worlds comprise of many individuals with diverse personal histories and visions for the future. Holland and Lave (2001) suggested that the day-to-day struggles over professional identities are in part staking claims into a future. In further understanding the struggles that exist in staking claim to futures through professional identities I turn to a discussion on the negotiation of professional identities.
Negotiation of Professional Identities

In discussing the negotiation of professional identities it is first necessary to clarify point of view. While the significance of context and temporality demonstrate the influence social figured worlds can have over time on professional identities I believe that it is at the site of each individual where professional identities are actualized. In recognizing teachers as the source for understanding and negotiating their professional identities I understand that there is no one certainty but multiple interpretations and stories to be shared (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Professional identities are in a position to be negotiated because there is no one certainty to professional identity. Being that there are many different interpretations of professional identity, the negotiation of professional identities inherently involve struggles for power. In the section below I turn to a discussion on Relations of power and Individual agency to further describe the negotiation of professional identities.

Relations of power. The socially and historically positioned figured worlds involve positions of power where particular values and beliefs as well as certain ways of knowing are privileged over others. The positionality associated with relations of power in particular figured worlds are socially and historically determined and maintained through dominant discourses. Holland and her colleagues (1998) further described the power relations involved in figured worlds by stating, “Some figured worlds we may never enter because of our social position or rank; some we may deny to others; some we may simply miss by contingency; some we may learn fully” (p. 41).
The dominant discourses presented within figured worlds can lead to the marginalization of non-dominant discourses. Pennington (2007) discussed the marginalization of non-dominant discourses in her example of teachers in the figured world of policy and teaching. Pennington argued that United States educational policies use a discourse of standardized practice that emphasizes test scores and scripted programs over teachers’ professional decision making. The dominant discourse carried by educational policy mandates in the United States has marginalized teachers’ knowledge, experience, and expertise, in creating effective learning strategies (Pennington, 2007).

Berger’s (1963) role theory is useful in understanding the connection between professional identity and action. Berger’s description of “external” and “internal” pressures demonstrates the power of dominant discourses. “External pressures” are those outside of the self such as policy makers or institutions that promote policy mandates that maintain a particular discourse which positions people within particular roles. As individuals come into contact with “external pressures” they can create “internal pressures” that serve to sustain dominate discourses as they become comfortable in the predictability of their socially defined roles. Berger suggested, however, the “internal pressures” that one creates for his or her self does not always serve to sustain dominant constructs but can also be used to reject them through acts of agency.

**Individual agency.** The social construction of identities within figured worlds provides a space for critical reflection and human agency in the form of authoring one’s own identity. Bakhtin’s notion of dialogism stems from the premise that individuals are in a state of being “addressed” and are in the process of “answering” (Holland et al.,
agency, according to Bakhtin, is a matter of orchestrating the multiple and competing discourses one experiences through acts of improvisation to author one’s own response of a professional identity claim (Holland et al., 1998; Holquist, 2001). The authorship of an individual’s professional identity claim, however, involves a process of relating one’s own discourses and practice to that of others. Gee (2000) referred to this orchestration as creating a “persona” of who one desires to be. Authoring one’s self is, in part, staking claim into a particular future (Holland & Lave, 2001). How one “authors” one’s self can serve to perpetuate and accept a current position within a figured world or it can serve to emancipate it. For example, Kroeger et al (2009) found that as mentor teachers became open to the discourses candidate teachers used from their universities they began to revisit their own discourses of professional identities to re-author themselves.

Improvising against the constraints of figured worlds and social position can thus be used to create new figured worlds (Holland et al., 1998). Pennington (2007) provided a useful example of improvisation in the figured world of policy and teaching where Laura, an English teacher, was mandated to follow a scripted program. Laura improvised away from the script by infusing her own teaching strategies. Although Laura feared the
consequences of her actions, Pennington (2007) suggested that these acts of improvisation are important in human agency. As Laura “authored” herself against the professional role allocated to her through the dominate discourse presented in educational policy and mandates, she then created a new space for new figured worlds to form, a figured world that was communal with others like her who share similar discourses of language and practice.

In using the narrative inquiry approach to study how five public preschool teachers understand and negotiate their professional identities within a major metropolitan school district, participants were practicing authorship as they shared their stories of their personal experiences, reflections, and future visions. While the act of participants sharing narrative stories is a form of authorship, the content of their stories also provided some insight into their authoring practices with others.

**Conclusion**

Thus far I have demonstrated the significance of this narrative research on how five public preschool teachers understand and negotiate their professional identities within a major metropolitan school district. In exploring a similar historical move made by kindergarten educators in affiliating with public primary schools, I have brought attention to the significance in studying preschool teachers’ professional identities in the context of a public school district. While affiliating with public school systems may promise a higher status and increased wages what remains to be explored is how preschool teachers understand and negotiate their professional identities within this context.
In exploring the literature on discourses of professional I have shown that understanding professional identity is complex as there are a multitude of interpretations about what is professional. The literature also shows some concern within the research about negotiating professional identities within discourses that promote competing professional roles and characteristics. The research I present contributes to this literature by providing an exploration of the lived stories of five preschool teachers’ experiences as they strive to negotiate their professional identities within the context of a major metropolitan school district. In so doing, I provide an examination of the constructs of knowledge and ways of being that these five teachers bring with them from various other figured worlds to negotiate the roles they are positioned in through dominant discourses.

Finally, in coming from a cultural models theoretical perspective I understand professional identities as socially constructed, individually understood, and negotiated within social spaces. In designing this research on how five public preschool teachers understand and negotiate their professional identities within a major metropolitan school district I also draw on the methodological perspective situated within narrative inquiry that points to teachers’ lived experiences as an important source of knowledge. In studying the stories of teachers’ experiences the narrative approach provided a useful three-dimensional framework that focused attention on the significance of context, temporality, and point of view. Within the next chapter I further discuss the use of narrative inquiry for this research.
CH  III

METHODOLOGY: NARRATIVE INQUIRY

In this study I used narrative inquiry to explore how five public preschool teachers understand and negotiate their professional identities within a major metropolitan school district. Within this research I explored the experiences of public preschool teachers as they made sense of and negotiated their understandings of their professional identities. The use of a narrative design was appropriate for the purpose of this research as narrative methods are aimed toward understanding “how people structure the flow of experience to make sense of events and actions in their lives” (Schram, 2006, p. 104).

In particular, I have chosen a narrative inquiry approach because I was interested in providing a space for the voice of public preschool teachers to be heard as they shared their stories of their lived experiences in understanding and negotiating their professional identities. There are a multitude of constructs about what is professional that range from various discourses. As teachers shared their stories of how they understand and negotiate their professional identities this research contributes to a better understanding of the particular roles teachers embrace, those they reject, and how they are negotiated within the context of a major metropolitan school district.

I have focused this narrative inquiry in particular on public preschool teachers within a major metropolitan school district because I was interested in understanding how the unique context of public schools influenced preschool teachers’ perceptions and experiences. The context of a major metropolitan school district was fitting as it most
closely represents the context in which a large number of public preschool teachers are working. In drawing from Dewey’s (1938/1998) understanding of experience as individual and social, yet continuous, I understand that although the participants may work within this shared context how they understand and negotiate their professional identities within this context can be diverse as participants’ understandings are also situated within and influenced by their personal experiences within multiple contexts of social and personal spaces.

In drawing on a cultural models lens in conjunction with a narrative perspective I understand the significance of context, temporality, and point of view in understanding and negotiating professional identities. As such, I used Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) three-dimensional model of space where as the researcher I looked at participants’ experiences in multiple ways: forward and backward, inward and outward, and situated in place. As mentioned previously, point of view does matter. With this in mind, I, along with the participants, looked forward and backward, inward and outward as we strove to understand their stories from our situated place. In the retelling of their stories, I include my interpretations as being one perspective of the stories shared. Within the remaining sections of this chapter, I discuss the research questions, research site and participant selection, data collection, data analysis, ethics, and trustworthiness.

**Research Questions**

In using narrative inquiry I approached my overarching research question, how do five public preschool teachers understand and negotiate their professional identities within a major metropolitan school district, through the shared personal stories of
experiences situated throughout time. I designed five supporting research questions that work toward understanding each of the three-dimensions of space as defined by Clandinin and Connelly (2000). Within this section I discuss each of my supporting research questions as they fit within Clandinin and Connelly’s three-dimensional space and explain how each question worked toward the overall goal of this research: to understand how five public preschool teachers understand and negotiate their professional identities within a major metropolitan school district. The table in Appendix A illustrates the dimensions of space of each research question, the significance of each question, data used to answer each question, and time frame.

**Backward**

In asking, *how does public preschool teachers’ biographical context contribute to their understanding about the role(s) and/or characteristics of the teacher as a professional*, I wanted to understand how public preschool teachers past trajectories have shaped and continue to shape how they perceive themselves as professionals. This question provided a space to explore the temporal and spatial boundaries as suggested by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) and provided participants with an opportunity to explore their own continuum of experience as it informs their understanding of who they are as professionals. This question in particular allowed me to gain insight into the constructs that they draw on to understand what it means to be a professional.

**Forward**

The question, *What professional goals do public preschool teachers have for themselves*, served to focus on the forward dimension of space. In asking participants
questions about their future professional goals I gained a better understanding of professional qualities and dispositions they presently valued for their own futures.

**Inward**

In striving to explore participants’ inward dimension of space I asked the question, *In what ways do public preschool teachers reflect upon how their understanding of their professional identities positions themselves in the context of public school education?* Here I gained an understanding of how participants feel about their own professional identities. In looking inward, I gained insight into participants’ internal voice that drives them toward particular roles as professionals and their particular actions in resisting other roles.

**Outward**

In looking toward the outward dimension of space I asked, *How do public preschool teachers understand and respond to the contextual messages they receive about their roles as professionals?* I designed this question to assist me in understanding how participants “author” themselves in response to the multiple and sometimes competing constructs of professional to which they may be exposed. This question builds from the question looking inward in that how participants reflected upon their understandings of their identity influenced how they responded or “authored” themselves.

**Situated in Place**

The final question I asked in support of my overarching research question was situated in place. I asked, *What challenges and supports do public preschool teachers feel they have as they strive to implement their understandings of their professional*
identities in the public school context? This question assisted me in understanding the current context in which participants’ stories are positioned. This question led to further understandings of how context serves to support or challenge teachers as they strive to negotiate their own understanding of professional identities.

**Site and Participant Selection**

Midwestern Metropolitan School District (MMSD), a large urban school district with 52 preschool classrooms across 45 schools, followed a business model where the district CEO was in place of a district superintendent. The preschool classrooms were organized by the district early childhood department. Dr. Johnson (pseudonym) was the Executive Director of the early childhood department at Midwestern Metropolitan School District.

I first made initial contact with Executive Director Dr. Johnson who approved my research project with the district’s research office. Dr. Johnson then put me in contact with the Early Childhood Preschool Coordinator for Midwestern Metropolitan School District, Sue Smith (pseudonym). Of the 45 schools that contain preschool classrooms there were 7 schools that contain more than one preschool classroom with some schools containing preschool special education classrooms. In understanding identity as socially constructed it was important to explore the social context from multiple perspectives. Exploring the stories of more than one teacher from each school allowed me to gain some insight into how a particular school context influenced teachers’ understanding of their professional identities in similar and different ways.
Sue made initial email contact with the public preschool teachers from the 7 sites that contain more than one preschool classroom to invite them to attend an informational session I provided about this research project. On September 25th, I spoke to a group of 12 public preschool teachers about my interest in this research project and described the purpose, goal, proposed procedures, confidentiality, freedom to withdraw, and efforts to maintain credibility. Teachers were then given a demographic survey (Appendix B) and an addressed and stamped envelope which they were to return if interested in participating in the research project.

As a result of my call for participants I received the demographic surveys from four interested teachers and received emails from a fifth and sixth who were interested. In using convenience sampling (Creswell, 2007) I chose to include all six volunteer participants across two school sites; however, the sixth participant dropped out due to the early delivery of her baby. Of the remaining five participants were two public preschool teachers from Watson Public School and three from Blake Montessori Public School (pseudonyms).

According to the 2009 United States census, the five women participants were representative of the larger population of preschool teachers. The 2009 United States census reported that 98% of all preschool and kindergarten teachers were female whereas 74% were White non-Hispanic and 13% were Black non-Hispanic. Four of the female participants were self-identified as Caucasian and one was self-identified as African American.
I was interested in how the study participants came to understand their professional identity throughout the influences from their personal histories and current context within the MMSD and their respected schools. As such, I used a small sample size to allow me to explore their personal stories in depth and to focus efforts toward capturing these individual teachers’ stories to accurately represent how they make sense of their professional identities. In what follows I describe each site and corresponding participants.

**Watson Public School**

Watson Public School was situated on the east side of Midwestern in a predominately African American population. The population of students that attended Watson Public School was from the local area and consisted of 99% African American and less than 1% Asian, Hispanic, and Caucasian students (State University, n.d.). Watson Public School housed classrooms ranging from preschool to eighth grade where the preschool and elementary classrooms were located on the first floor and the secondary classrooms were located on the second floor. There was a high poverty rate for the neighborhood of Watson Public School. According to the Watson Neighborhood link website, the median household income for families living in the Watson Public School area was $16,799.

Watson Public School was a traditional public school with an instructional program focused on state standards. At Watson Public School there was one full day preschool classroom, one full day preschool inclusion classroom, and two half day preschool special education classrooms. The preschool classrooms work in partnership
with a local Head Start agency and thus were required to also follow Head Start
regulations. The goal of Head Start was to “deliver high-quality early childhood
education programs in safe nurturing environments” (Obtained from Head Start Website).
Head Start provided some funding to participating programs along with health, mental
health, dental screening, nutritious meals, and family literacy opportunities for families of
young children who qualify. The two preschool teachers from Watson Public School that
participated in this study were Sam and Nanci (pseudonyms).

**Sam.** Sam, a 29-year-old Caucasian woman, grew up in the area surrounding
Midwestern where she lived with her mom and her grandma. Sam’s mother often
worked multiple jobs while also taking classes at the local community college. Sam’s
biological father was an “alcoholic” and “abusive” and Sam has never had her biological
father as a part of her life. Sam lovingly referred to her step-dad as her “real dad.” At the
time of the study Sam lived in a suburb close to Midwestern with her husband. Sam and
her husband were trying to start a family of their own but were experiencing infertility
and were pursuing medical treatments.

Sam always wanted to be a teacher as she loved school as a child. At the time of
the study, Sam had her bachelor’s degree in moderate to intensive special needs
kindergarten through 12th grade and her master’s degree in Early Intervention. Sam also
had almost eight years of experience teaching preschool through fifth grade special
education at Watson Public School. Sam spent the past four years teaching preschool
special education and at the time of the study was teaching in an inclusion classroom.
Nanci. Nanci, a 52-year-old Caucasian woman, came from a family with a twin sister and an older biological brother as well as two step-brothers and one step-sister. Nanci’s parents divorced when she was three years old and her mother re-married soon after. Nanci herself had never been married and had no children of her own. Nanci and her mother both struggled with their weight. The most significant life changing event for Nanci was when she had gastric bypass surgery in 2002 and lost 207 pounds. At the time of the study, however, she was disappointed that she had gained 70 pounds back. Nanci’s mother passed away a few months before the start of the study.

At the time of the study Nanci had 27 years of experience teaching preschool, kindergarten, and second grade in daycare and public school settings. Before becoming a teacher at MMSD Nanci was an assistant teacher, a teacher, and then an assistant Director at a local daycare center. Nanci had been teaching preschool at Watson Public School for three years. At the time of the study Nanci had an associate’s degree in Child Development, a bachelor’s degree in Kindergarten—Third Grade Education, and a master’s degree in Elementary Education.

Blake Montessori Public School

The remaining three participants were preschool teachers at Blake Montessori Public School. Blake Montessori Public School, situated in a diverse and trendy neighborhood on the west side of Midwestern, was known for a number of art galleries and trendy restaurants and bars. The population of students at Blake Montessori Public School consisted of 76% African American, 14% Hispanic, 9% Caucasian, and less than 1% Asian and Native American. Blake Montessori Public School was a specialty school
that participated in the city wide draw. As such, parents from across the district were able to choose to send their children to Blake Montessori Public School instead of their traditional neighborhood schools.

While Blake Montessori Public School was accountable to following the district wide curriculum models they were unique in that the teachers also implemented the Montessori philosophy. In following the Montessori philosophy the teachers at Blake Montessori Public School created educational activities in the classroom based on Montessori’s five main developmental areas: practical life, sensorial, math, language, and cultural studies. The Montessori philosophy is based on the premise that children learn through hands-on and structured environments. Montessori classrooms are designed with a “prepared environment” organized to facilitate maximum independent learning and exploration through Montessori materials (North American Montessori Teachers Association, 2010). Within Montessori classrooms children are provided with long blocks of time to individually explore materials freely. Montessori materials are designed to isolate one particular learning concept. Montessori materials are also self-correcting to promote independent problem solving through exploration. As students master particular materials they are permitted to progress to materials with increasing complexity.

Also unique about Blake Montessori Public School was that it was the only preschool program in the district that participated in a Universal Pre-kindergarten (UPK) pilot project. As such, Blake Montessori Public School also had to meet the requirements and standards set forth by UPK pilot project to obtain grant funding. The goal of the
UPK pilot project was to “make high quality early care and education more affordable for families” (Invest in Children press release, 2007). The standards set forth by the UPK project included increased teacher qualifications and compensation, lower teacher to child ratios, use of approved curricula, engagement of families, and family linkages to necessary supportive services. The preschool classrooms at Blake Montessori Public School receive grant money to enhance their programs while families at or below 400% of the federal poverty level receive scholarships to assist in school fees. The three preschool teachers that participated in this research from Blake Montessori Public School were Jill, CeCe, and Sophia (pseudonyms).

**Jill.** Jill, a 40-year-old Caucasian woman, came from a large family of seven with four girls, one boy, and her mother and father. Jill’s parents both worked when she was growing up, her mom as a social worker and her dad as a dedicated producer of a radio station. Jill remained close with her parents and siblings and visited with them often. At the time of the study Jill and her husband lived in a suburb close to Midwestern with their two young children.

Jill didn’t always know that she wanted to become a teacher. When Jill went off to college she said she just picked teaching, “because I didn’t know what else to do.” In looking back Jill wished she would have been aware of all the possible education related jobs like speech therapy; however, at the time she said she “didn’t know such a job existed.” Jill received her bachelor’s degree in elementary/early childhood education. After graduation Jill was hired at Midwestern Metropolitan School District. Jill has 17 years of experience teaching preschool, kindergarten, and first grade within the MMSD
and 13 years of experience teaching at Blake Montessori Public School. Jill has received Montessori training and also has her master’s degree in General Education.

**CeCe.** CeCe, a 58-year-old African/American Muslim woman with grandparents from Cuba and Canada, grew up in the city of Midwestern with her two sisters and her mother and father. CeCe’s extended family was always an important part of CeCe’s life as they often shared residences and held large family gatherings every week. At the time of the study CeCe lived with her third husband. CeCe also had two grown boys from her first marriage.

Although CeCe started within the field of dentistry as a dental assistant, after working with children in the clinic she decided to return to school to become a teacher. CeCe had 11 years of experience teaching preschool, kindergarten, and first grade in daycare and public school settings with five years of experience at Blake Montessori Public School. At the time of the study CeCe had a bachelor’s degree in Elementary Education, had received supplemental Montessori training, and also had a master’s degree in Education.

**Sophia.** Sophia, a 40-year-old White mother of two young children came from a family of educators. Sophia’s father was a college professor in English, her mother was a middle school science teacher, and her sister was an English as a second language teacher. Sophia lived most of her childhood on college campus with her family. At the time of the study Sophia lived in Midwestern with her husband and children.

Sophia decided she wanted to become a teacher while working at the University laboratory school while she was receiving her bachelor’s degree in Social Science with a
minor in English. Sophia decided to continue her education and receive her master’s
degree in Elementary Education with a minor in Early Childhood. Sophia had 12 years
of teaching preschool through second grade. Sophia began her career teaching preschool
at a University Lab school where she later became the director. Afterwards, she became
a director of a local day care center before becoming a teacher at Midwestern
Metropolitan School district. Sophia had three years of experience teaching special
education preschool at Blake Montessori Public School. Sophia also had her Early
Intervention Specialist license at the time of the study.

**Data Collection**

For the purpose of this narrative research project I used interviews as my primary
method of data collection and observations and artifacts as secondary sources that served
to inform further interview questions. In narrative research the story is the source of data.
Schram (2006) wrote, “Narrative researchers take as the object of investigation the story
itself, rather than treating interviews or documentation of naturally occurring
conversations solely as a means to obtain information” (p. 104). In exploring the stories
that public preschool teachers shared, I have gained a better understanding of how they
make sense of their professional identities.

In addressing my main and supporting research questions, I conducted four
interviews with each participant over the course of four months. While my main goal
was to understand how participants understand their professional identities through their
shared stories, I also conducted observations of participants and collected artifacts to
assist me in developing thoughtful questions about their context and how they are making
sense of how it influenced their understanding of their professional identities. As such, I asked participants during the first interview and throughout the data collection process to identify contexts or artifacts they believed were important for me to observe them participating in or collect that have been or that they anticipate being influential to their understanding of their professional identities.

In being open to multiple possibilities that may be suggested by participants I gained a more authentic perception of how participants understand their professional identities. Participants suggested that I observe them during their morning teaching, team meetings, and professional development. Participants also shared with me documents located on the website about the district’s transformation plan. Appendix C presents the time line executed for this project.

**Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews (Merriam, 1998) were used throughout the interview process: one life history interview, one context interview, and two follow-up interviews. Merriam suggested that using “less structured formats assume that individual respondents define the world in unique ways” (p. 74).

All interviews were conducted using Rubin and Rubin’s (2005) responsive interview model. The responsive interview model emphasizes the relationship between interviewer and interviewee, focuses on depth of understanding, and is a flexible design. In coming from a social constructivist perspective these qualities of the responsive interview model are important to this research in that it recognizes the influence of the interviewer/interviewee relationship yet at the same time recognizes the individuality of
each interviewee. This distinction was important as it allowed me the flexibility to form interview questions that were significant to each participant’s individual experiences to form an in-depth understanding of each of the participant’s stories about her understanding of her professional identity as influenced by her personal biography and current contexts.

**Life history interviews.** Life history interviews were used to understand *how does public preschool teachers’ biographical context contribute to their understanding about the role(s) and/or characteristics of the teacher as a professional?* In drawing from Thompson’s (1978) life-story interview model, I asked questions that allowed participants to share their lived stories of influential places in time. In maintaining a conversational approach (Rubin & Rubin, 2005), I used the questions selected from Thompson’s (1978) life-story interview model as a guide, but also allowed the interviews to take form as the conversations progressed (See Appendix D).

In beginning with life history interviews I was able to gain some insight into the past experiences that each teacher had endured and how they made sense of the impact these experiences have had on their understanding of their professional identities. Each life history interview consisted of a maximum of two hours and was audio taped for accuracy. I completed all life history interviews during the month of February and the first week of March 2010. Each participant was also given her corresponding transcribed life history interview to review to insure accuracy and to provide an opportunity for commentary.
Context interviews. After conducting life history interviews I continued with a context interview with each individual teacher during March and the beginning of April 2010. I interviewed each teacher for approximately 1 hour each during context interviews and focused on exploring their situated place (See Appendix E). Interview questions focused on understanding the challenges and supports they face as they strive to implement their understandings of their professional identities in their particular public preschool context. As participants discussed their context they were asked to identify artifacts that I might collect or situations that I might observe to assist me in understanding their situated place and how this context informs their understanding of their professional identities. Observations of participants and artifact analyses were then used to generate questions for follow-up interviews.

Follow-up interviews. Follow-up interviews took place after observations during the months of April and May 2010 to understand the inward and outward dimensions of space. Questions asked during follow-up interviews were informed by observations and artifact analysis of situations that participants identified as being influential to their understanding of their professional identities. Each follow-up interview focused on the observations and artifact analyses that was conducted during that month or any previous month. During follow-up interviews I asked each participant questions about how they reflected upon their understandings about the messages they received from identified artifacts and during suggested times of observations. I also asked participants about how they responded to broader contextual messages they received about their roles as professionals (See Appendix F).
Observations

Participant observations of situations that participants identified as being influential to their understanding of their professional identities (participants named, classroom teaching, team meetings, and professional development) were conducted throughout the data collection stage to gain a first hand perspective of the stories that teachers shared from their context. Upon invitation I observed one professional development session led by Sam at Watson Public School. All of the participants agreed that it would be appropriate for me to also observe during their district wide professional development day from which I observed for approximately three to four hours. Participants also invited me to observe during classroom teaching. For each participant I observed their classroom teaching practices two times throughout the data collection process for approximately one to two hours each observation. Participants also agreed it was appropriate for me to observe them during their team meetings at each school. I observed one team meeting at each school for approximately one hour each.

During participant observations I also examined how participants enacted their ideas about their desired professional identities. Participant observations also served to generate new interview questions for follow up interviews. My observations were shared and discussed with teachers during follow-up interviews to gain an understanding of how participants made sense of these experiences as they related to their professional identities.

During participant observations I took on the observer as participant role as described by Merriam (1998). Merriam suggested, “Using this method, the researcher
may have access to many people and a wide range of information, but the level of the information revealed is controlled by the group members being investigated” (p. 101). Although Merriam’s concern about group members’ control over the information revealed in using this method, I found that in forming trust with them in becoming a part of the group participants were more comfortable with sharing information with me. As an observer who participated, my main focus was on collecting data for the research while participation in the group was secondary (Merriam, 1998). My role as a researcher was known to the group and I established the appropriateness of my participation in activities with participants prior to observations.

**Data Analysis**

Analysis in narrative inquiry is described as a transition from field texts to research texts. Field texts included my transcribed interviews and typed field notes from observations and artifacts. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) wrote, “Field texts have a recording quality to them. Research texts are at a distance from field texts and grow out of the repeated asking of questions concerning meaning and significance” (p. 132). In moving from field texts to research text, I spent a significant amount of time listening to recorded interviews while reading corresponding written transcripts to correct any error. I then used interim texts as a means to record my understandings as they unfolded and to draw connections between emerging themes as I developed major assertions. Clandinin and Connelly suggested interim texts can be used between field texts and research texts.

In analyzing data throughout the data collection process I used my analysis to inform how I continued to ask questions in subsequent interviews. Creswell (2007)
suggested that by conducting data analysis throughout the research process the researcher can use early forms of analysis to drive subsequent data collection. For instance, after observations I closely reviewed field notes to develop further questions and points for further discussion to establish clarity during follow-up interviews.

During data analysis I carefully coded transcribed interviews and field notes for emerging themes. I used a categorical aggregation as suggested by Stake (1995) to organize and analyze common threads between participants and across interviews, artifacts, and observations. During analysis of the life history interview I first paid particular attention to points of time or experiences that seemed significant to each participant. I then went back through each transcript and color coded themes that were significant for each participant. Next, I copied quotes from participants’ life history interviews into individual tables with corresponding themes (see example in Appendix G). In drawing from the significant themes for each participant I then wrote individual personal narratives paying particular attention to their stories of their life history and what was significant to them in how they understand their professional identities. During the life history interviews particular participants spoke about their own children. For the purpose of this dissertation and clarity, I refer to the children within participants’ classrooms as students and their own offspring as children.

During the month of April I turned my attention to the analysis of participants’ context interviews and observations. During the analysis of the context interviews and observations I read and re-read field texts highlighting points that were significant to each participant but also paying close attention to challenges and supports they named.
went back through the field texts and pulled themes that correlated to the themes identified through the life history interviews and added that information to their personal narratives. Next, I created a new table for each participant to record incidents or individuals that they described as being supportive or challenging to their own understanding of their professional identities as well as incidents of agency they shared (See example in Appendix H). In drawing from this table I returned to their individual narratives to include a narrative account of how participants described their context in terms of supports and challenges to their understanding of their professional identity. In drawing from the observations I then developed subsidiary interview questions for the follow-up interviews that were not addressed in previous interviews.

During the months of May and June I turned my attention toward analyzing follow-up interviews and remaining observations. First I read and re-read field texts highlighting any themes that had already been established through the life history and context interviews and added those themes to the corresponding themes in their personal narratives. Next I read and re-read follow-up interviews paying particular attention to how they reflected on how their understanding of their professional identity positioned them within the public school district and how participants responded to contextual messages that challenged their understanding of their professional identities. I then recorded these two themes into a table for each participant and added them in narrative form to each participant’s personal narrative (see example in Appendix I).

I shared individual personal narratives with participants throughout the interview and analysis process for feedback. Participants were often in agreement with what I had
written in their personal narratives. There was only one incident when a participant felt that I did not capture her story accurately. After sharing the first draft of Sam’s personal narrative with her, Sam reported that she was surprised that I did not mention her step-dad very much. Sam felt that he had more of a strong influence in how she understands her role as a professional. After following up with Sam I added a section about her step-dad and asked her again to review her personal narrative. Sam was happy with the addition and the remaining drafts of her personal narrative.

In analyzing participants’ individual personal narratives I used Stake’s (1995) direct interpretation, to more closely examine instances that particularly stood out as being significant for individual participants. After analyzing all field texts and completing participants’ personal narratives I looked across participants’ personal narratives paying particular attention to common and exceptional themes. I then created a table to examine how each participant described her role as a professional, how each described the contextual messages she received about her professional identity, and how she described acts of agency in enacting her understanding of her professional identity (see example in Appendix J). From this final table I was able to write a first draft of chapters 4, 5, and 6. In looking more closely at particular trends throughout these chapters I was able to further analyze written drafts of chapters 4, 5, and 6 that resulted in the final organization of my findings into the three chapters, *The importance of relationships, Professional knowledge, and Negotiating professional identities.*
Ethics

To gain initial trust and acceptance from participants I discussed my intent for this research with teachers during their faculty meeting September 25, 2009. During this first meeting, I explained my research interests, my personal background as a teacher, and the procedures that would be used for this research. I also explained the measures I would use to protect the anonymity of their identity throughout the research project. It was important that individuals felt free to decline from participation in the study. With this in mind, I asked interested individuals to indicate their interest by submitting a completed Participant Demographic Survey (see Appendix B) to me by mail. Completed Participant Demographic Surveys were kept confidential and were kept in a file under lock and key.

Protecting the identity of participants was important in studying their understanding of their roles as educators and their professional identities as informed by contextual influences. In protecting the anonymity of data collected I used pseudonyms that participants assigned themselves on the Demographic Survey. Participants’ documents, audio taped and video taped conversations, and field notes have all been kept on file with names removed and pseudonyms in place.

Observing participants during their classroom teaching, team meetings, and professional development opportunities placed participants in a vulnerable position. In assisting participants in feeling more comfortable in my presence during these activities I reassured participants that I was only interested in how preschool teachers, who participated in the study, understand the professional roles that they are asked to and choose to assume during observations and would not take note on any irrelevant issues.
that may arise. As a safeguard, participants were granted the right to exclude the researcher from any setting without penalty. Furthermore, participants were also informed that in the event that they wished to withdraw from the study at any time they would be free to do so without penalty.

This research in itself offers much to gain by the participants. Throughout the research process participants gained new insights into how they come to understand their professional identities as well as their biographical and current context that have shaped and continue to shape their understandings. All participants were satisfied at the conclusions of the study and after reading their own personal narratives participants suggested that they particularly learned a lot about how their past experiences and relationships influence who they are as teachers.

**Trustworthiness**

In ensuring the trustworthiness of this research I used Lincoln and Guba’s (1984) five criterions for establishing trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and reflexivity. Here, I discuss the techniques I used in my effort to establish trustworthiness.

Credibility in the naturalist sense, as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1984), must show that the researcher strives to represent the multiple constructions adequately; this includes the reconstructions and how they are pursued and presented. Lincoln and Guba suggested that credibility must first “carry out the inquiry in such a way that the probability that the findings will be found to be credible is enhanced, and second, to demonstrate the credibility of the findings by having them approved by the constructors.
of the multiple realities being studied” (p. 296). In ensuring trustworthiness, I used the two techniques of peer examination/debriefing and member checking as suggested by Creswell (2007), Lincoln and Guba (1984), and Merriam (1998).

In using peer examination/debriefing (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1984; Merriam, 1998), I shared data and emerging assertions with members of my committee for review. Using peer debriefing in this way not only assisted me in keeping my perspective in check by offering the perspective of outside reviewers while also providing support in the construction of emerging methodological design but also assisted me in ensuring methods were dependable and confirming the trustworthiness of findings. Debriefing sessions happened periodically throughout the data collection and analysis stages and pseudonyms were used at all times.

I also used member checking to ensure the credibility of this research (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1984; Merriam, 1998). In using member checking I shared transcribed interviews with each corresponding participant for accuracy and commentary. I also periodically shared my interpretations of the data with the corresponding participants as they emerged through their individual personal narratives. This allowed participants to correct any errors in facts, clarify intentions, and provide feedback on emerging assertions. Member checking sessions took place at the end of each proceeding interview.

In addressing issues of the transferability of this research I drew on Lincoln and Guba (1984). Lincoln and Guba stressed that the “naturalist cannot specify the external validity of an inquiry; he or she can provide only the thick description necessary to
enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility” (p. 316). While my endeavor was to share the stories of how a particular group of public preschool teachers understand their professional identities, these findings may lend some insight for other similar contexts.

In making this research more transparent, I used thick descriptions of not only the participants and their historical and contextual influences but also of who I am as a researcher and my methods for collecting data and process of emerging assertions. Such thick description allows the reader to make individual judgments of transferability.

**Reflexivity**

Schram (2006) described reflexivity as a sensitivity to and awareness of the “self and other and of the interplay between the two” (p. 9). In remaining aware of my own perspectives and assumptions about the teacher as professional it was important that I documented and reviewed my own understanding throughout the research process. As such, I used a reflexive journal to record my own personal stories, how they inform how I understand this research, and how this research assists my re-thinking about my past and future experiences as a teacher as well as my own professional identities.

The use of a reflexive journal assisted me in bringing my biases and values to a conscious level so that I could make them clear to the readers of my research. Before beginning data collection I recorded in the reflexive journal about my experience as a teacher and my beliefs about my role as an educator and my own professional identities. I periodically returned to this journal to record how my understanding has transformed as the research progressed while continuing to make note of how my experiences could have
influenced how I understand data derived from interviews, observations, and documents. For instance, in returning to my reflexive journal during interview analysis I realized that I identified more with Sophia’s need to assert her agency in public spaces. As such, I found that I did not ask as many clarifying questions during my interviews with her. In realizing this connection before the conclusion of the study I was able to focus my attention in being more deliberate in asking clarifying questions that assisted me in capturing a more accurate story of her experience.

**Summary**

Within this chapter I have described the significance in using narrative inquiry for this research to explore how five public preschool teachers understand and negotiate their professional identities within a major metropolitan school district. In doing so, I have described the research questions, site and participant selection, the process of data collection and analysis, ethical considerations, criteria followed to ensure trustworthiness, and the limitations for this study.

Within the next three chapters I discuss major findings from this research. Within chapter 4 I discuss how participants described the importance of relationships in their work as professionals. In chapter 5 I discuss how participants described the importance of knowledge in being a professional and how their ideas about knowledge often competed with the district administration’s notion of important knowledge. Within chapter 6 I discuss how participants negotiated their professional identities within a context that promoted professional roles and characteristics that were competing with participants’ own ideas about who they were as professionals.
CHAPTER IV

THE IMPORTANCE OF RELATIONSHIPS

Participants believed forming relationships with students, families, principals, and colleagues was an essential part of enacting their professional identities. The relationships these five teachers developed took on differing characteristics, and were important to participants for a variety of reasons, as is reflective of their unique lived experiences. In discussing the significance of participants’ relationships with students, I begin by sharing three participants’ reflections on how and why they strive to know their students well. I also discuss how two participants described their relationships with students as “strict” and “hard” or “tough” in order to assist students in meeting high expectations. I then describe how tensions developed for four participants who were faced with parents that believe their relationships with students were only as “babysitters.”

I then turn to a discussion of the relationships the teachers developed with principals and colleagues. In doing so, I discuss how these relationships were important to participants in validating and supporting their professional work and thus were important to how participants enacted their professional identities as experts and collaborators. Here I also discuss the tensions participants experienced in their relationships with principals and colleagues who did not validate or support their professional work.
Relationships With Students and Families

Participants’ relationships with students and families were significant to their work as professionals. In particular for three of the participants, these relationships were used for understanding students in order to advocate for them, to plan for appropriate curriculum, to encourage students to follow their interests, and to work collaboratively with parents. The two remaining participants, however, believed that having “tough love” was important to their relationships with students in ensuring that students meet high expectations. These two participants believed that they already knew what was best for students and therefore were “tough” and “strict” for the students’ “own good.” As relationships with students were important to participants tensions ensued when parents perceived teacher relationships with students as “babysitters.” In what follows I share participants’ stories of their relationships in understanding students and in providing them with tough love. I then turn my attention to a discussion of the tensions that existed for participants in being viewed as “babysitters.”

Relationships for Understanding Students

For some participants, knowing their students was critical to their performance as a professional. I begin with CeCe, who talks about developing family-like relationships with students so that she could meet their academic and personal needs, as well as advocate on their behalf. I then talk about Jill, who like CeCe believed in a family-like relationship with students in meeting their academic needs. I then focus on Sophia who draws on her close relationships with her teachers to understand the importance of relationship in knowing students to fostering their interests.
CeCe: “I gave them a choice because I could see that you’re not professional if you’re going to make someone do something.” For CeCe, forming close family-like relationships with her students was particularly important in knowing their academic and personal needs and advocating on students’ behalf. This belief stems from CeCe’s experience as a student herself. As a young girl, CeCe did not have close relationships with her teachers and therefore felt that her teachers did not know her academic needs and cultural background. In fact, she claimed that it may have been because of her racial or cultural background that she and her teachers did not become close.

Growing up in the 1960s CeCe experienced some racial tensions in the school. At an early age CeCe began to notice how African American students were treated differently. She said,

Caucasian teachers they kind of just really didn’t look at us [African American students]. They did what they did and just walked out of the classroom. They didn’t really bond with us I don’t think and especially when the movement [Black Panthers] started going on. They really looked at just trying to get out of the neighborhood to me.

From this experience CeCe learned how not knowing students culturally can make them feel isolated. As a teacher, then, CeCe strives to create a sense of community and family-like atmosphere in the classroom where every child feels valued and differences are celebrated to prevent students from feeling isolated like she experienced. CeCe said,
You can’t leave their culture outside the classroom. You know you have to bring that in. So you can’t, you have to bring in their whole life. You know like I know some of the children that are really family oriented and if their parents want to, we always open the door to that, their cultures or what ever they want to give to the classroom.

CeCe also believed that having relationships with students was important in knowing their academic needs. In remembering her own experiences in school, CeCe said,

I think that they [teachers] had more time with the smarter students. I felt that the teachers that were with the middle-average students or the ones that weren’t average they were just below the grade average they just really didn’t care to me. I can remember a teacher making me read in front of people and I was so nervous and I cried and everybody laughed. She [teacher] would just repeat it and tell me to repeat it and then the kids start laughing.

From this experience CeCe learned of the importance of knowing students’ academic needs in planning appropriate curriculum. During a classroom observation of small group reading I observed how CeCe strives to know her students’ academic needs. During the group reading time there were three children who were distracted with a conversation about Easter. CeCe explained, “When they changed the topic to Easter I gave them a choice because I could see that you’re not professional if you’re going to make someone do something. That’s not teaching because their mind is not open.”
One of the reasons CeCe valued such close relationships with her students was that it allowed her to advocate on their behalf. In explaining the core role advocacy played in her professional identity, CeCe drew on her personal experience growing up with her extended family:

We were always doing things with our extended family. I had a lot of boy cousins. They are like my brothers because they always looked after me, like right now we are close. My aunts and uncles they were like, we listened to them like they were our mother and father.

CeCe’s close relationships with her family taught her about the importance of caring for others in “looking out” for them, a lesson that influenced her preschool teaching. One way that CeCe fostered close relationships with her students was by greeting them each morning with a hug and a conversation about how they were doing. CeCe said, “You find [out] a lot when you see a child in the morning, you see how their face is, you know your children. They know if they have something they really have to tell me they can at that time.” In fostering close relationships with her students CeCe was able to advocate for her students much like how her cousins “looked out” for her. CeCe gave an example of how she advocated for her students:

One little boy, you know, he had kept crying and whining and he did it yesterday and it’s like now it’s beginning to be a habit and I said it’s time for me to spend some time with him and see what’s going on. I did the other day and he had said he had allergies and his eye itches but today he just looks miserable. I pulled him to the side and we had a talk and you know what we talked about? He said, “My
mommy’s not giving me enough rest and she’s waking me up early in the morning.” He started telling me these things and then “well, I’ll send a note home to mommy and let her know that you were really tired today.”

CeCe’s advocacy depended on her ability to know her students well. From CeCe’s story of how she advocated for students it seems that her family-like relationship with students allowed for her to know them as individuals with individual needs. In having a family-like relationship CeCe “looked out” for her students but at the same time “looked out” for the parents by helping them understand the needs of their child. As a student herself CeCe did not feel that her teachers “looked out” for her because they did not “care to know her.” In bringing her past to bear on her present and future practice as a teacher CeCe decided to draw on her family experiences as a model rather than her experiences as a student herself to understand her role in forming relationships with students. In looking back on the painful memories from her own experiences in school CeCe advocated for a different experience for her own students.

Jill: “She saw that it was something that maybe I like, so she pushed me to try to do more.” Like CeCe, Jill also believed that having relationships were important in knowing her students’ academic needs and in working collaboratively with others to meet those needs. The second youngest of five siblings, Jill also shared a close relationship with her family. Because her parents both worked, the members of Jill’s family pitched in when needed. Jill spoke of counting on her older siblings for help. “I know my oldest sister did a lot of carting us around, you know driving us to things we needed to get to.” As an adult Jill was still very close to her family. “Just knowing that
we are all going to have each other and lots of family, cousins and things for our kids and it’s nice.”

From this experience Jill learned of the importance of having a family-like relationship where everyone “pitched in” and worked together for a common goal. As a teacher, Jill felt that it was important to have relationships with parents where everyone had a part in the student’s education. Jill said,

I think I’m the one that’s supposed to be sort of leading the way in the education but at the same time I can’t expect to do it all by myself either. You know there are things that I need to rely on parents to reinforce at home.

Jill continued,

Just knowing how to talk to parents and understand that these are their babies and these are some of their first experiences in school and they [parents] need to be treated with kids’ gloves too. I think that is a part of being a professional, at least in early childhood.

Working with parents, however, demanded that Jill take the time to develop an understanding of who their children were and how she could help them reach their fullest potential. Remembering her own experience as a student, Jill learned that having close family-like relationships with students was important so that she might come to know students’ academic needs and to encourage them to achieve higher levels. She recalled,

I remember I had written a story or something, or a book or something and she [teacher] was really encouraging me to write more. I thought, well that was nice
that she was really pushing me like she really liked my book. She saw that it was something that maybe I like, so she pushed me to try to do more.

During an observation I was able to see Jill put this idea into action. I watched Jill encourage an enthusiastic student to continue working on her journal. Jill asked the student to tell her more about her picture. The child pointed to the snail and said that she had a purple snail and a flower. Jill encouraged the child to write about the picture. Jill then gave her an example sentence, “The snail is purple.” With an excited expression the child rushed back to the journal center. In having a close relationship with her student Jill seemed to know the value the student placed on her journal and encouraged her to continue to add to her work.

Jill draws from her experiences in coming from a large close family where everyone “pitched in” caring for each other as well as from close relationships she has had with teachers from her own experiences as a student. For Jill, having these close relationships was significant to her life as they made her feel valued. In bringing her understanding of the importance of close relationships that she has gained from these experiences and other similar experiences Jill strives to create similar close relationships with her student and their parents.

Sophia: “I would stay after school a lot and help her and I would stay and just read.” Sophia, too, spoke about the importance of knowing her students well. Unlike Jill and CeCe, Sophia did not draw on her familial experience to describe her commitment to relationship-building. Rather, she focused on her experience as a student
and one experience in particular. Remembering a close relationship that she had with her fifth grade teacher who took the time to foster her passion for reading, Sophia said,

She used to recommend a lot of books for me to read and I would stay after school a lot and help her and I would stay and just read. And I think I would read to her, I would read to her while she was doing stuff. She was just wonderful. I mean she was just wonderful. I would even go to her house sometimes and visit her.

From this experience Sophia learned that having relationships with students was important in knowing students’ interests and assisting them in pursuing their interests. During an observation, I watched as Sophia spent time with a student to get to know her. During group time one child announced that she got a dog over the weekend. Sophia engaged with the student in a conversation about the dog. Sophia asked, “Was that a real or pretend dog that you played with?” Sophia, with a seemingly genuine interest, continued the conversation with the child about the dog allowing it to become a topic for the entire class to discuss during group.

For Sophia, having a teacher who took the time to notice her interest and find ways to foster those interests was an important experience for her. As a teacher herself, Sophia carried her memory of this experience and other similar experiences to inform the relationships she formed with her own students. As such Sophia strives to know her students’ interests and to foster those interests within her classroom.

**Discussion.** In listening to the life stories of CeCe, Jill, and Sophia, the importance of close relationships with students was clear. For CeCe and Jill, creating a
family-like community in the classroom was a natural extension of their familial experience, wherein they could identify and meet students’ needs, challenge them, and enact collaborative and advocate roles as professionals. These two women also drew heavily on their experiences as students to inform their teaching. For Sophia, her recollection of a fifth grade experience was influential in shaping her approach to teaching. She believed that taking extra time to know students, to identify their individual passions and abilities, would enable her to help them reach their full potential. CeCe, however, reflected on how the lack of relationships with teachers isolated her as a student.

These pungent memories taught important lessons and helped to frame constructs of professionalism held by individual women. These women’s stories suggest that not only are individuals’ lived experiences paramount in shaping their professional identities and goals, but that reflection can play a powerful role in how participants choose to enact in similar or different ways.

“Tough Love” Relationships

Sam and Nanci also spoke about the importance of having relationships with students. They similarly discussed their belief that they ought to hold high expectations for students and develop trust with families. However, Sam and Nanci did not seem to enter their relationships with students in order to understand students’ academic and cultural needs so much as to send the message to students that they cared about them. Having students and families trust that they cared meant that they trusted the teachers had students’ best interests at heart, and strove to help them reach high levels of achievement.
Sam: “I would just really hope that they remembered me as someone that was tough as shit but I cared at the same time.” Like CeCe, Jill, and Sophia, Sam described the importance of having close relationships with students. Sam seemed to believe that knowing students well required extending their relationship beyond the classroom. This commitment stemmed from her experience as a young girl. Sam had teachers whom she trusted because of their close relationship they established outside of the classroom. Sam said her fourth grade teacher “would write me letters and when I had my tonsils out she brought me my homework to my house.”

Sam draws from this experience to inform how she developed close relationships with students outside of the classroom. Sam said for example, “I actually am the godmother of one of my former students. I’m very close with the family. In the Summer I pick up the kids, we go bowling; I went to their birthday parties, very close.” Sam believed that establishing trust through having close relationships with students outside of class is important because, “I have always said I would be there for you, I would have felt like I was going against that.”

Like CeCe, Jill, and Sophia, Sam believed that it was important to foster close relationships with students, sometimes relationships that extended beyond the school day. Doing so, she believed, helped her to develop trust, and this was important to her as a teacher. Sam wanted her students and their families to trust that she had their best interests in mind.

Sam strove to help her students reach high expectations. She described her approach to teaching as being “strict” and “hard.” Sam had learned the importance of
being strict and holding children to high expectations from role models in her family. When it came to grades Sam’s grandma and mom were “hard” on her. Sam said,

She would kick your butt if she needed to. It was you better get an A or you’re going to get it, kind of deal. If I had bad grades I had to do extra homework.

Now bad grades being A-, B+ or less so if I got a B+ it was like 10 hours of extra homework a week.

Sam’s mom faced many struggles with school and jobs due to an undiagnosed learning disability. Sam said, “I really think too that’s why my mom pushed me so much to do extra because she was so afraid that I would be like her.” Sam’s step-dad was also an authoritarian figure in her life who modeled for her the importance of being “strict.” Sam said, “I had a very strict curfew, very strict rules, I did when my step-dad came along.”

From this experience Sam learned that being “strict” and “hard” is important to adults in caring for children. As a teacher Sam is “hard” on students by having “high expectations” to make sure that her students “get the best education they can.” Sam said, “I set high standards for the kids, and that’s why I think I’m a good teacher.”

During one of my classroom observations I observed first hand how Sam sets “high standards” for students. When making Mother’s Day cards, one child said that he was finished. Sam asked to see the card and then looked at the student and said, “What do you think, is that good enough for your mommy? I don’t think so.” Sam sent the child back to the table to continue his work on the card.

On another day, Sam’s students had just returned from Music and the assistant announced that some of the students did not receive stickers for good behavior. Sam had
each student who did not have a sticker announce to the class what they had done wrong in Music to not receive a sticker and then had each of them flip their behavior cards from green to red. One child in particular was hiding her hands, her eyes were tearing up. Sam said, “Why are you hiding your hands? Why didn’t you get a sticker?” Sam then directed the student to go flip her card to red and told her she gets a double red for being secretive and hiding her hands. Sam then announced to the class that all the children with red behavior cards “do not get to play at recess.” Sam said,

Those of you without stickers can suffer the consequences of your actions and sit on the wall during recess. Remember Mrs. Sam loves you very much and I want to be proud to be your teacher. All of you who got stickers I am proud to be your teacher. Those of you who didn’t need to get it together so I can be proud to be your teacher too.

Sam draws from her own experiences as a child to understand that in enacting “care” for children, adults are “strict” or “hard” because they ultimately know what is best. By being “strict” with students, Sam hoped to communicate to students and families that she cared about the children. Sam said, “I would just really hope that they remembered me as someone that was tough as shit but I cared at the same time.” Sam was not alone in her beliefs of the importance of being “strict” or “hard” on students as protecting them. Nanci similarly described her relationships with students as being “strict” and “tough.”

Nanci: “I think I’m pretty tough like she [mom] is.” Like Sam, Nanci also learned as a child that adults protect children by being “tough” and “strict.” In particular,
Nanci’s mom was “tough” on her and compliments were often followed by some form of critique. Nanci explained, “She’d be kind in a roundabout way, like wow you look great but lose ten more pounds and you’d look even better.” Nanci and her mom both battled with their weight. Although Nanci’s mom criticized her for her weight Nanci believed that it was because her mom cared about her and did not want her to “go through what she went through” in having her husband walk out on her with three children.

As a young girl, Nanci also encountered strict teachers. Nanci recalled that her teachers were “strict” and sometimes “tough” on students to get their work done. She said, “I see now that they just wanted the best for all of us, you know. They were just trying to teach us what was right.”

As a teacher, Nanci cares for her students in much the same way that she was cared for by her mother. Nanci said, “I think I’m pretty tough like she [mom] is. You know I’m pretty tough.” During my classroom observation of Nanci I observed several examples of how Nanci is “tough” on her students. One day Nanci was testing children in the hallway when she heard a child crying from her classroom. Nanci went into the classroom and pulled a little girl out into the hallway who was crying. Nanci told the little girl that if she is going to cry she can do so in the hall because “there is NO crying in PK.” The little girl sat on the floor and watched as Nanci continued the flash card assessment with another child.

Another time Nanci announced to the students that she was going to teach them a new song for W, the letter of the week. Nanci started to sing the song and the children began to chime in. Nanci stopped singing and in a loud stern voice said, “NO! I thought I
was singing first because you don’t know the words yet.” Nanci began singing the song again and the kids started singing with her on the second verse. Nanci then told the children that she would sing a line and let them repeat it. Nanci cued the students when it was their turn to sing by pointing to them.

In drawing from her own experiences Nanci has come to understand that the adults in her life were “strict” and “tough” on her because they cared about her and knew what was best. For Nanci, being “strict” and “tough” on students was important to her in teaching students appropriate school behaviors and protecting them from failure. During observations Nanci often reminded the students that they would be going to kindergarten next year and they would be expected to have school behaviors and “act like kindergartners.” In being “tough” on her students’ behaviors Nanci believed that she was preparing them for kindergarten.

**Discussion.** Sam’s and Nanci’s constructs of relationship-building were different than the other three participants. Namely, the relationships these women strove to develop with students were aimed at imparting important lessons to students. These relationships generally emphasized being “strict” and “hard or tough” and maintaining control. Such authoritarian relationships were starkly different from the relationships that CeCe, Jill, and Sophia had with their students where relationships were more centered on knowing the students individually and meeting their needs.

Certainly, the differences noted in how participants think about the role of relationships to their professional identities can largely be linked to their early experiences and relationships with their families and teachers. Across all five
participants, their relationships with family members and former teachers, in particular, informed their teaching. However, CeCe’s story demonstrates that personal histories from different figured worlds can impact individuals in diverse ways. Recall that as a young student, CeCe’s teachers could be characterized as “hard” and “strict.” CeCe, however, also had experiences within her own family where she was able to feel valued and “looked after.” In reflecting on the negative feelings she had from her experiences in school, CeCe had chosen to enact as a professional in a different way than her teachers. Her reflection on what it was like to exist in authoritarian contexts taught her that she wished to create a different experience for her own students. As such, CeCe draws from her experiences with her family to inform a construct of professional that was different to what she experienced from her own teachers as a student herself. This finding not only highlights the important role personal histories can have on teachers’ professional identity but also highlights the significance of reflection and the potential of teacher agency to construct their own professional identities. CeCe was able to reflect on her personal histories and pull from the experiences that were most meaningful to her to improvise a new vision for her own students. While participants spoke about the significance of the relationships they sought to foster with their students in their professional work, there were some tensions that existed when parents perceived their relationships differently.

**Tensions**

Significant to their work as professionals, participants believed their relationships with students were particularly important in planning curriculum and making sure
students met high levels of achievement. Tensions ensued, however, when participants felt that their relationships with students were viewed by parents as being nothing more than “babysitting.” This tension existed particularly for CeCe, Jill, Sam, and Nanci. Jill said,

This is curriculum based. This is not just play, we are not just babysitting all day, they are in school now so they are expected to act like they are in school. We are setting the tone here in preschool for the rest of their school that education is important. We are having fun but it is still important.

Sam also described how parents treat her as a babysitter. “They’ll send a kid with a fever, runny nose, you know, 20 inches of snow, they don’t care because they have to go to work.” Sam said, “Well, I’m not watching your child, we’re teaching your child.” Nanci said, “I have kids that stroll in at 11 o’clock, but we don’t wait for them; we just keep going.” Nanci explained the difference between daycare preschool and public preschool; “When I did daycare it really was like babysitting because those kids got dropped off whenever, got picked up whenever. I mean this is an elementary school.”

CeCe described similar problems with parents treating her as a babysitter. CeCe said, “A parent brings their child a couple of days a week and then some days he don’t bring them and when it gets cold they don’t bring them.” CeCe said that the majority of parents of students at Blake Montessori Public School know that this is a “school and we operate as such and they’re expected to be here and follow the rules of the whole community here.” CeCe said, “A while back they still looked at preschool as just playing.” CeCe suggested that she feels that the perception of preschool is changing in
general; “the president now, he’s really into early childhood education so I think it’s a
global change.”

Being perceived as a babysitter where preschool is “just a drop off service” served
as a tension for participants who desired more collaborative relationships with parents
that are centered on students’ educational development. While participants spoke about
the importance of relationships as being family-like, “looking out” for each other,
knowing students and knowing what is best for students, for participants these qualities
are primarily based on education.

Nel Noddings (2002) wrote about the importance of caring relationships between
teachers and students where teachers focus on understanding students’ needs and working
toward meeting those needs. While all participants believed that they were working in
the best interest of their students they focused more heavily on students’ educational
needs which in turn caused tensions for their relationships with parents who viewed their
work as babysitting rather than educational. Noddings suggested that in having caring
relationships with students teachers must be open to attend to the needs of the whole
child. Participants spoke about parents’ main concern for their young children in
preschool as having a “babysitter” or caregiver. While these four participants did not
suggest that they did not fill the role of caregiver, their emphasis on having a partnership
with parents that focused on education as well as their aversions in being perceived as
“babysitters” marginalized the important work that “babysitting” or caregiving provides
for families and thus puts a strain on teachers’ relationships with parents.
Also significant was the influence participants’ unique life histories had on how they understood their students’ needs. In approaching their relationships with students as authoritarians Sam and Nanci did not involve students’ feelings but made decisions informed by their own history of experiences about what was important for students to learn to be successful in life. According to Noddings (2002) in having caring relationships with students, teachers must also look toward students for affirmation that their needs are met. Sam and Nanci, however, believed that they already knew what was best for students. While CeCe’s and Jill’s relationships with students were more centered on knowing children individually to meet their diverse needs they too struggled with being perceived as babysitters rather than educators or having their work viewed as play rather than educational. This suggests CeCe and Jill believed that having relationships based on students’ educational needs was to the forefront of their professional work.

Relationships with students and parents were not the only relationships that were important to participants’ professional identities. Participants’ relationships with their principals and colleagues were also significant. As such, I will now turn my attention to a discussion on how participants described the importance of their relationships with colleagues and principals in validating and supporting their professional work. In doing so, I draw on their individual narratives to tell the story of their shared context and how they draw from their shared relationships in similar and different ways.

**Relationships With Principals and Colleagues**

In addition to their relationships with students and parents participants also named their relationships with principals and colleagues as significant to their professional work.
Most significant was how these relationships had the potential to either provide or not provide participants with validation and support for their professional work. In what follows I first discuss participants’ stories of how their relationships with principals and colleagues validated their work as professionals. Next, I discuss how these relationships also provide participants with support for their professional work. I then turn my attention toward the tensions that some participants experienced in these relationships when they did not validate or support their professional work.

**Relationships Validate Professional Work**

Having a relationship with their building principals was particularly important to how participants felt validated as professionals. These relationships with building principals provided participants with feelings of respect for their professional work when principals provided them with professional autonomy and recognition for work well done.

Jill and Sophia talked about how their principal at Blake Montessori Public School showed she respected them as a professional by providing them with some space to make autonomous classroom decisions. Jill said she felt her principal trusts her as a professional because she “is not breathing down my neck.” Sophia also spoke about the importance of autonomy in being validated as a professional. Sophia said, “I think they [principals] have to respect your decisions that you make. I hope she respected my professional judgment enough to know I’m making the right decision.”

Being provided with classroom autonomy by their building principal was particularly important to Jill’s and Sophia’s enactment of their professional identities.
because it suggested to them that their knowledge and judgments are valued and respected by the principal. Participants also felt respected as professionals from praises they received from their principals.

In addition to having professional autonomy Sophia also believed that praise was important in how she felt validated by her principals. Sophia felt validated when her professional work was recognized by her principal. Sophia said, “I just had a nice talk with my principal this morning. She was saying, oh you guys are doing a good job down there.” Similarly, Sam feels respected as a professional when her building principal showcases her classroom as a model classroom when district administrators come to visit. Sam said,

When big district people come they always, they are brought to our room, and they do see our room. Yeah, um, and there’s always compliments that are said or people come in—even when I have a sub—come in and they’re like oh my God this is so nice for a Midwestern classroom.

For Sophia and Sam being praised for their work is important in validating them as knowledgeable professionals. Being praised in particular by their principals lets them know that their work was recognized as important and thus encourages them to enact their professional identities in particular ways. Participants were not only validated through praise by their relationships with principals but also through their relationships with their colleagues.
Jill and CeCe spoke about the praise they receive from their relationships with other teachers at Blake Montessori Public School. Jill said, “I think they value us because they know we are the foundation.” CeCe explained,

We ask the other teachers in the building and the children that have come to us, rather than coming from outside, they [other teachers] feel like they are so much more together. They can see that they’re a little more mannerable and that they’re more school oriented where the other ones come in they don’t know how to maybe stand in a line or understand that there’s quiet times, there’s work times, there’s work stations, you get your work, you know, so staying on a routine, so they can see the difference. The kindergarten teachers because that’s where they go next and they really celebrate children coming in knowing their alphabet and their sounds and can write and know numbers. They can get started with just concentrating on reading.

For Jill and CeCe being praised for their work with students by other teachers was significant in making them feel validated as professionals. Being validated by other teachers made Jill and CeCe feel that their work was effective and important to the success of students as they moved into higher grades. This was particularly important for Jill and CeCe who come from a Montessori background built on the premise that all children progress through particular stages of development and that all stages are important.

Having relationships with principals and colleagues are important to participants in validating their work as professionals. Particularly important were how these
relationships provided them with space to make autonomous decisions and offered praise for their work. As such, participants felt validated for their professional knowledge and were thus able to enact their professional identities as experts. Participants also spoke about the significance of their relationships with principals and colleagues in providing them with support.

**Relationships Provide Support**

Receiving support from their relationships with principals and colleagues was important to how participants enacted their ideas about what was a professional. Participants received support from their relationships with principals and colleagues by working alongside of them to pursue grant projects, improve practice, and share new ideas. Through these relationships participants were able to draw upon and build their practical expertise in collaborative ways.

Sophia, CeCe, and Jill spoke about the significance of their relationships with their principal at Blake Montessori Public School in providing them with support in working on grant projects. Sophia said,

> They try to make sure that we’re included in different things. We have a Universal Pre-kindergarten [UPK] grant and so my principal has to do a lot of work for that. It’s a lot of work; they try to work with us.

CeCe and Jill explained that the effort their principal at Blake Montessori Public School puts forth in working with them on grant projects suggests that she values their work. CeCe said,
It’s a lot of work that has to be done and a lot of meetings and paperwork. I think she [building principal] sees the work that we do and values our expertise in preschool. So I think it’s a good thing.

Jill said, “I think it depends on the administrator; our principal here sees value in early childhood.”

For participants at Blake Montessori Public School, their relationship with their principal was also important in how they are supported in their professional work. The principal at Blake Montessori Public School put forth much effort to make sure these three participants were able to continue the UPK pilot project and receive grant funds to enhance their professional work. For Jill, CeCe, and Sophia being supported by the principal was also validating in that it gave them a sense that the principal values their work enough to support them in their professional endeavors. By working alongside the teachers the principal also showed that she respected them for their work. As such participants were able to enact professionally as collaborators with their principal.

Participants also spoke about the importance of their relationships with colleagues in supporting their professional practice. In particular, these collegial relationships served in developing practical knowledge. Through their relationships with each other and other preschool and kindergarten teachers, participants were able to work together and share ideas and strategies in building their practical knowledge for their work as professionals.

Jill, CeCe, Sam, and Nanci spoke about the importance of team collaboration in sharing ideas. Jill said,
Well the two of us [Jill and CeCe] plan a lot of stuff together when we think of projects and things. We always share. Like we did a project we made this quilt, it was out of paper so we just decided to combine it so it’s a preschool spring quilt.

CeCe explained how she works with Jill to build practical knowledge, “We [Jill and CeCe] have our strengths, I think I’m really really good at teaching the how to write and she’s really good at math.”

The relationship that Jill and CeCe have was particularly important to each of them in building practical knowledge. Jill and CeCe not only work on classroom projects together but they also support each other in areas that are their expertise.

For Sam, having relationships with the two new preschool teachers in the building was important in learning new strategies. Sam said,

The two new preschool teachers have helped, they’re young, 23, 26, but they come in with new fresh ideas—even though I’m only going to be 30 but still I’ve been teaching eight years and you kind of get stuck in your own thinking and I’m like, oh that’s cute, I should try that. So I do like to say it is a nice breath of fresh air.

Sam’s relationships with new preschool teachers are important to her in building professional knowledge in that they provide her with new strategies that keep her “fresh.”

Nanci spoke about how her relationships with the planning team assisted her in building practical knowledge. Nanci said,

We’re on a team altogether. It’s good! We all try and talk about it [their work], because, kindergarten teachers may have ideas, the special education teachers
may have ideas, so we all try and just throw it back and forth and see what we can do to help each other. We are a good team, we work well together.”

For Nanci, building practical knowledge with her team is important in drawing on their different areas of expertise.

While participants drew from their relationships with different teachers to build practical knowledge, one thing was clear: having a collaborative relationship with colleagues was important to their professional work. For CeCe and Jill their most important relationship in building practical knowledge was the relationship they had with each other. For Sam it was the new teachers who brought new “fresh” ideas and for Nanci it was the entire planning team with their different expertise that was significant in building practical knowledge as a professional. Building practical knowledge seemed to be important to participants in how they see themselves as experts. Practical knowledge is specific to their contexts and placed them in a powerful position where they are the most knowledgeable about their students.

Participants’ relationships with principals and colleagues were primarily significant in validating their work and providing them with support. Relationships with principals and colleagues allowed participants to draw on their own expertise to make pedagogical decisions and to also work collaboratively with other professionals in sharing ideas and creating practical knowledge. This in turn validated their work as professionals.

While participants spoke about the significance of relationships with principals and colleagues that validate and support their professional work for two participants,
these relationships did not validate or support them as professionals. As such, I now turn my attention to the stories of participants that did not feel their relationships with principals and colleagues validated or supported their professional work. In so doing, I discuss the tensions that existed in these relationships.

**Tensions**

Similar to the tensions that participants experienced with parents Sam and Nanci spoke about the tensions they experienced in their relationships with their principal and colleagues at Watson Public School in being viewed as “babysitters” and having their work characterized as “easy” and “play.” Sam and Nanci expressed trepidation with being viewed as “babysitters” as they did not agree that was a role that defined their professional work. Sam and Nanci thus felt that their principal and colleagues did not validate or support their work as professionals.

Sam and Nanci described how their principal at Watson Public School did not validate their work as professional when she referred to their students as babies. Sam said,

She always refers to us like the babies, she’s like oh you’re babies and she’s gotten better at realizing that we’re [preschool students] not just babies in here but we don’t necessarily get the respect that maybe some of the other classes get just because we are the little ones. We’re never really brought up [at faculty meetings]; it’s always the testing grades. I mean the only thing that we get is “oh our babies know how to walk in a line” and then we give her the look and she goes, “I mean our preschoolers.”
Nanci said, “A lot of administrators and stuff don’t feel a need for pre-k or don’t understand pre-K because most of them are focused on middle to upper instead of early childhood.”

Sam and Nanci’s principal at Watson Public School does not come from an early childhood background and therefore does not understand the professional work that they do. Having a principal that does not understand the value of their work made Sam and Nanci feel less respected as professionals than their colleagues that teach higher grades because the work of the “testing grades” were always the focus of faculty meetings.

Sam and Nanci also felt that their work as professionals was not respected by their colleagues. Sam said, “I’m a certified teacher but no because we’re not mandated we’re not look at as anything else sometimes as glorified babysitting.” Nanci said, “That’s what a lot of teachers think, especially middle school teachers. Preschool is not a grade; you’re just babysitting in there.” Sam explained that the other faculty, namely the middle school teachers, have always had the perception, “preschool, it’s easy, it’s little kids, oh you get nap time, oh how easy. We get that all the time and we get very defensive over. They kind of perceive that it’s just fun and games.”

While all participants worked within the shared context of MMSD there were different “figured worlds” at work within each school site that seemed to privilege particular ways of being a professional over others. While at Blake Montessori Public School Jill, Sophia, and CeCe felt validated and supported for their professional work by their principal and colleagues Sam and Nanci felt that their work was marginalized and therefore did not receive recognition or validation at Watson Public School.
For Sam and Nanci tensions in their relationships with their principal and colleagues once again settled in the perception that babysitting and play did not involve teaching or education and were therefore less professional. While Sam and Nanci were the only participants that spoke of these tensions existing in their relationships with their principal and colleagues all but one participant spoke about the tension that existed in being perceived as “babysitters” who “play” by parents. This finding suggests there are some underlying beliefs that play is not educational and thus less professional.

The early childhood literature that supports the use of play in preschool classrooms is vast (Bloch, 1987; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Chalufour & Worth, 2004; Curtis & Carter, 2008; Jones & Reynolds, 1992; Mooney, 2000; Worth & Grollman, 2003). Play is viewed as an important context where young children learn social, emotional, and cognitive development. Bloch (1987) wrote that play was also an important philosophical aspect of kindergarten curriculum; however during the kindergarten movement in becoming more affiliated with public schools the kindergarten curriculum began to transform to resembling the curriculum used in the higher grades. Findings presented here suggest that a similar trend is happening to preschools that are affiliated with public schools.

Interestingly, all but one participant spoke negatively about being perceived as a babysitter and having their work perceived as play suggesting there are some deeply seeded notions about what counts as knowledge. As such, questions arise such as, what knowledge do participants draw upon to understand their work as professionals and from where do their understandings about what counts as knowledge stem.
Summary

Throughout this chapter I have presented the stories of how five public preschool teachers understand the importance of relationships in their professional work. In so doing, I have discussed how for some participants relationships with parents and students are important to them in knowing their students well in order to advocate for them, plan appropriate curriculum, encourage them to follow their interests, and work collaboratively with parents. Other participants showed that their “tough love” relationships with students were important in showing families and students that they cared for students in making sure they succeed in meeting high expectations. While the difference in how participants thought about the role of their relationships with students can be largely linked to their early experiences and relationships with their families and teachers, CeCe’s story demonstrates how individuals can be selective in choosing to take particular elements from multiple figured worlds they have experienced to create or improvise a new model of what is professional.

In sharing the stories about how participants also experienced tensions when their relationships with students were perceived by parents as “babysitting” participants showed how they believed that their professional work had more educational merit than “babysitting.” While participants believed that they had students’ best interests in mind Noddings (2002) suggested that in caring for students, teachers need to focus more on the unique individual needs of students. This suggests that caring for students requires a holistic view of the child rather than just focusing on educational skills.
In describing their relationships with principals and colleagues participants named being validated and supported as professionals as most significant. Tensions also settled within these relationships when participants felt that their principals and colleagues did not value their professional work as educators but only viewed them as “babysitters” and defined their work as “easy” and “play.” In presenting the vast amount of literature that suggested the importance of play in preschool education I demonstrated that there are other messages that exist about the role of play in education.

The literature suggests that there is a vast amount of interpretations about what is professional. In focusing on the importance of relationships for participants this chapter demonstrates how participants draw heavily on an emotionality discourse of professional. As such, collaboration (Osgood, 2004) and personal practical knowledge (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999) were important to participants’ professional work.

While relationships were important to participants’ professional work they also believed that having professional knowledge was important to how they enacted as professionals. Teachers, however, do not exist in a vacuum. As such, within the next chapter I explore not only the knowledge that participants draw upon as professionals but also the contextual messages they receive about what counts as professional knowledge.
CHAPTER V

PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Participants believed that knowledge was important in being professionals. Teachers’ ideas about knowledge, however, contrasted with constructs of knowledge asserted by the district administration. Within this chapter I begin with a discussion on participants’ knowledge of child development. While all participants believed that knowledge of child development was essential in their professional work as public preschool teachers, how they understood the importance of child development and how they implemented this knowledge in their professional practice reflected their diverse teacher education backgrounds and early experiences. With an understanding of teachers’ diverse beliefs about the importance of knowledge of child development I then turn to a discussion on the dominant discourses that exist within the figured world of MMSD that promote particular ways of knowing and being as professionals. In doing so, I discuss the tensions that exist between teachers’ ideas about knowledge and the discourses of kindergarten readiness, efficiency, and customer service.

Knowledge of Child Development

Knowledge of child development was important to participants in their professional work as knowledgeable experts. Knowledge of child development allowed them to assess their students’ individual levels of development and plan appropriate curriculum that was centered on what children have the potential to learn at a particular stage. There were, however, variations in what aspects of child development teachers draw upon and in how they used their knowledge of child development in their
professional practice. These variations reflected their unique experiences in teachers’ education and previous teaching experiences.

What follows is a discussion of how participants spoke about the importance of knowledge, wherein I pay particular attention to how their early experiences as teachers and in teacher education helped to shape their understanding of child development. I begin with Jill and CeCe together because they have similar ideas about why knowledge about child development is important to their professional practice. Jill and CeCe both have extensive backgrounds using the Montessori philosophy and draw heavily on their experiences with Montessori in understanding the role knowledge of child development in their professional work. I then turn my attention to Sophia who draws on her knowledge of Developmentally Appropriate Practices to understand the importance of play in children’s development and thus in her professional work. Next I discuss Nanci and then Sam who both believed they did not learn how to be a teacher from their teacher education backgrounds but from other experiences.

**Jill and CeCe: “Being Professional in Your Field is Knowing Your Field”**

Having knowledge about child development was particularly important to Jill and CeCe as professionals. Having knowledge in child development Jill believed set her apart from preschool teachers that are non-professional. Jill said,

I think of myself as a professional in my job and if it’s just a day care that’s taking care of kids I guess it’s not as professional; you don’t have to have special training for it other than being a caring person and responsible and you don’t necessarily have to have a degree. I think that for preschool teachers they should
know what is developmentally appropriate, what’s expected at what age and I think that all grade levels should know what that age is expected. Being a professional in your field is knowing your field.

For Jill and CeCe knowing their “field” or child development was largely connected to how they know their students. In chapter 4 Jill and CeCe demonstrated that knowing students was important. Part of how Jill and CeCe know their students was also by knowing typical child developmental milestones. With this knowledge Jill and CeCe were able to plan for differentiated instruction. CeCe explained,

Everything is developmental, we go by the development of the child, the growth of the child. It’s age appropriate, we kind of assess the children when they come in to see which ones are at which level and some of them will grow, they will just take off and grow. Some of them they need more time on certain things and that’s okay too.

Jill similarly explained, “Everything is very individualized. All the work is done individually so when there’s 20 kids, there’s 20 different things going on at one time. So some are trying to learn colors and some are reading.” For Jill and CeCe, it was important to understand the developmental cycles of children at particular ages in order to better understand a child’s individual level and their potential.

Jill and CeCe’s focus on child developmental stages stems from their experiences in Montessori. In drawing on the Montessori philosophy Jill and CeCe believed that there are developmental stages for every skill. Jill explained,
Montessori said that you have a window of opportunity for every skill, at certain, and if you miss it, then it’s that much harder. There’s a lot of things that they learn at three and four that are so important if you don’t get them, then when they go to kindergarten and they’ve never been to school, it’s not too late, but it’s much more difficult. It’s like trying to learn a language at 15 when it’s a lot easier at three.

For Jill, knowledge of child developmental stages was significant to providing her students with early learning experiences that would contribute to their later success in school. While Jill suggested that missing a stage may not be detrimental, it did make learning later skills much more difficult for students.

Developmental stages of children are a major focus for Montessori teachers and are thus reflected in the Montessori materials Jill and CeCe use within their classrooms. Jill described how the Montessori curriculum and materials reflect progressing developmental stages of children. Jill said,

Everything in Montessori is very incrementally stepped so that within one skill of, a math skill, there’s a bunch of different steps to ease them into skills you need before you add. You need to know how to count, so there’s a lesson on counting. There’s lesson on learning numbers and there’s lessons on number/numeral matching and there’s lessons- you know, and they all start from easier to harder so the easiest skills first, the hardest skills later. The most concrete skill to the more abstract. So, everything is manipulated and then so they would manipulate things
to count and then they would do it more abstractly like on paper or writing the numbers kind of thing.

The developmentally based materials of the Montessori philosophy supported Jill and CeCe’s understanding of the importance of knowing child development. Knowledge of child development in isolation, however, is not useful without knowledge of individual students.

CeCe described how her Montessori training taught her about the importance of knowing child development in conjunction with knowing individual students’ levels. CeCe said,

There’s something called the sensory periods in Montessori philosophy where the door opens up. For example, children do certain things at different levels and different times at different stages in life. When they do come around you have to be able to see it and that’s when you dive in and say oh well they’re ready for this and then that’s when you know that’s when you can unload on them.

For example, CeCe believed not all children are ready to read but in drawing on her knowledge of child development she must carefully observe children that “hang out” around the reading center in order to distinguish “those that are really ready to read and those that just want to be seen.” In using her knowledge of child development in conjunction with her knowledge of individual students gained through her close relationships with students, CeCe was able to make knowledgeable judgments about students’ needs and the curriculum.
In drawing from their experiences and knowledge in the Montessori philosophy, Jill and CeCe have come to understand that knowledge of child development was important to their work as professionals. This knowledge allowed Jill and CeCe to understand their students’ individual development and plan curriculum appropriately. Particularly important to Jill and CeCe was the mastery of incrementally stepped skills that lead to more abstract concepts that were represented in the higher grades.

Sophia: Teachers Who Don’t Incorporate Play Are “Less Developmentally Appropriate”

Sophia also agreed with Jill and CeCe that knowledge of child development was important as a professional. Sophia said, knowing “developmental milestones, like, where are they,” is important especially in assessing students. Sophia explained how beneficial knowledge of child development was to understanding individual children’s growth. Sophia said, “Like, as a teacher, it really helped me be focused on ‘Oh my gosh, they are making progress in these areas.’ And it [documenting development] was training me what to look for.” Like Jill and CeCe, Sophia believed that knowledge of child development in conjunction with knowledge about individual students was important to her professional work. Sophia, however, draws not from the Montessori philosophy but from her experiences in learning about Developmentally Appropriate Practices from her teacher education and her early experiences as a teacher at a University Child Development Center.

Sophia first learned about the importance of Developmentally Appropriate Practices through her teacher education program. Sophia’s knowledge of
Developmentally Appropriate Practices were then reflected in her first teaching experience at the University Child Development Center where she was able to put her knowledge to practical use. Sophia said,

I learned that [DAP] in my education background, that was very big and I learned it so much in working in the child development center; my director was MG who happens to be very big. She’s written a lot of books for High Scope. She’s really good; she’s the trainer of trainers. She’s extremely influential on me.

These experiences have taught Sophia the importance of play to the development of preschool children’s development. As such, Sophia strove to create classroom environments for her students that included ample time and space for them to play and explore. Sophia said,

They love the blocks and housekeeping. I know, you’d think, man they’re going to get bored but they love it! I mean, I try to add new things and keep it, like I just added the shark hat and the dinosaur tail and dinosaur hat, they love that. Um, and it’s actually great like I love it that they want to do that because a lot of times they need practice on pretend play and I’ve really seen it kind of evolve over this year where they actually will make a dinner and say here’s your dinner; sit down.

For Sophia, play was an essential element in providing preschool students with experiences that were appropriate for their development. Regarding preschool teachers who do not incorporate play into their curriculum, Sophia said, “I feel like it’s less developmentally appropriate. Maybe they don’t understand the importance of it?”
Unlike Jill and CeCe who primarily used their knowledge of child development to focus on students’ development of incrementally stepped skills, Sophia used her knowledge of child development to create environments where children are free to work out and represent their understandings through play. Sophia felt strongly about the role of play in the preschool curriculum so much so that she believed that teachers who do not incorporate play are “less developmentally appropriate.”

**Nanci: “I Think Maybe I Missed That Part of [Development]— The Fine Motor”**

Like Jill, CeCe, and Sophia, Nanci believed that development happened in a pattern of sequence. Nanci, however, only focused on the role of fine motor development in students’ development of later academic skills. Nanci said,

I just think fine motor, I just think it’s so important. I mean, everything revolves around your hands. You can’t do anything without them. So, I think you have to and at this age this is the most important age to learn all that; to learn how to grip the pencil and do all that.

In her professional practice Nanci used “Art” (product oriented) as a way to assist students in developing fine motor skills. During a classroom observation Nanci proudly walked me down the hall to show me all the “Art work” she had been working on with the students. Nanci said, “They just need that [fine motor work through Art], academics will come.” For Nanci, preschool children’s fine motor development was most important to her professional work. Nanci, however, did not draw on her experiences in teacher education to understand the importance of fine motor development but on her own experiences as a young student.
As a child herself, Nanci felt that her fine motor developmental needs were not recognized. Nanci did not feel that she was a good printer and therefore decided to ask for extra help. Nanci said, “I made them [parents] get me a tutor to learn how to write smaller. I think maybe I missed that part of [development]—the fine motor part.” In reflecting on her own struggles as a young student Nanci believed that fine motor development was foundational to all other development. Unlike Jill, CeCe, and Sophia, Nanci did not believe that she learned about the importance of development from her teacher education background. In contrast, Nanci believed that having a degree was not necessary to teach preschool education. Nanci said,

Not necessarily because my master’s isn’t even in early childhood, it’s just in elementary ed. I mean people with GEDs can do the same job. But, they want teaching as a profession so, like a doctor or a lawyer, they have a degree and teachers need to be on the same level.

While Nanci felt that she did not learn how to be a preschool teacher from her teacher education, she did draw heavily on her own experiences as a student to understand what was best for students. This theme was also presented in chapter 4 when Nanci demonstrated that her “tough love” relationships with students were important in showing them that she has their best interest at heart. Nanci felt that as a young student she missed an important part of fine motor development. As such, Nanci focused her attention to making sure her students receive ample fine motor experiences to ensure that they would not have the same struggles as she experienced.
As Nanci did not draw from her teacher education background to further understand the importance of fine motor development she also stressed that she believed that having a degree was not necessary in teaching preschool. Rather for Nanci, a degree was only needed to improve professional status of preschool teachers. As such, Nanci draws from her own experience as a self-identified child with fine motor needs. For Nanci having good printing skills was significant to being successful in school. Nanci therefore improvised her own professional practice to provide her students with activities that she felt could have helped her in developing fine motor skills.

**Sam: “Book Smarts Only Get You So Far”**

For Sam, knowledge of child development was primarily about students’ development of preschool concepts. Knowledge of what concepts preschool students need to know and how individual students are progressing in learning those concepts assisted Sam in planning differentiated instruction. Sam said, “I have a lot of animosity, but some regular teachers piss me off because everyone can’t learn the same way.” Sam draws from her experience in special education to understand the importance of differentiated instruction. Sam said,

As a special education teacher I think you really kind of get that drilled into your head and that’s what my thing is. I will teach any way, if I have to teach something six different ways to get each six kids to know what they need to know, I’ll do it.

In drawing from her special education background Sam also believed that assessments were important in understanding students’ developing understanding of preschool
concepts. Sam said, “I’ve always taken data [assessments] ever since I’ve been a teacher. I do like to see the results.” Assessments allowed Sam to track students’ academic progress so that she could better understand individual students’ levels.

Although Sam draws from her background in special education, like Nanci, she believed that in general her teacher education did not prepare her to be a teacher. Sam explained,

I don’t really feel that college in general taught me to be a teacher. It taught me all the definitions and what not and for special Ed, taught me every law you could think of for special ed, but I think when you really get out there and do your methods and you’re student teaching is when you REALLY learn to be a teacher.

Like Nanci, Sam believed that a degree was not necessary as a preschool teacher. Sam believed that a teacher with a GED and lot of hands on experiences would make a better teacher than one with a master’s degree and little teaching experience. Sam said, “Oh, I think for sure the teacher with GED and hands on skills because like I have my masters but book smarts only get you so far I kind of feel. You’ve got to have some common sense.”

In coming from a background in special education grades preschool through eight, Sam focused more intently on students’ development of preschool concepts through the use of assessments. Unlike Jill, CeCe, and Sophia who in chapter 4 demonstrate the importance of forming close relationships with students in order to know them, Sam believed that assessment were most important in knowing students’ academic needs. This finding seems fitting to Sam’s beliefs as in chapter 4, like Nanci, she demonstrated
that her “tough love” relationships with students were important in showing them she had their best interests at heart. Recall Sam grew up with a mother who struggled with an unidentified learning disability. Sam’s mother therefore pushed Sam even harder to meet high academic standards. As such, Sam strives to know her students’ academic abilities through standardized tests in order to make sure they do not face the same struggles her mother did.

Although Sam seemed to draw upon her experiences from her special education background, like Nanci, she believed that having a degree was not necessary as a preschool teacher. As such, Sam believed that teachers’ knowledge gained through experiences in teaching were more valuable as a professional.

Discussion

While participants all believed in some shape or form that knowledge of child development was important to their work as knowledgeable professionals, how they understood the importance of child development and how they used that knowledge in their professional work with students was reflective of their unique experiences in teacher education and in early school and teaching experiences. Participants that believed their teacher education backgrounds were instrumental in their ideas about what knowledge was important pulled from their education in Montessori and in developmentally appropriate practices to understand the importance of knowing child development in assisting students in progressing through developmental milestones and providing them with environments that allow them to learn through play and exploration. These
participants felt that their education about child development was reflected and supported in their early and current teaching experiences.

The remaining two participants did not feel that they gained important knowledge from their teacher education programs and thus pulled from their own experiences as students and their experiences in teaching public school to understand the importance of having knowledge of children’s fine motor development and development of preschool concepts. Holland and her colleagues (1998) suggested that the extent to which an individual validates a figured world corresponds to the extent that particular figured world informs the identity of that individual. For Jill, CeCe, and Sophia the figured worlds of teacher education they encountered influenced their identities as professionals; as such, they each continued to validate the knowledge gained from these figured worlds as they carried this knowledge with them into the figured world of MMSD. While Sam also seemed to carry knowledge gained from her experiences in the figured world of special education, like Nanci, she believed that in general a degree was not necessary in preschool education. Sam and Nanci thus believed that their own experiences in school and the experiences they continued to gain as teachers were most important to their professional work.

While teacher education and other early experiences were significant to how participants understand their work as professionals, it is important to recognize that they also exist in shared contexts where other ideas about what counts as knowledge also exist. As such, I now turn my attention to a discussion about the contextual messages
that participants received from the administration at MMSD about professional knowledge.

**Contextual Discourses of Professional Knowledge**

Significant to how participants understand their professional identities within the context of MMSD were the dominate discourses that circulated throughout the district. The particular discourses that were most significant to participants in competing with their own ideas about their professional work were the discourses of kindergarten readiness, efficiency, and customer service. In what follows I discuss the dominant discourses of *kindergarten readiness*, *efficiency*, and *customer service* that participants described as existing within the context or figured world of MMSD. I refer to these discourses as dominant because they are “taken-for-granted as truth” (Holland et al., 1998) by district administrators and were regulated by standardized mandates and artifacts. I also share the stories of participants in how they struggled within this context as the dominant discourses promoted constructs of professional that competed with their own ideas about who they were as professionals.

**Discourse of Kindergarten Readiness**

Participants all spoke about the dominant messages they received from the district about their work in getting children “ready for kindergarten.” To further understand the messages that participants received about kindergarten readiness participants suggested that I review the district’s Academic Transformation Plan and the district’s CEO’s Transformation address. These documents indeed reflected a prevailing discourse of kindergarten readiness at MMSD. The MMSD Academic Transformation Plan stated,
“Pre-k-8 depends on building core academic skills. Focus on school readiness for pre-k early education” (p. 24). The discourse of kindergarten readiness was a part of a wider discourse of academic achievement throughout the district. Teacher accountability has thus become a major part in how the district administrators ensure improvements in student performance. In the Transformation address the District CEO said, “What is at the heart of this transformation plan-accountability. School change doesn’t mean anything to a child, to his parents, to his teachers, to his school or his community unless it is accompanied by clear improvements in student performance” (p. 11). The particular artifacts that participants spoke about that were validated by the discourse of kindergarten readiness were academic benchmarks and standardized tests.

While some participants embraced the messages promoted through the discourse of kindergarten readiness others struggled with these messages. Participants’ decision to embrace or reject the professional constructs given rise to through the discourse of kindergarten readiness seemed to be largely influenced by their own beliefs about knowledge. Jill, CeCe, and Sam, embraced the discourse of kindergarten readiness as it aligned with their beliefs about what counts as knowledge. Recall that for Jill and CeCe, in coming from a Montessori philosophy they believed that each stage of development was important to the success of subsequent stages. For Jill and CeCe, kindergarten readiness was a part of their goal in moving students through incrementally stepped lessons. As such, Jill and CeCe felt validated when their efforts in getting students ready for kindergarten were recognized by others. CeCe said she particularly felt validated from “the Kindergarten teachers, because that’s where they go next and they really
celebrate children coming in knowing their alphabet and their sounds and can write and know numbers. They can get started with just concentrating on reading.” Jill similarly said,

When you look at those test scores I could look at those kids individually and say that one went to preschool, that one went to preschool. I think there’s a lot of evidence that our preschoolers are showing progress, that this is a worthwhile venture for them here.

In embracing the discourse of kindergarten readiness Jill and CeCe viewed test scores and praises from kindergarten teachers on their abilities to prepare students for kindergarten as important validations of their work as professionals. Jill and CeCe, however, were not the only two participants that embraced the discourse of kindergarten readiness; Sam also believed that preparing her students for kindergarten was important to her work as a professional.

Recall that for Sam, knowledge of students’ development of preschool concepts was most important in her professional work. In drawing on her special education background and her experiences in living with a mother who had an unidentified learning disability, Sam believed that test scores were most important in how she was able to see students progress in learning preschool concepts and meeting academic benchmarks which progress into kindergarten concepts and benchmarks. As such, Sam also felt validated from her students’ test scores, in particular the kindergarten readiness test. Sam said, “We’re seen as a very good preschool program. Our test scores show it.” For Sam, her belief that knowledge about preschool concepts was most important as a preschool
teacher aligned well with a discourse of kindergarten readiness and thus the use of standardized tests served as a validation for her success in meeting her professional goals.

While Jill, CeCe, and Sam embraced the kindergarten readiness discourse two participants did not. Nanci and Sophia struggled with the discourse of kindergarten readiness. Recall that for Nanci, the knowledge that was most important for a preschool teacher to have was knowledge about students’ fine motor development as she believed that fine motor skills led to the development of all other skills. As such, Nanci believed that it was important to focus on students’ fine motor skills rather than “pushing academics on them.” Nanci said, “I mean we can’t even have fun anymore, it’s like, even in pre-k they really want them academically ready to go.” Nanci believed that focusing on kindergarten readiness means that teachers must focus on academic skills. Nanci expressed trepidation over having to focus on academic skills because she believed that her students first needed to work on their fine motor skills.

Like Nanci, Sophia also struggled with the discourse of kindergarten readiness because she too believed that it meant that teachers must focus on academic skills which Sophia believed were not always developmentally appropriate for preschool students. Remember, Sophia emphasized the importance of teachers having knowledge of developmentally appropriate practices in their professional work. For Sophia, this translated into the classroom by creating developmentally appropriate environments for her students that provided them with ample time and space to play and explore. In describing her struggles with the discourse of kindergarten readiness, Sophia said,
It’s for me it’s still a struggle. I just feel like there’s so much pressure on these little kids, that by the time they get to kindergarten they’re supposed to be reading sight words. They’re supposed to be writing complete sentences, they’re supposed to know all of their letters and letter sounds. It’s like some kids are just not ready for that and that’s okay, but nobody ever says that. I feel like they [other public preschool teachers] are okay with that because what I get is ‘yeah, no this is great look what my four year old can do.’ It’s like, ugh!

Sophia felt alone in her struggles with a kindergarten readiness discourse. In feeling like she was the only public preschool teacher at her school who did not agree with the focus on academic skills promoted by the kindergarten readiness discourse, Sophia felt that she sometimes lost sight of what was developmentally appropriate.

Sophia explained,

You just get sucked into the public school—it’s so different than your child care background. It’s so different from what’s developmentally appropriate. I mean, they just want you cramming this stuff [academics] down their throats. I’m still struggling, like 12 years later, I’m still struggling with what’s developmentally appropriate and best practice and how do you meld it all together? I think sometimes I might have lost track of some of the developmentally appropriate things because you just are so into school mode and testing mode, not even that you really test, well in a couple of years we did do some testing but you know at some point they’re going to be testing and they better be writing.
Sophia’s struggle with implementing her knowledge of developmentally
appropriate practice in a context that promoted academic skills through a discourse of
kindergarten readiness was complicated by the pressures of accountability. Although Jill
embraced a kindergarten readiness discourse she too believed that the pressures of
accountability caused stress for teachers. Jill said,

They’re pushing, pushing, pushing for schools to get better ratings. You almost
feel like you have a gun to your head that this school must become effective next
year. It’s like we better show progress or they might close, are they gonna close
us now?

The stress of high stakes accountability made participants feel that if their students did
not score well on the kindergarten readiness test then their schools and programs would
be threatened to be closed down. This is particularly difficult for Sophia who did not
agree with the aims promoted through the discourse of kindergarten readiness.

Participants’ views about the discourse of kindergarten readiness were largely
related to their beliefs about what counts as knowledge. Jill, CeCe, and Sam embraced
the discourse of kindergarten readiness in that it aligned with their beliefs that children
are to learn particular skills or concepts at particular stages or grade levels. These three
participants embodied not only the constructs promoted within the discourse of
kindergarten readiness but also the artifacts of academic benchmarks and standardized
tests as trusted symbols used to guide and validate their professional work, thus
perpetuating the dynamics of the discourse of kindergarten readiness. Nanci and Sophia,
however, did not agree with the discourse of kindergarten readiness as they believed it
focused too narrowly on academic skills and did not recognize other skills or activities that were developmentally appropriate. The use of high stakes testing thus placed Nanci and Sophia in a difficult position where they felt pressured to conform to the discourse of kindergarten readiness or risk their jobs and/or reputation.

**Discourse of Efficiency**

Participants also spoke about how they struggled with the standardized curriculum mandated by the district. Here, the standardized curriculum was perpetuated by the discourse of efficiency. Participants suggested that the standardized curriculum was also a part of the district Academic Transformation Plan. During the Transformation address the District CEO emphasized the importance of “creating effective schools district-wide.” As such the district mandated “effective curriculum” models to be implemented district wide. Many of the participants expressed concern with the mandated curriculum as they placed too many curricular demands on teachers’ already full days and they did not allow teachers to make curricular decisions based on the individual needs of their students.

Nanci and Jill described the heavy demands that were placed upon teachers within a discourse of efficiency. Nanci said, “We have a reading curriculum, a math curriculum, then we’re supposed to fit things in interchangeable and letters of the week.” Jill explained,

I think the district keeps asking us to do more and more and more, it is just impossible to do it all. Implement this curriculum and do this curriculum and do that curriculum and you must do this and there isn’t just enough time in the day to do it all. I mean you just can not!
In promoting efficiency district administrators mandated curriculum models that they believed were most effective. Nanci and Jill, however, felt that there were too many mandates making it almost impossible for them to implement everything they were required. This caused stress for teachers because not only were they unable to implement all of the district mandates but they were also limited on time that they could implement their own curricular ideas.

Participants also felt limited by district mandates because they did not allow for flexibility in following the interests of the students because they were set by predetermined themes designated by different publishing companies. CeCe said,

They don’t go with a lot of different things. I mean why would you do weather this week and you do the letter W [later]? Why wouldn’t you do, if you’re going to do zoo why didn’t you do zoo theme the week that you’re going to the zoo and not have to do it on week whatever.

The district mandates were limiting to CeCe’s professional work in that it did not allow her the flexibility to connect the curriculum to the daily lives of her students. For instance in CeCe’s example, the curriculum mandated that all preschool classrooms study the zoo theme one week; however, the district planed for a field trip to the zoo weeks later. CeCe believed that in coordinating the zoo theme for the same week as the zoo trip would have provided students with a more meaningful learning experience.

Sophia talked about how the mandated curriculum limited teachers’ ability to plan curriculum according to the unique needs and interests of each classroom of students. Sophia said,
It’s like what do you do? You’ve got these words coming from the top. Teachers are trying, because we’re the ones on the front lines. We’re the ones who get to know these kids personally and who are really invested in them and their families and who really care but our hands are so tied. You know and that in turn, it’s kind of demoralizing and defeating and you just feel like, well what am I doing here, but you can’t give up because you can’t give up for the kids and it just, it’s hard. Sophia particularly struggled with the messages she received from the discourse of efficiency because they did not allow a space for her expertise and practical knowledge to be valued. In chapter 4 Sophia talked about the importance of knowing her students well in planning appropriate curriculum. However, she received the message from district administrators that efficiency was most important and therefore standardized curriculum practices were privileged.

The discourse of efficiency placed teachers in a technical role where important curricular decisions such as what will be taught in the classrooms were made by district administrators and were implemented by teachers. Being placed in the role of an obedient technician did not value the knowledge and expertise that teachers brought to the classroom nor did it value teachers’ knowledge of their particular students. CeCe and Sophia in particular spoke about how the standardized curriculum made it difficult for them to make learning meaningful to their students’ individual needs and interests. Teachers, however, struggled with this position as they were mandated to implement curriculum with which they did not agree.
Discourse of Customer Service

Participants also spoke about the messages that they received from the district about their role in customer service. Within the discourse of customer service teachers received messages that retaining students was essential; therefore they were to treat students and parents as customers. Participants disagreed with the discourse of customer service in that they believed that it disrupted the relationships they believed were so important to have with students and parents in their professional work.

Nanci and Sam disagreed with the discourse of customer service in that it disrupted their “tough love” relationships that were important to them in showing students and parents that they cared about their students’ well being. Sam said,

His [CEO] big push is this customer service, that our students are our customers and our parents are our customers and when you go to a school you want good customer service and I even said I have a problem with that because they’re not our customers. I think my big thing is that this is not a store, you’re not my customer, you’re my student kind of deal. I’m polite to parents when they come of course but I also tell my parents I’m like I’m very strict and I’m very hard on your child but your child needs me here to learn.

As demonstrated in chapter 4, Sam believed that being “hard” and “strict” on her students was important in making sure that they succeed. Sam believed the discourse of customer service threatened her “tough love” relationships with students and parents as it would call upon her to serve the customer. Sam believed that she already knew what was best
for her students and therefore believed that treating students and parents as customers was not a part of her work as a professional.

Like Sam, Nanci disagreed with the discourse of customer service. Nanci explained, “These kids aren’t customers, they’re children. Their parents aren’t customers, they’re parents. I think of the store I work in and they are customers and we greet them at the door. These aren’t customers, they’re children.” According to the customer service model, when faced with an angry parent, Nanci said, “We’re supposed to smile and stuff but you know what, they’re [parents] not always right!” In a customer service model Nanci believed she would have to follow a “customers always right” policy. Like Sam, however, Nanci felt that she already knew what was best for her students and therefore did not believe that customer service should be a part of her professional work.

While Jill and Sophia also disagreed with the discourse of customer service they felt that it disrupted the collaborative relationships that they sought with parents. Jill said, “I don’t believe I’m totally the person working for the family, I think it’s a partnership.” Sophia explained,

You need to treat parents and kids with respect, obviously. I mean and that’s what they’re saying, they are saying these are our customers, we need to retain them, we want them to come back, but I think there is a fine line there because you can’t just put up with anything to keep them. We’re working together. Not I’m doing this for you because everybody has a part to play.
As demonstrated in chapter 4, having collaborative relationships with parents was important to participants’ professional work. The discourse of customer service, however, placed teachers in a service provider role.

Sam, Nanci, Jill, and Sophia in particular did not agree with the discourse of customer service because it disrupted the type of relationships they sought with students and parents. For Sam and Nanci they believed that it was more important that they continued their “tough love” relationships with students as a way to communicate to students and parents that they have their best interest at heart. For Jill and Sophia they believed that it was important to their work to continue a partnership relationship with parents in collaborating for students.

Summary

Within this chapter I presented participants’ diverse ideas about the importance of knowledge of child development in their professional work. I also presented the prevailing discourses about professional knowledge that exist within MMSD. In so doing, I have illustrated the tensions that existed for teachers whose ideas about knowledge, relationships, and their roles as professionals were not in alignment with that of the districts. Socially positioned figured worlds often involve positions of power where particular ways of knowing are privileged over others through dominant discourses (Holland et al., 1998). For instance, at MMSD the discourse of kindergarten readiness, efficiency, and customer service positioned teachers in low positions of power and privileged particular ways of knowing that perpetuated the dominate discourses in this space. As such, these discourses created tensions for participants who brought with them
different ideas from other figured worlds they have encountered. For instance, the discourse of kindergarten readiness proved to be a tension for participants in that it privileged behaviorist views of knowledge whereas teachers who struggled with these messages drew from constructivist or practical views about knowledge. Another tension existed for participants with the discourse of efficiency as it placed teachers in a technical role while many participants desired to be autonomous experts. As such, participants felt that the discourse of efficiency did not value their knowledge and expertise as professionals. The final discourse that provided some tensions for teachers was the discourse of customer service. The discourse of customer service promoted a service provider/customer relationship between teachers and parents while some participants believe that having more collaborative relationships with parents was important to their professional work.

In exploring how five public preschool teachers understand their professional identities within the context of MMSD I have found that relationships and knowledge were particularly important for participants. In chapter 4 in presenting participants stories of their beliefs about the role of relationships in their professional work I found that relationships with students, families, principals, and colleagues were most significant in how teachers knew students well, demonstrated that they cared for students, and felt validated and supported in their professional work. In chapter 5 I focused on how participants spoke about the importance of being knowledgeable in child development in their work as professionals. In doing so, I found that participants struggled with messages they received from dominant discourses of kindergarten readiness, efficiency,
and customer service that existed throughout the district about their knowledge and roles as professionals that were competing with their own ideas. Within the next chapter I discuss how participants negotiate their ideas about what is professional in a context with constructs that were competing with their own.
CHAPTER VI
NEGOTIATING PROFESSIONAL IDENTITIES

Within the last chapter I demonstrated how participants struggled with district constructs that competed with their own ideas about what was important to their professional work. Within this chapter I discuss how participants asserted agency in enacting their own understandings about what was professional within a context where dominant discourses promoted particular ways of knowing and being as professionals that were competing with participants’ own ideas about their professional identities. Understanding how teachers asserted their agency was important because it provided some insight into how they maintained particular discourses or attempted to dismantle them. I begin with a discussion of how participants asserted agency within the classroom by improvising the curriculum, rules, and their relationships with parents. I first discuss how participants improvised the curriculum as they struggled with being positioned as babysitters and technicians. I then discuss how rules were improvised in asserting their professional identities as knowledgeable experts in a context that promoted the role of an obedient technician through a discourse of efficiency. Next I discuss how participants improvised relationships with parents to assert their professional identities as collaborative partners and caring experts rather than the service provider/customer relationships promoted through the discourse of customer service. And last, I discuss how one participant asserted agency within public spaces in an attempt to change prevailing district discourses by enacting her professional identity as a knowledgeable expert at faculty meetings.
Agency Within the Classroom

Participants spoke about their classrooms as an important space where they could make their own decisions about what was appropriate for the curriculum, rules, and their relationships with parents. Participants’ classrooms were thus spaces they could assert agency against district constructs that competed with their own ideas about what was professional. In what follows I describe how participants pulled from their own ideas about their professional work to improvise the curriculum, rules, and their relationships with parents.

Improvising the Curriculum

Participants seemed to improvise the curriculum for two reasons, to assert their identities as educators rather than babysitters and to assert their identities as knowledgeable experts rather than obedient technicians. In chapter 4, I discussed the tensions that existed for participants when their work was viewed as babysitting rather than education. In chapter 5, I discussed how participants struggled with the discourse of efficiency in that they felt it positioned them as obedient technicians rather than the knowledgeable experts that they desired to be. In what follows I discuss how participants improvised the curriculum in order to assert their identities as educators and knowledgeable experts.

For Jill, CeCe, Sam, and Nanci, play was not a part of being an educator. As such, these four participants chose to improvise the curriculum by not including or limiting students’ time in the dramatic play and block areas. These four participants’ choices in limiting the curriculum in this way were reflective of their struggles with being
perceived as babysitters and their beliefs about knowledge. Chapter 4 demonstrated that Jill and CeCe struggled with being perceived as babysitters as they felt that their work as professionals was more educationally based. In chapter 5, I discussed how the Montessori philosophy was important in how Jill and CeCe understand what knowledge was important in their professional work. Although being a part of the UPK grant project required that Jill and CeCe’s classrooms included a dramatic play area Jill and CeCe chose not to comply with this requirement. In coming from a Montessori philosophy Jill and CeCe believed that play did not have a place in the classroom. Jill said,

I make the executive decision that it’s not going to be in here because it’s not the Montessori classroom. So we just take our marks for it. Get marked down and say we’re trying to stay as true to Montessori as we can. They get enough of that [play] outside of school that it doesn’t fit here [in public school].

Observations of Jill and CeCe’s classrooms confirmed the absence of a dramatic play area within their classrooms. Jill and CeCe set up “work” stations where children worked independently with Montessori materials.

Similarly, in being associated with Head Start, Sam’s and Nanci’s classrooms were also required to have a dramatic play as well as a block area for children. Like Jill and CeCe, Sam and Nanci also demonstrated in chapter 4 that they struggled with being perceived as babysitters. While Sam’s and Nanci’s classrooms did have dramatic play and block areas, in asserting their professional identities as educators they limited or prohibited the children from playing in those areas. Sam said,
You see our fun little centers, they only get in those maybe once a week, if that, because we have so much, I mean, we do centers three times a week and a lot of it’s academic. It just depends on, you know what is open.

Nanci also spoke about how she prohibited her students from using the dramatic play and block areas. Nanci said, “I know play is educational but not the way they do it. Here we play but we do games, rhyming games and stuff like that.” Nanci maintained the dramatic play and block areas in her classroom for inspections. Nanci said, We can all play the game. You know like Head Start is coming, okay, I can put on a show if need to, you know, I can do what I need to do. I know what needs to be done.

In limiting students’ time in the dramatic play and block areas Sam and Nanci spent more instructional time with students thus asserting their identities as educators rather than babysitters. Although improvising the curriculum was important to participants in how they asserted their professional identities as educators, it was also important in how participants asserted their professional identities as knowledgeable experts.

Unlike Jill, CeCe, Sam, and Nanci, Sophia was the only participant that felt she needed to improvise the curriculum in order to protect children’s time to play. Sophia’s desire to protect children’s time to play reflected her background and knowledge in Developmentally Appropriate Practices. In protecting children’s time to play Sophia thus asserted her professional identity as a knowledgeable expert with an expertise in
Developmentally Appropriate Practices. Sophia explained how she incorporated play into her daily schedule. Sophia said,

> Usually how it works is that I pull a couple of kids to work with me, [the assistant] pulls one or two and then one or two are playing and then we kind of switch. Then we get done with this and we pull somebody else to maybe go write their name and that seems to be working so that they get a nice balance of, yes I’m working but I’m also getting to play.

Sophia did not struggle with being perceived as a babysitter or having her work viewed as play because she viewed play as an important part of her work as an educator. Her struggle, however, was with having her knowledge of the importance of play not valued by the administrators who in her opinion “pushed academics.” Sophia therefore improvised the curriculum by carving out time in her classroom schedule that allowed children time to play.

While the district’s partnerships with UPK and Head Start required that preschool classrooms have dramatic and block play areas in their classrooms there was also a prevailing discourse of kindergarten readiness throughout the district that privileged academic work over play. Jill, CeCe, Sam, and Nanci believed that the academic skills promoted by the discourse of kindergarten readiness was most important for their students, while Sophia believed that play was most important for her students. Certainly, Sophia’s knowledge and experiences with Developmentally Appropriate Practices had contributed to her unique differences. As such, Sophia believed that play was a part of her work as an educator and thus improvised the curriculum in order to assert her identity
as a knowledge expert. While Jill, CeCe, Sam, and Nanci improvised the curriculum in order to assert their identities as educators they too believed that the knowledge they drew upon was important to their work. As such, these three participants’ acts of curriculum improvisation were also acts in asserting their professional identities as knowledgeable experts.

In drawing on their knowledge of their students and their knowledge of child development gained from their Montessori background Jill and CeCe spoke about how they improvised the standardized curriculum by balancing it with their own ideas about what was appropriate for their students. CeCe said,

"We have to like balance it so we have to find a way like to incorporate both things, all things like what the district wants you to do and how to support it with the Montessori materials. So you have state standards and you have district materials and you have Montessori materials so blending it together. I think with anything you take what you need out of it and then add what you can and delete what you have to."

Jill similarly explained how she draws upon her knowledge of students to decide how much of the mandated curriculum to use and when. Jill explained,

"I only do part of the calendar because I can’t do it all. It’s hard to do the lessons all the time because you have to do the calendar, which is the curriculum, “every day counts” which I am not doing exactly the way it’s proscribed because it’s so much. It would take forever for me to count how many days of the year there are. It’s really hard to do it all because you want to go over it but the kids they can"
only sit so long before they’re going to act out and it’s not fair to have them
sitting on the carpet that long.

Jill and CeCe believed that in improvising the mandated curriculum by drawing
on their own expertise of Montessori and knowledge of students provided their students
with an education that extended above and beyond what was required in the mandated
curriculum. Jill said, “I use the district’s curriculum as supplemental to my Montessori.
I’ve got all those better, to me, Montessori materials that teach the same and more.”
CeCe explained,

When they leave preschool they’re only supposed to know some of the alphabet
and they’re only supposed to recognize numbers one through ten. Our children
we want them to recognize numbers one through a hundred. You know, be able
to count to a hundred when they leave preschool. I want all of them to know
every letter of the alphabet and every sound of the alphabet when they leave me.
Not just some.

Like CeCe and Jill, Nanci improvised the mandated curriculum by drawing on her
knowledge to decide what was important for students. Nanci, however, spoke about how
she draws from her own practical knowledge and common sense to be selective about
what she included from district mandated weekly themes. Nanci said,

I don’t really because like, to me, bugs in the middle of March just didn’t make
sense to me. So I didn’t do bugs. I don’t really do themes. I basically do more
stuff with letters, like the letter of the week and then I revolve everything around
that or seasons.
Chapter 5 demonstrated that Nanci believed that practical knowledge was most important in her professional work. Nanci thus draws on her practical knowledge and experience to improvise what she believed was important content.

In understanding the importance of fine motor development for students’ later development, Nanci believed that art projects were important for students in developing fine motor skills. Like CeCe and Jill, Nanci believed that in drawing on her own knowledge she also was going above and beyond what was required by the mandated curriculum. Nanci said,

Today we painted with celery because the cut side of celery looks like a U and that’s our letter this week. They [District] give us the math and the reading and what we’re supposed to be on every week but I just add my own stuff because the kids need it, I mean, academics come.

While Nanci demonstrated that play was not a part of her professional work she did not believe that teaching academics was necessarily at the forefront. Nanci believed that what was most important for her students was developing their fine motor skills.

In asserting their identities as educators rather than babysitters and knowledgeable experts rather than obedient technicians participants pulled from their own knowledge and experiences to improvise the curriculum in similar and different ways. Improvising the curriculum, however, was not the only way that participants asserted their professional identities within their classrooms. Participants also improvised district rules.
Improvising the Rules

Participants from Watson Public School (Sam and Nanci) in particular also struggled with the standardized rules and regulations that stemmed from the district’s discourse of efficiency. Sam and Nanci spoke about how they improvised rules about following the principal’s mandated agenda during planning team meetings as well as the district’s rules about students’ last day of school. Sam and Nanci asserted their professional identities as knowledgeable experts by drawing on their own beliefs to improvise these rules.

Sam described how team planning time had been converted from an autonomous teacher directed time to a controlled principal directed time. Sam said,

In the past our planning time would be, we’d just sit there and just kind of plan together like what we’re going to do like preschool wise and kindergarten lesson plans, but we’ve kind of had to get away from that because this [holds up agenda] is what she [principal] wants now. So sometimes to me [planning] team’s a waste of time.

Sam believed that the agenda designated by the principal was not appropriate for their planning needs as a team. Sam therefore felt that planning team was a “waste of time.” As the team leader, Sam thus chose to reject the principal’s designated agenda when the principal was not present during planning meetings. Sam explained, “Planning meetings turn into gossip time. I’ll say something snarky or sarcastic to get a rise out of people. I do it also to make people laugh.” During my observation of Sam’s team planning meeting I observed first hand how she rejected the principal’s designated agenda by
straying from its contents and by making jokes and gossiping about other teachers and
students. She resisted being placed in an obedient technical role by making the decision
to not follow the principal’s designated agenda. When the principal was not present Sam
felt she had more power and autonomy to alter the agenda as she believed fit.

In describing her life experiences Sam often described herself as needing to “be in
charge.” Sam’s resistance to the principal’s designated agenda was in part also making a
positional claim that when the principal was not present the power of the agenda as a
regulatory artifact would also not be present. In being “in charge” in the absence of the
principal Sam chose to not perpetuate the discourse of efficiency by resisting any rules or
regulations that were associated with that particular discourse. In further showing her
resistance Sam chose to turn planning time into “gossip time” as a way to demonstrate
how she believed that planning time had become a “waste of time.”

Sam also talked about how she struggled with district regulations that did not
consider student and teacher needs. Sam said,

It’s just a matter of, you got to learn to do what you can with what you got and it’s
a matter of just surviving. I really think that’s what it comes down to. I mean we
are on the front lines everyday all day and you know downtown [district] doesn’t
always understand.

Sam felt that her practical knowledge was not respected by district administrators who
made district-wide decisions without considering teachers. For example, during one of
my observations of Watson’s team planning meeting Sam, Nanci, and the other teachers
in the planning meeting expressed concern with the district administrators’ decision for
the last day of school to be on a Tuesday and the last day for teachers to be on a
Wednesday. The teachers felt having only one day without children was not sufficient
enough to clean and pack their classrooms. Sam suggested to the group that they have
the end of the year preschool celebration on the Friday before the last day of school and
nonchalantly suggest to parents that was the last day. Sam told the team to just say,
“Bye, have a nice summer” when families left. Sam then suggested to the team that it
was important that they did not put anything in writing about when the last day of school
was. Sam said she was not worried about repercussions if they got caught changing the
last day of school by the administrators because, “I know how to play it.” Sam said she
would tell the building principal, “We never said they [students] couldn’t [come back
Monday and Tuesday].” Sam, Nanci, and the other teachers from their planning team
struggled with district wide decisions that were made without consideration of teachers.
In drawing from their knowledge and experience of how long it would take for teachers
to pack up their classrooms before Wednesday the team decided to improvise the district
rule to better fit their needs as teachers.

Thus far I have discussed how in struggling with the roles promoted by a
discourse of babysitting and efficiency participants asserted their professional identities
as educators and knowledgeable experts in improvising the curriculum and rules. Sam’s
and Nanci’s example demonstrated that for some teachers asserting agency in
improvising rules may only be possible behind closed doors without the surveillance of
the principal or district administrators. While Sam was the leader the teachers in the
planning team all pulled together to conspire in improvising the rules. This suggests that
having support from others was influential to how Sam and Nanci asserted agency. I now discuss how participants improvised relationships in response to their struggles in being perceived as service providers within the discourse of customer service.

**Improvising Relationships**

In the previous chapter participants spoke about their struggles with the constructs of professional that were promoted by the discourse of customer service. Within the discourse of customer service, the administration at MMSD promoted a service provider/customer relationship between teachers and parents. While participants also believed that relationships with parents were important to their professional work their ideas about their relationships with parents were starkly different from that of the districts. As such, Jill, Sophia, CeCe, and Sam improvised the service provider/customer relationship with parents to reflect their unique beliefs about the role of relationships with parents in their professional work.

Jill and Sophia spoke about how they improvised a service provider/customer relationship with parents by subscribing only to aspects that they interpreted as being congruent with their beliefs about relationships with parents. Jill said,

I think of it [relationship with parents] more as a partnership. I think everybody needs to be professional, an adult and talk to each other in a nice way. Being caring I think fits into customer service. Not talking nasty or ignoring them.

Jill interpreted being caring and respectful as important aspects of the customer service discourse. Jill thus only draws from her interpretation of what was important to assert her
professional identity as a collaborative partner with parents and resisted the role of service provider.

Sophia similarly draws on her ideas about her relationship with parents as a partnership to interpret what she believed was important in the district message about customer service. Sophia said,

I’m not interpreting it that way [service provider/customer]; I don’t know how they are. I don’t think that that’s true in this instance. I mean I don’t want to think of my students as my customers, that seems a little odd. I think I’m kind of just doing what I always did, you know, regardless of whose saying it just because it’s the right thing to do.

Similar to Jill, Sophia used her interpretation of what was important in a customer service discourse to assert her professional identity as a collaborative partner with parents.

Like Jill and Sophia, CeCe believed that close collaborative relationships with parents were important to her professional work. While CeCe also spoke about how she only pulled from the discourse of customer service what she interpreted as meaningful to her collaborative relationships with parents, she also spoke about how her classroom is a safe place where she can make these autonomous interpretations as she wished. CeCe said,

The district is what the district is and they don’t come into my classroom so I handle my room, you know, they want customer service okay I’ll do that I’ll call back people I’ll do those things but as far as my connection with parents and children it’s a caring community and I’ll do what I do when I close my door you
know I don’t have to act like they are customers. When we close our doors at the end of the day they are children that we have to be responsible for to help them grow and become educated and disciplined individuals.

For CeCe, behind the closed door of her classroom was a space where she had the autonomy to enact her professional identity as a collaborative community member with parents.

Sam is another participant that struggled with the customer service model. Unlike Jill, Sophia, and CeCe, however, Sam believed that having a relationship where parents trusted her decisions was important. Sam felt that showing parents that she was knowledgeable and had their students’ best interests at heart was important in building this trust. In improvising her relationships with parents, Sam particularly struggled with the district’s open door policy for parents. Sam said, “You can’t yell at a kid or get that kid the way you want. They’re parents, not our customers!” I observed first hand how Sam improvised away from having a customer/service provider relationship with students’ parents by limiting opportunities for parents to participate. During an observation of a planning meeting, Sam asked the team to lie to parents by telling them that there was no more room on the bus for parents to attend the field trip. Sam believed that she already knew what was best for students and therefore did not agree with the discourse of customer service as it interfered with her ability to show parents that she was knowledgeable and had students’ best at heart by being “tough” and “strict.”

The district administration as well as participants believed that relationships with parents were important; how they interpreted these relationships were different. The
district administration believed that having a service provider/customer relationship with parents was important to teachers’ professional work whereas Jill, Sophia, and CeCe believed that collaborative partnerships were most important and Sam believed that her knowledge was most important in having a trusting relationship with parents to show them she had their students’ best interest at heart. As such, these four teachers found ways to resist the discourse of customer service and enact their own beliefs about relationships with parents and thus staying true to their commitments as professionals.

While participants seemed to share common struggles with district constructs about what was professional they mostly asserted their agency behind the closed door of their classrooms. There was one participant, Sophia, who felt that it was also important to assert agency within social spaces in order to change dominant discourses.

**Agency Within Public Spaces**

In struggling with the messages she received about her professional work through the discourse of kindergarten readiness, Sophia believed that it was important to assert her agency beyond the classroom into public spaces where she was more capable in effecting change. Sophia talked about how closing the classroom door was not productive in making change happen. Sophia said,

My first reaction is usually to argue or to push more. Trying to change things.

Yes you can say yes okay and then do your own thing [behind closed doors] but I think at some point I think you have to say wait this isn’t right let’s try to do this some other way.
In asserting her agency Sophia often spoke up during faculty meeting to challenge prevailing district discourses such as the discourse of kindergarten readiness. Sophia said for example, during faculty meetings she has been vocal about how pushing academic work in preschool can compromise Developmentally Appropriate Practice. Sophia, however, felt alone in her quest. Sophia said,

It’s so hard to get people on board with you and then you’re out there on your own. So you get worn down and then you start saying, fine whatever and you shut your door or you just have to do it. I have to kind of de-brainwash myself.

In being alone in asserting agency in public spaces Sophia often felt “worn down” and worried that she may fall into line with the district’s push for kindergarten readiness and compromise her beliefs about Developmentally Appropriate Practices. As such, Sophia understood how it might be easier to just close her classroom door and do what she wanted but also felt that real change required more public acts of agency.

For Sophia, asserting her voice in public spaces was important in being an active agent in promoting change. The need to stand up for what she believed in has always been a major “personality trait” for Sophia. She said, “Social injustice has always bothered me.” Sophia recalled an instance when her parents took her to a play about slavery when she was three and after the play, “they had to take me out, I was just sobbing and yelling and crying.” Being concerned about broader social issues seemed to weigh more heavily on Sophia than her own discomfort. While closing her door and doing what she knew was best would be “easier,” her commitment toward impacting
social change was a greater driving force that prompted her to assert agency in public spaces.

**Summary**

Throughout this chapter I have discussed how participants asserted their professional identities as educators, knowledgeable experts, and collaborative partners in the face of competing professional roles of babysitters, obedient technicians, and service providers that were promoted by discourses of babysitting, efficiency, customer service, and kindergarten readiness. While participants alike shared common struggles with the district’s constructs of professional how they enacted their professional identities by improvising curriculum, rules, and relationships reflected their unique beliefs about relationships, knowledge, and their roles as professionals. Many participants, however, felt that the only space they could assert agency in enacting their professional identities was behind the closed doors of their classrooms. Sophia was the only participant that felt that it was important to have her voice heard in working toward changing prevailing district discourses. This finding raises some concern about public preschool teachers’ abilities to become active agents within their school districts. Within the next and final chapter I review the major findings presented within this study as well as discuss the implications this research has on future research and practice.
CHAPTER VII
DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In using narrative inquiry to understand how five public preschool teachers understand and negotiate their professional identities within a major metropolitan public school district, I presented a complex narrative that demonstrated how the unique accounts of five public preschool teachers intertwined into the story of their shared context. This story emphasized key elements of what it means to be a professional as identified by participants, including relationship-building and knowledge, and seeks to explain how these ideas were taken up and negotiated in the school context.

I began with a discussion on the importance of relationships to participants’ understanding of their professional identities. Participants drew from their own unique early experiences and relationships with their families and their teachers to understand the importance of their relationships as professionals. Teachers came to understand that developing relationships with students and families was critical to their work as professional educators as it allowed them to know students well in order to plan appropriate curriculum or enact “tough love” relationships with students in order to show families and students that they cared for students’ success in meeting high expectations. Within their relationships with principals and colleagues, participants sought validation and support in their efforts to enact their professional identities. Tensions arose, however, for four of the participants in their relationships when they felt that their professional work was viewed as babysitting rather than as educational.
In chapter 5 the story shifted toward participants’ unique beliefs about knowledge as informed by their diverse educational backgrounds. Here I explored the various constructs that teachers held about what it meant to be knowledgeable of child development and how they enacted their diverse understandings about child development through their professional practice. In particular participants drew on their experiences in teacher education that focused on the Montessori philosophy or Developmentally Appropriate Practices as well as their personal practical knowledge to understand the importance of knowing child development in their professional work. I then turned to a discussion of how participants’ ideas about knowledge contrasted with the constructs of knowledge asserted by the district administration, which emphasized kindergarten readiness, efficiency, and customer service.

In striving to understand how participants negotiated their professional identities within the tensions identified around relationships and knowledge I examined teachers’ acts of agency in chapter 6. First I explored teacher agency within their classrooms and then agency asserted in more public spaces. Here I discussed how teachers enacted agency within the classroom by improvising the curriculum, rules, and relationships. I also discussed how one teacher enacted agency within the social space of faculty meetings. In the end, I highlighted how most instances of agency were carried out behind the closed doors of teachers’ classrooms which raised questions about limits of public preschool teachers in becoming active agents within their school districts.

In what follows I discuss the contributing findings on personal histories and competing constructs of professional make to the current literature as well as provide
recommendations for future lines of research. In doing so, I also discuss the implications each finding has on future practice.

**Personal Histories**

The literature suggests that personal histories are significant in shaping individual identities (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Holland et al., 1998; Holland & Lave, 2001). This literature describes how identities are influenced by the multiple social contexts or “figured worlds” that individuals come in and out of. In using narrative inquiry the research I have presented makes a contribution to this literature by shedding light on the stories of five public preschool teachers and how they draw on their personal histories to understand the significance of relationships and knowledge on their professional identities. The findings I have presented demonstrate how participants’ understanding of the significance of relationships and knowledge to their professional work was unique to their own diverse personal histories of experiences and relationships at home and school.

Four of the five participants demonstrated that they often modeled their professional practices as teachers from their early relationships with their families and teachers. CeCe was the only participant that did not model her professional practice from her past experiences in school. In reflecting on the painful memories from her own school experiences CeCe chose to instead draw from her experiences with her family to understand the role of relationships. CeCe’s example demonstrated not only the diverse impact multiple figured worlds can have on individuals but also the important role reflection can have on teachers’ agency in constructing professional identities different from the ones they experienced. There is a vast amount of literature that suggests
reflective practices are important to the professional work of teachers (Brookfield, 1995; Doerr, 2004; Henderson & Gornik, 2007; Pinar, 1975; Schön, 1983). This finding contributes to this literature by providing some insight into how reflective practices assisted one public preschool teacher’s sense of agency in defining her own professional identities.

For four of these teachers, participation in this study was their first experience in reflecting on their past experiences and examining how the past influenced their professional work. Pinar (1975) warned that it is important to recognize that conceptions of the past can be accountable for the present as the past can become habit in the present if not examined. Bringing the past to bear on the present can assist teachers in having a better understanding of their beliefs and values and how they impact their professional work with students. As teachers critically reflect on how their past experiences influence their professional practice they can begin to make informed decisions about the implications continuing or altering particular practices can have on their students. CeCe used critical reflection to examine the impact her teachers, who were “hard” and “didn’t care” to know her, had on her as a student. In bringing the past to bear on the present, CeCe was then able to envision new possibilities and enact accordingly. She believed that her religion was most influential in her abilities to be reflective. CeCe said:

You know you’re going to have nightmares but you are still gonna have dreams. I look at everything as being another chapter in my life instead of looking at it as, oh woe is me, to know that from every difficulty comes relief, so that comes from our religion [Islam]. So you know you have to be reflective because those things
are to help you grow, you know, when you have trials in your life and so you have to reflect daily you have to reflect weekly you know I try to.

Although for four of the participants reflecting on their past experiences to understand their professional practice was a new experience, CeCe drew from her religious beliefs to understand the role reflection had on her professional practice as a teacher.

The implications from this finding suggest that teacher educators need to continue to promote students’ critical reflection of their own early experiences and how those experiences influence their beliefs about their professional practice as teachers. For instance, a critical reflection journal could be kept throughout each course where pre-service and in-service teachers are asked to journal about their past experiences throughout school before particular topics are addressed in class, through readings, and/or observations. Pre-service and in-service teachers can then return to their journals and reflect on how their perceptions are evolving and can begin to envision new possibilities or further support their early perceptions. These journals can then be used to prompt classroom discussions to further expand upon individual constructions. Such reflective practices should happen continually throughout the program to promote more in-depth understanding of beliefs as they evolve and should be encouraged to continue as students enter the teaching field.

Findings from this research also suggest that personal histories are influential to the knowledge that individual draw upon to inform their professional practice. Participants all agreed that being knowledgeable of child development was important in their professional work. However, how participants understood child development was
unique to their own personal histories. In particular, their own teacher education backgrounds and early teaching experiences were most important for four participants whereas personal experience as a young student was most important for one participant in their knowledge of child development and how they use that knowledge to inform their professional work. For instance, recall from chapter 5 that Jill, CeCe, and Sophia believed that their teacher education backgrounds were instrumental in their understanding of child development and how they draw on that knowledge in their professional practice. Jill said, “I think that for preschool teachers they should know what’s expected at what age and I think that all grade levels should know what that age is expected. Being a professional in your field is knowing your field.” Whereas, Nanci and Sam did not believe that their teacher education backgrounds were important and thus drew on their own experiences as students and their practical experiences as teachers. Sam said, “I have my master’s but book smarts only get you so far I kind of feel. You’ve got to have some common sense.” This finding suggests that there are many different conceptions about child development and how teachers draw on child development to inform their professional practice.

Each participant only understood child development from the lens of their own experiences from which they chose to draw. The literature suggests that knowledge should not be taken for granted as sacred and thus critical reflection of knowledge and practice are important to the professional work of teachers (Brookfield, 1995; Henderson & Gornik, 2007; Sachs, 2001). As such, critical reflection is also needed for teachers to
have a better understanding of the knowledge that they draw upon to inform their professional practice.

The implications from this finding suggest that teacher educators should also use critical reflection to assist pre-service and in-service teachers in being critically reflective of their own knowledge and practice. Brookfield (1995) suggested that multiple interconnected lenses need to be considered when reflecting on practice. For instance as student teachers reflect on particular interactions or lessons they have with students they can be guided by teacher educators to not only reflect from their own autobiographical perspective but also from the perspective of the students they work with to better understand how their practices impact their students in different ways. Reflection should also take place through the perspective of a peer, mentor teacher, or professor after they have observed the student teacher during a particular interaction or lesson to gain the perspective of an outside individual that may be able to bring to bear new insights. Furthermore, reflection through the use of literature should also be used to not only understand the knowledge that they draw upon but to also understand why they choose to not draw upon other ways of knowing to inform their practice. This type of reflection will encourage student teachers to go beyond implementing particular practices because that is what is taught at their particular institution but to consider other perspectives and new possibilities.

Future lines of research should focus on following prospective teachers who have participated in critical reflective practices throughout their teacher education programs to better understand if these reflective practices translate into their professional work as
teachers. Researchers could also focus on further understanding the impact such reflective practices have on teachers’ agency in constructing their own professional identities.

**Competing Constructs of Professional**

In chapter 2 I discussed the literature that suggests there are particular competing constructs about what is professional that exist in informing teachers’ professional identities (Moyles, 2001; Osgood, 2006a, 2006b; Sachs, 2001; Woodrow, 2008). In looking at the shared professional identities of a wider group of preschool teachers this literature has shown that teachers are often placed in a difficult position when they exist between constructs of opposition, namely, entrepreneurial professional and caring professional (Osgood, 2004; Woodrow, 2008) as well as entrepreneurial professional and activist professional (Sachs, 2001). The research I presented here contributes to this literature by focusing more narrowly on five public preschool teachers to understand how they individually struggled within district wide constructs that were promoted by dominant discourses that positioned teachers within professional roles that were in opposition to their own beliefs about their roles as professionals. What seemed to be at odds with participants in particular were discourses that promoted professional roles as babysitters, obedient technicians, and service providers because they believed that these roles competed with their own ideas about their roles as educators, knowledgeable experts, and collaborative partners.

In chapter 2 I discussed the broader managerial discourse of professional and suggested that it has given rise to notions that professionals are technicians,
entrepreneurial, and service providers. The research I have presented here further complicates the managerial discourse by demonstrating how it has manifested within the context of MMSD in discourses of customer service, efficiency, and kindergarten readiness. In doing so, this research also sheds light on how participants wrestled with the roles that were promoted within these discourses in different ways. In what follows I discuss how the stories participants told of their struggles within each competing discourse makes a contribution to the literature as well as implications for future practice and research.

**Discourse of Customer Service**

The administration at MMSD used a discourse of customer service to promote notions of consumerism similar to those that derive from the business world. As discussed in chapter 2 notions of consumerism that placed teacher/parents in a service provider/customer relationship are situated within the broader discourse of managerial (Dahlberg et al., 2007). Elsewhere I have found that teachers struggled when being placed in a service provider role in that they felt their knowledge as professionals were not respected by the consumer demands of parents (Sisson, 2009).

Other researchers have written about the tensions that existed for teachers who were positioned between competing constructs of professional as entrepreneurial and professional as caring (Osgood, 2004). Like the discourse of customer service, the discourse of entrepreneurial derives from the broader managerial discourse. Osgood wrote about how teachers struggled with the entrepreneurial professional identity as their
own beliefs about their professional work stemmed from an emotionality discourse where they preferred collaborative relationships over individuality (Osgood, 2004).

The study I have presented here contributes to this research by presenting the personal stories of how public preschool teachers who also draw on an emotionality discourse of professional to value collaborative relationships struggled with the competing construct of the district that promoted service provider/customer relationships through a discourse of customer service. In particular Jill, Sophia, and CeCe believed that having collaborative relationships with their students’ parents was important in knowing their students well in order to plan appropriate curriculum and meet the needs of their students. Jill said, “I think of it [relationships with parents] more as a partnership.” I saw first hand an example of how Jill fostered a collaborative relationship with parents when an irate parent came into the classroom during a classroom observation. Jill listened to the parent to better understand her concerns and then offered to work with her collaboratively toward a solution. During this observation I watched as the parent’s demeanor changed and she thanked Jill for offering to work with her.

As discussed in chapter 2, collaborative relationships are an essential part of an emotionality discourse. In drawing from an emotionality discourse Jill, Sophia, and CeCe resisted the service provider/customer relationship of teachers and parents the discourse of customer service promoted because it disrupted their own beliefs about the importance of collaborative relationships. Jill, Sophia, and CeCe thus decided to interpret “customer service” in terms of how it fit with their own ideas about relationships. The space where these three teachers felt they had the power to freely
interpret and enact their ideas about their relationships with their students’ parents was within their classrooms behind closed doors. CeCe said, “As far as my connection with parents and children it’s a caring community and I’ll do what I do when I close my door you know, I don’t have to act like they are customers.”

This finding suggests that having an awareness of the multiple discourses operating to construct images of the professional roles of teachers can assist teachers in becoming more aware of their vulnerabilities and more strategic about how they might choose to accept, reject, or improvise particular roles that will continue to shape perceptions of the profession. In drawing from an emotionality discourse Jill, Sophia, and CeCe’s stories demonstrated how important collaborative relationships with students’ parents were to their professional work. Within an emotionality discourse collaboration is preferred over individuality because it is through collaboration that multiple perspectives are taken into consideration to inform decisions (Osgood, 2004). The observation of Jill interacting with an irate parent demonstrated how working with parents in a collaborative relationship can be beneficial in problem solving and ensuring that parents and teachers have a clear understanding and respect for the knowledge and roles they each play in students’ education.

Future lines of research should focus on further understanding how teachers use collaboration in their relationships with students’ parents to inform their professional practice. Qualitative research methods would be most useful in understanding individual experiences to provide concrete examples to build future practice. Such research would
not only provide useful practical examples but could also provide further insight into the role of emotionality discourses to the professional practice of teachers.

**Discourse of Efficiency**

The administration at MMSD also promoted mandated standardized practices and curriculum through a discourse of efficiency. Like the discourse of customer service, the discourse of efficiency also stems from the broader managerial discourse of professional. A product of the industrial revolution, ideas of efficiency were important to mass production. Significant to a discourse of efficiency is a hierarchical structure where some form of authority (district administrators in the case of MMSD) determines educational practices based on the efficient production of institutional educational outcomes. Within this hierarchy teachers are placed in a technical role where they are to obediently carry out mandated educational practices (Dahlberg et al., 2007).

All five participants struggled with the messages communicated within the discourse of efficiency because it did not allow space for them to draw upon their knowledge or expertise. Recall in chapter 5, participants all believed that knowledge was important to their professional work. As required by the state department of education all participants had also obtained their master’s degrees. While teachers believed that their knowledge and expertise were significant to their professional work, the discourse of efficiency promoted by the district administration sent a message that their role was that of an obedient technician where important decisions were made by district administrators rather than teachers. Participants often felt that their knowledge and expertise was significant to making important educational decisions. Sam said, “We are on the front
lines everyday all day and you know downtown [district administration] doesn’t always understand.”

There is a vast literature over many years that suggest that providing teachers with autonomy to draw on their knowledge and expertise is important to their professional work particularly with diverse learners (e.g., Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Dewey, 1938/1998; Eisner, 2002; Henderson & Kesson, 2004); however, this autonomy to draw on knowledge and expertise did not exist within the district’s discourse of efficiency. As such four participants spoke about how they resisted a technical role and enacting their constructs of professional as knowledgeable and autonomous by improvising the curriculum and the rules within their classrooms.

In improvising the curriculum, CeCe said, “I think with anything you take what you need out of it and then add what you can and delete what you have to.” CeCe, Jill, and Nanci improvised the mandated standardized curriculum by picking and choosing particular parts that they felt were important and incorporating it with their own knowledge about what young students should learn. In improvising the rules Sam and Nanci felt more powerful in covertly resisting mandated rules with the support of the other teachers from their planning team. Sam said, “It’s just a matter of, you got to learn to do what you can with what you got and it’s a matter of just surviving.” Recall that Sam, Nanci, and the other teachers from their planning team felt that the designated last day for students did not provide teachers with enough time to clean and pack their classrooms for the summer. For these teachers, covertly changing the last day of school was important to their “survival” in finishing their end of the year responsibilities.
Sam and Nanci counted on the support from other teachers who faced the same
struggles in their planning team to assert agency in improvising the rules. Recall in
chapter 4 Sam and Nanci were the only participants that did not receive support from
their principal or their colleagues that taught higher grades for their professional work.
While Jill, CeCe, and Sophia spoke about the importance of their relationships with their
principals and colleagues in validating their professional work, they also spoke about
how these relationships provided support in their abilities to enact their constructs as
knowledgeable experts and autonomous professionals.

Jill, CeCe, and Sophia described how their relationships with their principal and
colleagues supported their abilities to enact as knowledgeable experts because they were
often involved in opportunities to work on projects alongside their principal and other
colleagues. These three teachers were also supported in enacting their constructs as
autonomous professionals through the trust that their principal showed them by “not
breathing down their necks.” Sam and Nanci, however, did not have such relationships
with their principal or other building colleagues; rather they felt that their work was not
professionally recognized as important and were often referred to as “babysitters” by
their principal and middle school colleagues.

Holland and her colleagues (1998) suggested that improvising against constraints
of figured worlds or social contexts and social position can be used to create new figured
worlds. Sam and Nanci created a new figured world with other like minded teachers
where their particular knowledge and expertise was valued. Sam and Nanci felt validated
in their figured world of like minded teachers and thus agreed to improvise the
constraints they felt from the discourse of efficiency promoted by the district administration.

This finding suggests that school administrators and educational policy makers need to take a closer look at the appropriateness of an efficiency model. Eisner (2002) suggested that educational decisions are like those of an artist where judgments are based largely on “qualities that unfold during the course of action” (p. 155). Teachers are thus significant in making important educational decisions as they are more closely connected to their students and the nature of their professional work. As such, teachers must be brought to the table to make important decisions about the curriculum and rules. Teachers must also be granted a certain degree of flexibility where they can feel comfortable in having open dialogue with colleagues and administrators about their ideas of negotiation that may better fit their classroom needs. Respecting teachers for their knowledge and expertise by bringing them to the table as significant contributors to important educational decisions is important because it will provide multiple perspectives to inform decisions that take into account all parties involved. While Jill, CeCe, and Sophia experienced some validation and support for their knowledge and expertise in their relationships with their principal and colleagues at Blake Montessori Public School, at Watson Public School, Sam and Nanci did not. As such Sam and Nanci along with other like minded teachers formed a new figured world where they felt safe to improvise the constraints of rules set forth by the district administration.

Implications of this finding on future lines of research suggest that more research is needed to better understand the influence validation and support from principals and
colleagues has on public preschool teachers’ professional identities. While I have presented an example from two schools within one district, further research is needed to represent multiple contexts to provide a better understanding of how relationships with principals and colleagues are different in diverse context with diverse individuals. Such research endeavors may also provide more accounts that offer insight into the factors that contribute to why some principals and colleagues validate and support the professional work of preschool teachers and others do not.

Discourse of Kindergarten Readiness

Kindergarten readiness was also a discourse promoted by MMSD administration. The district’s discourse of kindergarten readiness privileged a behaviorist perspective about knowledge that stemmed from a broader rationality discourse. Rationality discourses draw from the modernity beliefs that the world is “knowable and ordered” and the ability of science to provide a true account of ourselves (Dahlberg et al., 2007). In drawing on a behaviorist perspective, intellectual development is viewed as a set of learned facts and behaviors (Copple et al., 1982) where the role of the teacher is to bestow knowledge onto students (Genishi et al., 2001).

The research I have presented can also be used to argue that how this discourse was used within MMSD was also related to the broader managerial discourse in that it is a top-down decision made by the administration that privileged a behaviorist perspective of learning and development. In chapter 2 I described a managerial discourse in terms of ideas that stem from the ideas of the business world and industry that emphasize competition, consumerism, efficiency, and accountability. Like a rationality discourse, a
managerial discourse also draws from modernity beliefs of the world as “knowable and ordered” (Dahlberg et al., 2007). The research I have presented contributes to this literature by demonstrating how discourses are complicated in that they can intertwine with other discourses to inform practice in complex ways. In the case of MMSD, behaviorist learning theory was used to establish standardized student outcomes through a discourse of kindergarten readiness.

While all five participants spoke about the messages they received about kindergarten readiness only one participant struggled with these messages. In drawing on her knowledge of Developmentally Appropriate Practices, Sophia’s beliefs about knowledge stemmed from a constructivist perspective where learning is influenced by interactions and experiences within the environment (Gordon & Browne, 2007). As such, Sophia struggled with being positioned within a context that privileged a discourse that was counter to her beliefs about knowledge. Sophia believed that expressing her voice within the public space of faculty meetings was the best place for her to publicly resist the discourse of kindergarten readiness. Sophia believed that in publicly challenging the discourse of kindergarten readiness and enacting as a knowledgeable professional by presenting a counter discourse of Developmentally Appropriate Practice was important to promote change. Sophia said, “I think at some point I think you have to say, ‘wait this isn’t right; let’s try to do this some other way.’”

Sophia was the only participant that spoke about the importance of her knowledge about Developmentally Appropriate Practices in understanding the role of play in young children’s learning and development. Where as, CeCe, Jill, Sam, and Nanci associated...
play with babysitting and believed that play did not have a place in their educationally based classrooms. Nanci said, “I know play is educational but not they way they do it [dramatic play and block play]. Here we play but we do rhyming games and stuff like that.” For these four participants focusing on education in terms of teaching academic skills placed them in a higher professional status than babysitters. As such, these four participants became upset when parents and colleagues referred to them as babysitters and their work as play as they felt that was an indication that their work was not valued as “educational.” Nanci said, “That’s what a lot of teachers think, especially middle school teachers. Preschool is not a grade; you’re just babysitting in there.” These four teachers then placed themselves above daycare teachers by suggesting that daycare teachers were only babysitters who focused on play. Holland and Lave (2001) wrote, “Through embracing their words and practices socially marked others can be incorporated into us” (p. 15). In embracing the notion that play is babysitting and thus less professional these four teachers further perpetuated the power structure placing daycare teachers in a lower position. In resisting being perceived as babysitters CeCe, Jill, Sam, and Nanci improvised the curriculum behind the closed doors of their classrooms by not including or limiting students’ time in the dramatic play and block areas that were required by Head Start and the Universal Preschool grant project.

There is a vast body of literature that recognizes the importance of play in young children’s learning and development (e.g., Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Chalufour & Worth, 2004; Curtis & Carter, 2008; Epstein, 2007; Jones & Reynolds, 1992; Mooney, 2000; Worth & Grollman, 2003). The importance of play in children’s learning and
development is represented in the discourse of Developmentally Appropriate Practice. While the discourse of Developmentally Appropriate Practice is prevalent within the field of early childhood education, Sophia was the only participant that pulled from this discourse to inform her professional work. This finding suggests that when faced with competing discourses such as play as being developmentally appropriate and play as being babysitting if teachers are not well grounded in the theory of Developmentally Appropriate Practices, as CeCe, Jill, Sam, and Nanci demonstrated, they then may be more likely to choose to adopt practices that make them feel more professional according to others’ standards. Sophia was more grounded in her understanding of play and Developmentally Appropriate Practices, thus was able to withstand and articulate her own ideas about her role as a professional while the other four teachers were more inclined to adopt others’ ideas of their work.

Researchers have suggested that the level of education matters more than the type of education focus in nurturing beliefs about Developmentally Appropriate Practices for preschool teachers (McMullen & Alat, 2002; McMullen, Alat, & Lash, 2003). The research I have presented contributes to this literature by suggesting that level of education may not be as important as the type of experiences connected to teacher education for instilling beliefs about Developmentally Appropriate Practices in preschool teachers. Each of the five participants had master’s degrees in education related fields, yet only one participant talked at length about the importance of Developmentally Appropriate Practices and the role of play in preschool children’s learning. The remaining four participants believed that play did not have an important role in their
students’ learning in the classroom and therefore only used play as a break from learning. What was unique about Sophia were her early teaching experiences in a setting that promoted the use of Developmentally Appropriate Practices and play.

Furthermore, although Jill and CeCe did not talk about the importance of Developmentally Appropriate Practices and play they did speak about the importance of individualized instruction and following the students’ development based on their teacher education background in Montessori and their experiences in teaching in Montessori classrooms. This supports the notion that experiences that are connected to what teachers are learning in theory are important to how teachers are able to later translate theory into practice. The literature on field experiences in teacher education suggests that the ability of field sites in bridging theory and practice for teacher education students are uneven (Allsopp, DeMarie, Alvarez-McHatton, & Doone, 2006; Korthagen, Loughran, & Russell, 2006; Zeichner, 1980). Feiman-Nemser and Buchmann (1985) also suggested that because teacher education students are no stranger to the classroom, being placed in field sites that are more similar to their own school experiences support and sustain conditions from their early experiences rather than the theories they have learned in their teacher education programs.

This finding contributes to the literature by suggesting that teacher educators need to work on providing student teachers with practical experiences that are congruent with what they are learning in their teacher education programs. Creating partnerships with schools where university professors and mentor teachers meet regularly to ensure
continuity of practice is maintained between course work and field work would be one strategy that could be used.

In presenting the stories of five public preschool teachers in how they struggled within district constructs that positioned them within professional roles that competed with their own beliefs about their roles as professional I have shown the complexity that exists when individuals enter contexts that privilege particular ways of knowing and being over others. In chapter 2 I described the historical move made by kindergarten teachers in integrating within the public schools that resulted in compromising some of the philosophical beliefs that originally informed the characteristics of kindergarten professionals as they adopted more standardized curriculum and measurement practices of the primary grades. The research I have presented demonstrates how integrating with public schools has also impacted the professional work of public preschool teachers. While I have focused on understanding the context of one public school district further research is needed to understand the influence of multiple contexts. For instance, future research could focus on how daycare preschool teachers understand and negotiate their professional identities within the context of private daycare centers or preschool teachers in the context of university laboratory schools. Such research endeavors should keep an open research design to capture unique discourses that may arise. Further research could also focus on a comparative analysis to gain a better understanding of how context influences the professional practice of preschool teachers in different ways.

In examining participants’ acts of agency in resisting district constructs I have found that most often participants enacted agency behind the closed doors of their
classrooms. Connelly and Clandinin (1999) similarly described the classroom as a “safe place” for teachers’ enactment of their professional identities. Connelly and Clandinin wrote, “Classrooms are, for the most part, safe places, generally free from scrutiny, where teachers are free to live stories of practice. These lived stories are essentially secret ones” (pp. 2-3). By limiting their agency to their classrooms participants were in part maintaining the very discourses they wished to dismantle because they were not actively resisting or challenging them in open spaces.

There was one participant, Sophia, who believed that having her voice heard in public spaces was essential in promoting change from prevailing district discourses. Sophia enacted her professional identity as a knowledgeable expert in asserting agency during faculty meetings to challenge the discourse of kindergarten readiness and present a counter discourse of Developmentally Appropriate Practice. Sophia, however, felt alone in asserting her voice as a knowledgeable expert and worried that in being “worn down” that she would eventually compromise her own beliefs and embody the constructs promoted within the discourse of kindergarten readiness.

The implications on future practice from this finding suggest that teacher education needs to support teachers’ use of agency outside of the classrooms. More conversations with pre-service and in-service teachers about their role as active agents should be incorporated within teacher education programs. Further research is needed to understand how teachers from all disciplines enact their agency within the classroom and within social spaces. Future research should also focus on understanding what is unique
about teachers who assert agency in public spaces. This type of research will assist teacher educators in understanding how to prepare the “Sophia’s” of the world.

**Conclusion**

This narrative research study on how five public preschool teachers understand and negotiate their professional identities within a major metropolitan school district was significant for two important reasons. First, public preschool teachers are positioned within a unique context. While historically preschools have not been associated with public schools, increasing interests among American policy makers to close the achievement gap between minority students and their peers has led to an increase in attention being paid to preschool children and has resulted in more preschools being incorporated into public school systems. As the historical move made by kindergarten educators in affiliating with public schools demonstrated, although they gained a higher professional status and increased wages it cost them their foundational philosophical beliefs that originally informed the characteristics of kindergarten professionals (Bloch, 1987). Professional action has a reciprocal relationship with professional identity (Watson, 2006). The research I have presented here demonstrated that while a similar trend was happening to public preschool there are also multiple and diverse narratives that have served to complicate this issue as teachers bring with them a history of experiences that sever to inform their own ideas about what is professional. As such, the multiple and competing notions about the professional work of preschool teachers have caused some tensions for public preschool teachers as they enacted their own understanding of their professional identities.
Secondly, this narrative research was significant as it provided a space for the voices of public preschool teachers to be heard. The voice of teachers who work with our youngest children has been underrepresented within the research on professional identities (McGillivrary, 2008; Mitchell, 2007). While there is some literature that examines the professional identities of preschool teachers (Moyles, 2001; Osgood, 2006a, 2006b; Sachs, 2001; Woodrow, 2008) these studies do not capture the lived stories of preschool teachers’ experiences as they strive to understand and negotiate their professional identities. While professional identities are socially constructed it is important to realize the potential of public preschool teachers as being key players in that construction (Helsby, 1995). There are multiple and sometimes competing constructs of professional. These constructs of professional are understood at the site of each individual teacher where they are then enacted or rejected. As such, the research I have presented here demonstrates the complexities that exist for public preschool teachers in enacting their professional identities within a major metropolitan school district.
APPENDIX A

DIMENSIONS OF SPACE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS
### Appendix A

**Dimensions of Space and Significance of Research Questions**

How do public preschool teachers understand and negotiate their professional identities?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension of Space</th>
<th>Supporting Research Questions</th>
<th>Data used to answer this question</th>
<th>Projected timeline</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Backward</td>
<td>How does public preschool teachers’ biographical context contribute to their understanding about the role(s) and/or characteristics of the teacher as a professional?</td>
<td>Semi-structured life history interviews.</td>
<td>Feb-Mar 2010—life history interviews.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Forward</td>
<td>What professional goals do public preschool teachers have for themselves?</td>
<td>Semi-structured life history interviews.</td>
<td>Feb-Mar 2010—life history interviews.</td>
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<td>Situated in Place</td>
<td>What challenges and supports do public preschool teachers feel they have as they strive to implement their understandings of their professional identities in the public school context?</td>
<td>Semi-structured context interviews. Observations of events participants identify as being significant to their understanding of their professional identity. Artifact analysis to develop follow-up interview questions.</td>
<td>Mar-Apr 2010—Context interviews. Mar-May 2010—Observations/artifact analysis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inward</td>
<td>In what ways do public preschool teachers reflect upon how their understanding of their professional identities positions themselves in the context of public school education?</td>
<td>Follow-up interviews after observations.</td>
<td>Apr-May 2010—Follow-up interviews.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Outward</td>
<td>How do public preschool teachers understand and respond to the contextual messages they receive about their roles as professionals?</td>
<td>Follow-up interviews after observations.</td>
<td>Apr-May 2010—Follow-up interviews.</td>
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APPENDIX B

DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY
Appendix B

Demographic Survey

Name: _______________________________________________

Phone: ________________________    Email: ______________________________

Your Age: ______    Years of experience teaching: ______ Grades taught:_______

Name of school you currently teach at: ________________________

How many years have you taught at your current school? __________

Is there anything unique about your school that I should know about?

______________________________________________________________________________________

Are you a current resident in the city where you currently teach? __________

If you are not a current resident in the city where you currently teach please briefly describe where you
currently reside: ________________________________________________________________________

How would you describe your ethnic/racial/cultural background?

______________________________________________________________________________________

What do you identify as being important aspects of your ethnic/racial/cultural background?

______________________________________________________________________________________

As a participant in this study you will be given a pseudonym to protect your identity. I would like to give
you an opportunity to name yourself. If you could choose a name, (other than the one you already have)
that would capture the essence of who you are, what would that name be?

______________________________________________________________________________________

Thank you again for your interest in participating in this study. I will contact you within the next few
weeks to schedule our first interview. If you have any questions before this time please feel free to contact
me.

Jamie Huff Sisson
(216) 538-6811
jhuff8@kent.edu
# Appendix C

**Project Timeline**

January 2010-January 2011

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<th>Event</th>
<th>Jan</th>
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Appendix D
Life History Interview Protocol

Adapted from Thompson’s (1978) Life-Story Interview (pp. 309-323) and James (2006, p. 288)

- Let’s start from the beginning. Can you tell me about when and where you were born? How many years did you live there? Where did you move then? Can you remember why the family made those moves?

- Now I would like to talk about your family. Can you tell me about your family? Grandparents? Parents? Siblings? Where did they live? What had been their occupations? How would you describe their characters? How did you spend time with them? What were their roles in the family? Who helped in raising you? What do you think were their main interests? Were they religious? How did they get along together? Were you close to them? Were they a strong influence to you?

- Now I would like to ask you some questions about your daily life in childhood. Describe where you lived, your home and neighborhood. Who lived in your home when you were a child? What were the roles in your household? What did you enjoy as a child? Who did you play with as a child? How were you rewarded? How were you disciplined?

- Now I would like to ask you some questions about your schooling. When did you start school? What school did you go to? When did you leave? What did you think of these schools? How well did you do in class? Did your parents
encourage you with your school work? What do you remember about your teachers? How did you feel about them? Were they strict? What about? What did they emphasize as important in life? Did they encourage discussion? Was any teacher an important influence to you? Did they treat any of the children differently? How did the teacher organize the classroom?

• Now I would like to talk to you about your life as a teacher. How did you decide to become a teacher? How did you envision yourself as a teacher? Tell me about your journey in becoming a teacher, influences, education, experiences. What contexts have you taught in? What do you think about those contexts? How did you decide to become a public preschool teacher at this school? What educational experiences (and people) have most influenced your philosophy of teaching and learning? How would you define yourself as a teacher? How would you describe the teacher you hope to be? What do think are important roles and characteristics of a teacher? How do you think public preschool teachers are perceived by administrators, policy makers, parents? How do you feel about how others perceive your role as a teacher? Who is most like minded with you at work? When do you feel most validated in your work? Are there particular individuals that are supportive in validating your work/ or that push your thinking about your work? What does a professional look like in a public preschool setting? What factors determine if a teacher is professional or not? Do you see yourself as a professional? Explain.
• I would now like to talk about your leisure activities. What activities do you engage in outside of work? What activities do you enjoy most? What activities are most important to you?

• I would now like to talk a little bit about your family. Do you have a family of your own? Describe your family to me. Describe the current home you live in and the role of each family member. What is your philosophy in raising your own children? Have you modeled this after your own experience growing up? What are your educational goals for your children?

• In conclusion I would like to ask you a few questions about yourself. How would you describe yourself now? Has this identity changed since your childhood? How? What has been most significant in your life? What has been most challenging in your life? What would you most like to do in the time ahead?
Appendix E

Context Interview Protocol

• Tell me about your school and the district. How would you describe how other faculty members and administrators perceive the preschool program here and your role as a preschool teacher? How are you and other preschool teachers included within larger district wide activities?

• Describe how this school year is going—class, relationships at school, district, school?

• What do you feel are the benefits in teaching preschool in a public preschool setting? Do you feel that you are supported as a teacher? If so, then how and by whom? If not, then why do you think you are not supported? Where do you feel validated? Who validates your work at school or outside of school? Where do you feel challenged about your professional identity? Who challenges your professional identity?

• During your personal history interview you mentioned that you had the following professional goals . . . Do you feel that these professional goals are supported by others within your school and district? Explain.

• What challenges do you face as a public preschool teacher? How do you work through these challenges?

• If there was one thing that you could change about your school context what would it be?
• What messages do you feel you receive about your role as a professional from CEO, principal, supervisor, other teachers? Where do these messages come from? Do you agree with these messages? Why or why not?

• What events or part of your day do you feel are most influential in your understanding of your professional identity that I could observe? What events or part of your day would be most appropriate for me to observe you enacting professional qualities that are important to you?
APPENDIX F

FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
Appendix F

Follow-up Interview Protocol

• Talk to me about how the event I observed made you feel as a professional?

• During my observation I noticed __________. Can you talk to me a little more about that; the significance, how, why, what?

• What messages do you feel were being conveyed about your role as a professional?

• If anything, what would you change about this event? Why or why not?

(Additional interview questions for individual participants were developed from observations before each follow-up interview.)
Appendix G

Sample Life History Analysis Table of Emerging Themes

Jill: Professional as Caring

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Temporality</th>
<th>Caring</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>As a child</td>
<td>In reference to things she cares about: “I liked having lots of sisters and brothers. Just knowing that we are all going to have each other and lots of family, cousins and things for our kids and it’s nice.” (3)</td>
<td>Cares about family—family caring for each other—being there for each other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childhood</td>
<td>In reference to how her parents cared for them: “I think interestingly enough because of the dynamics of a large family, the way my sister and I were raised was very different than my older siblings, because my older sisters I think had more responsibility, or you know more rules and curfews and things like that. And by the time my sister and I came around, my little sister, those were all out the door. I don’t ever remember a bed time, I don’t ever remember a curfew. Um, chores, everybody kind of took care of themselves. I mean, we were all responsible for our own laundry, that kind of stuff. I mean, obviously when we were little, we did our, my mother did those things, my father did those things. But I know my oldest sister did a lot of carting us around, you know driving us to things we needed to get to. So, I mean, I think, but so did my parents. I think it’s just whoever could do it whenever they could do stuff.” (5-6) “I guess more likely to be rewards than punishments.” (6) When asked about who was the biggest influence— “probably my mom. I think that she was the one that . . . just the nurturing one.” (8) In reference to getting in trouble: “So, and even then my parents were really good about it. They were really, like, any other parent would probably ground them forever from the car, but they were nice about, because I was so guilt ridden. I think I was so like guilt-ridden and upset about it that they kind of thought, I think they, and I didn’t do anything wrong usually, they kind of figured that I had my punishment.” (9)</td>
<td>Promoted individuality—caring for self but also doing your part for the larger family when needed. individual and community. The focus on individual responsibility is also a characteristic of Montessori. Wonder if that is also why she clicks with it so well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childhood</td>
<td>In reference to her 6th grade teacher: “I remember the classroom being really creative and fun, and encouraging. Like she was very positive. Like when she saw things in students that they enjoyed, whether they were good at it or not, she really encouraged it, because she saw that they enjoyed it. So she, I remember I had written a story or something, or a book or something, and she was really encouraging me to write more. And I’m like, I didn’t really like it. I don’t know why I did it, I just</td>
<td>Care as nurturing Fair-individualized Self police Caring-encouraging—push individual interests</td>
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did it and thought, well that was nice that she really was pushing me; like she really liked my book. And I can’t believe she thought it was really that good. But, you know what I mean, looking back I’m like, it must have been crap. But, you know, she saw that it was something that maybe I liked, so she pushed me to try to do more.” (12) “I think that the atmosphere of the classroom was one of being positive and encouraging, so I would assume that everybody else felt the same way as I did.” (13) In reference to her K teacher: “Yea I did. She was just nice. You know she smiled a lot. You know everybody in my family had her so she knew all of us and you know it was I don’t know she was just nice.” (17)

Childhood

In reference to her ice skating coach:
“Our coach I really felt was really influential in our growing up and in our morals and values and sportsmanship and I mean I felt like he was more than just a coach, he was like a father figure in a way.” “He is like a really good guy. Loves children, loves his job. Very passionate, just ethical, probably the most ethical man believe it there are a lot of non-ethics going on in figure skating and he really taught, I think he was very good at teaching his students how to be good sportsman and have ethics and even just past, being a figure skater when I got into teaching ice skating, how to be a coach, that was ethical.” (8)

Childhood

In reference to gym teacher:
“There was a gym teacher that I didn’t care for that wouldn’t let kids go change, until they were able to do a skill. And it was frustrating because I was not athletic. Other than ice skating, I was not athletic at all. So that was tough. That teacher pretty well, not thinking he had the best ways to encourage.” (14) In reference to a strict teacher:
“Although I learned a lot from her as much as at the time I don’t think I really liked her. She just was not, like she, she didn’t waiver, it was an English teacher. She went on a point system and she made it next to impossible to get an A. But in a way in the end, it kind of really motivated, I think kids get motivated to really try. She was sort of a challenge to earn the points. To get the A. So it was really hard to do, but looking back I think oh actually she wasn’t, she was a pretty good teacher.” (15) When asked about techniques her teachers used that she liked: “Teachers who thought outside of the box. I could not actually as much as thought the guy, everybody loved him because he was just a cool young teacher, but his teaching style was awful! I mean it was total lecture and you’re in like eighth grade and your like writing notes just writing the whole time. I just thought it was the absolute
worst. Like I just dreaded being in school, and that’s all you did was just mad writing notes for forty minutes or whatever the period was you know.” (16)

Childhood

In reference to another classmate that was treated unfairly:
“I’m sure I went home and kind of brewed it over a little bit. I mean you know well it wasn’t me, but yea. I think I had empathy for people that you know when it wasn’t fair. Because he wasn’t like he was a bad kid, like he wasn’t somebody, he was just a class clown. You know he was somebody that I mean and that I am a teacher is going to be really irritating. You know like somebody that’s rallying everybody else up, but you know he was just trying to be silly and get attention and stuff.” (17)

Childhood to present

In describing herself in the family:
“I feel like I’m more of the emotional one, the person that things bother me a lot.” (7)

As a teacher

Cares about developmental stages-Montessori see Analysis II (12)
In reference to Montessori:
“I really like it, I think it’s great, I love it.” (22)

As a teacher

“I hope I am you know, somebody who tries to make learning more fun. That’s why I kind of like this kind of program a Montessori program and I like the little ones, because it’s not sitting and standing in front of the class lecturing. I just would not like teaching high school or junior high. I don’t know I just hope that I’m the kind of teacher that makes it interesting, thinks of different ways to teach things.” (19)
“I like preschool best. I think it’s much more open and freeing and flexible with the things that I want to do and creative.” (21)
Defining herself as a teacher:
“Just somebody that tries to help children to love learning and excite them into discovery. Mainly I just really hope that I’m the kind of teacher that teaches children to love school, and to be excited.” (24)

As a teacher

Important qualities of a teacher:
“That you like kids, and that—well I would say being organized, but I am not organized. Just being caring and knowing, you know knowing your students and what’s important for them to learn at that age. Being a team player. I don’t think anybody’s a good teacher that keeps to themselves.” (25)

As a teacher

In reference to UPK:
“Yeah, I think every kid should have the opportunity for free preschool. I mean childcare is very expensive.” (26)
In reference to how others view her work as a preschool teacher:

Caring-empathic
teacher: “Well it is a little frustrating but I know it is reality, like when I tell people I am a preschool teacher I wonder if in the back of their mind they think oh you know, it is daycare. I am like do they think, like I think I have a really hard job and do they have any idea? I mean I am not belittling anything I do but it does make me feel like god every time I say I am a preschool teacher do they just think of just like not like real school, I mean even my own husband is kind of like what do they do, it can’t be that hard of a job. I am like you don’t know!” (28)

Cares that her work is not just looked at as babysitting and play all day.

As a teacher

When asked about when she feels validated:

“When kids have success or relationships with children that I have taught and I, you know they come back and see me and say hi and you know there are a couple kids that I have had even though they are much older you know, and family parents, when they are happy you know with the things you do and they are happy with the progress of their children and just even that you care about their kids because they can show lots of progress but when they understand that you are trying and that you care” (28)

How do you show parents that you care?

“Yeah I mean I talk to a lot of parents because the preschoolers, I do have a lot of kids on the bus. But we talk on the phone or email or especially if I have more than one student, I have so many kids where I have had their brothers and sisters and I have had good relationships with the family. On the preschool, more and more, most of them are usually picked up and dropped off so I see them, this year it just isn’t that way. I only have three kids that are picked up, but rest go on the bus but they all, I have met all of them one way or another. I don’t know them all that well but I don’t know I guess I just try to communicate with them on the phone, notes, through homework, I mean you know, it is not formal homework but projects and things, we invite parents in all the time to do” projects.”

As a teacher

Jill names being professional as important. When asked about what a professional looks like in public preschool:

“I think the way they act. The behavior, they act like an adult.” (28)

She then goes on to say that how you dress is not so important but that it’s important to “show some part of professionalism and just show that they are not lazy because it gave me a perception of lazy. (In reference to a male teacher with baggy pants).” (29) “I mean that is just a look about professionalism but you are behaving professional too and just knowing how to talk to parents and understand that these are their babies and these are some of their first experiences in school and they are never, they need to be treated with kids gloves too. You just have to understand that and I think that is a part of

Cares for students and parents—communication is key

Being professional is also about knowing how to talk to parents and being empathic to parents and helping them through this first school experience.
being professional, at least in early childhood.” (29)

As a teacher

When asked if she felt being caring was a part of being professional:

“Well I think caring is an important characteristic for a person in general but I guess to be, I guess if you don’t care about others and how they feel I don’t know how you can act necessarily in a professional manner. I don’t know like you can’t be I don’t know, I guess yes.” (30)

When asked to explain how she felt the faculty at her school were all like minded:

“I think so because we all believe in, we are all here in, at the core we are all teachers and I hope to think that we all care about children and that would be the underlining core of everything . . . think we are all like minded that we all care about kids and that most of us here believe in the underlying philosophy of the program.” (30)

“I love having parent volunteers but you have to be so specific with them . . . I always have to remember to say let them put it together themselves, Don’t worry about it if it’s out of order.” (37)

As a parent

In response to how she cares for her own kids’ education:

“I don’t want him sitting and doing worksheets and stuff, but I’m hoping they’re singing the ABC’s and they’re— you know, like last month it was dinosaurs and something and I’m like, my God, why are they doing dinosaurs for a whole month. I’m like this is just too much. I’m like—I don’t know, they should be moving on with their themes, I think, a little faster.” (33)

“I really love spending time with my kids doing anything really.” (33)

(talking about k) “I will die if she’s sitting doing worksheets all day It will kill me. and I don’t think that I would be able to sit back.” (35)

I response to how she raises her kids:

“Um, it is connected to the way I was raised. I don’t believe in spanking and hitting. I don’t think that you can teach your kids not to hit by hitting them. I think you should lead by example. You know, I don’t—um, and I think my parents, they didn’t ever hit us. So, I don’t think that’s right to hit my kids. I think, um, just loving them, you know. Hopefully they know, no matter what—because I do get angry at my kids, there’s no doubt, I mean, I can’t say that I’ve never yelled at them, but, they know I love them. I mean, I tell them a hundred times a day and we’re very close, touchy, you know, we hug and kiss and, you know, I like to think that they see affection from adults—that that’s just normal and not weird to them, and that they’ll grow up and be affectionate adults also.” (34)

Hmm did I lead her into this?? but this does show her focus again on empathy and being professional.

Caring being important to philosophy of Montessori
Professional as knowledgeable
Developmental stages and individual child
(much of the knowledge that Jill draws from stems from her experience and education of the Montessori program)

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<th>Temporality</th>
<th>Knowledgeable</th>
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<td>As a student</td>
<td>In reference to her experience at OU:</td>
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<td>teacher</td>
<td>“I’ve got to be honest; I think it was a terrible program.</td>
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<td>But maybe it’s better now, but when I was there, I</td>
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<td>thought I learned nothing about teaching. I worked, my student, the lady I taught with for student teaching I think</td>
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<td>was wonderful, in Marietta. And that was a third grade class. But as far as prep I think they, maybe it’s all</td>
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<td>different now. They gave you no information about standards—what was expected in each grade level. Like, what do kindergarteners learn, what do first graders,</td>
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<td>what is in the curriculum for that grade level. Um, some, I took a whole class on handwriting. Like, who the hell cares about that? I guess it’s hard to teach teachers how</td>
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<td>really where you need to see it. That’s what I think.”</td>
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<td>at three and four, that are so important if you don’t get them, then when they go to kindergarten, and they’ve never been to school, it’s like, it’s not too late, but it’s much more difficult. It’s like trying to learn a language at 15 when it’s a lot easier at three, you know.” (12)</td>
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<td>“I wasn’t originally a Montessori teacher, but I really, since I kind of fell into it accidentally, and took the training and stuff, I really like it. I think it’s great, I love it. I’d choose that education for my children, at least for the preschool and kindergarten experience. I just think it gives them a really great foundation.” (22)</td>
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<td>In describing the Montessori approach:</td>
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<td>“It’s very hands on. Everything is very concretely taught. Very little to no worksheets. I’m not saying that they won’t do some here and there, but it’s not out of being forced to do it, it would be more out of a choice. Or, um, you know, you’d look at it more like for the skill</td>
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of learning to cut, not so much-like a cut and paste would be, because we need to learn to cut, not so much that we need to complete a worksheet. But you can learn to cut in lots of different ways. You don’t have to do a worksheet to do it. Everything is very individualized. There’s not, there’s no whole group. I mean, you do like a circle time to do things like, everybody’s going to do on some level, like calendar, like routine stuff we would do a circle time, read a book to a whole class. But all the work is done individually. So when the kids are in here, there’s 20 kids, there’s 20 different things going on at one time. And they’re all working at their own level. So some are trying to learn colors and some are reading. You know, so everything in Montessori is very incrementally stepped so that, within one skill of, a math skill, there’s a bunch of different steps to ease them into the final goal. So, it’s not like, you’re going to learn to add, it’s like okay, what are the skills you need before you add. You need to know how to count, so there’s a lesson on counting. There’s lessons on learning numbers, and there’s lessons on number/numeral matching, and there’s lessons-you know, and they all start from easier to harder, so the easiest skills first, the hardest skills later. The most concrete skill to the more abstract. So, everything manipulated and then-so they would manipulate things to count, and then they might, then they would do it more abstractly like on paper, or writing the numbers kind of thing. The lesson, it’s very, like, you can add in your own things and make up your own lessons, but as far as the curriculum, it’s guided by this lesson’s first, this lessons next. You know, like in language. The first lesson is always what they call nomenclatures, just naming things in and around the environment. Then you would do object-object matching. Then object-picture matching, because now we’re getting more abstract. Then picture-picture matching. So if you teach rhyming words, you do rhyming objects first, and then you would do rhyming pictures, and then rhyming words. So, um, and it’s ordered, and the shelves are set up that way. I can’t say mine are in the right order right now because they move things around. But from left to right, it’s easier to harder.” (23)

As a teacher

Describing the role of the teacher in Montessori:

“Montessori they call you, you’re really not a teacher, you’re a director, because you’re supposed to follow the child, and they lead the way to what they want to learn, and then you direct them and help them through that. So, you know, if they’re showing an interest in, whatever, maps, you know, then you, you know, you don’t have to worry, ok, well, we didn’t get math in today, we’re just going to do maps, because you love maps and you could
do it all day if that’s what you want to do. Because you want to have them be excited, and be focused, and really want to take interest in what they want to learn. You know, you have to direct them, you have to move them towards things if they’re not doing something. Like one, challenge them, so if they’re just kind of wavering in something that’s too easy for them, you have to encourage them to, you know, we need to move on and try something a little bit more challenging.” (24) “I also think that we are all here teaching in a Montessori school because we believe in that…I think we are all here because we all care about kids and that most of us here believe in the underlying philosophy of the program.” (30)

Talks about how other requirement and curriculums are managed so that she can get to her Montessori curriculum: “I can’t even do the calendar everyday, as much as I’d like to. Then I wouldn’t be able to do all the other Montessori curriculum.” In reference to UPK: “They have expectations of us that doesn’t necessarily jive with the Montessori philosophy” (housekeeping). (31)

Are there those who do not believe in it?
Professional as Teaching

(Jill places emphasis on the role of the teacher in teaching… I think this is a quality of Montessori. Emphasis is also placed on stages and getting kids ready for the next stage)

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<th>Temporality</th>
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<td>Childhood</td>
<td>In reference to her skating coach: “Morals and values and sportsmanship . . . Just talking to us and you know when we get ready to go to competition and talking about you know win or lose, this is how you are supposed to behave, you know do your best, try your hardest you know but losing is not the end of the world or you know and making sure that you congratulate other competitors that do well and you know that kind of stuff.” (8)</td>
<td>Valued coach for teaching morals and values.</td>
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<td>Childhood</td>
<td>“I got pretty good grades. I mean, average grades, you know, Bs. but I know that my dad would give us like a dollar or something, if we got, for every A, kind of thing. My parents didn’t place-I think they knew that we all tried hard, and if, trying as hard as we did, and we still only got a certain grade, it wasn’t for lack of effort. So, you know, they would try to help to bring grades up, but I don’t think we were ever punished.” (10)</td>
<td>Parents valued the effort over the grade</td>
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| Childhood   | In reference to her K teacher: “I remember she, every time you brought a note back, the candy fairy would come out. She’d go in the closet where the candy fairy lived, and bring out candy for everybody who brought back their notes.” (11) “Play based, but I also remember doing these workbooks too, kind of. And I don’t think I have them anymore, but I had them for a long time, and I was even kind of using things out of it for teaching. They were these big giant square books that had numbers, or letters on the front that were kind of made like these sandpaper letters that we have, you know, with their textures, and it was like glitter or something, and you could feel the letter. And then there were pages that you would listen; a lot of times I remember kind of listening to something to, like the teacher didn’t necessarily read it to us, she played a tape, and that gave us the directions. I know we didn’t, I didn’t read in kindergarten. I don’t remember learning to read in kindergarten. I mean although the work pages taught words, but I don’t remember reading. Because I remember this one little boy, she always made this one boy read, because he could. Like so and so is going to read because he can read. And I remember that.” (11) Jill says things are different now: “It’s, there’s so much more expectation. Even in the preschool. It’s like being in kindergarten. And the kindergarten is more like first grade. I mean, the standards have risen considerably with the expectation. I think it’s a lot to ask for a kindergartener. I think it’s
As a teacher

not, if the, if all the kids are coming from a background of a quality preschool, where they’ve got a lot of the background, or, you know. But for children that are struggling, it’s impossible, I think, for them to even catch up. So if they’re struggling anyways, and they’ve never been to preschool, it’s like; and I do believe in the Montessori philosophy, which she says, you know Montessori said that you have a window of opportunity for every skill, at certain, and if you miss it, then it’s that much harder. And there’s a lot of things that they learn at three and four, that are so important if you don’t get them, then when they go to kindergarten, and they’ve never been to school, it’s like, it’s not too late, but it’s much more difficult. It’s like trying to learn a language at 15 when it’s a lot easier at three, you know.” (12)

As a child

Remembering her 6th grade teacher:
“I remember the classroom being really creative and fun, and encouraging.” (12)

Remembering her 3rd grade teacher:
“Oh, I’m going to do that when I’m a teacher; it was like putting these stars up around the room or something, and then when it got all the way around the room we got a party or something.” (13)

Remembering her JH teacher:
“I remember a teacher in junior high that was very strict. Just didn’t let anything go. Although I learned a lot from her as much as at the time I don’t think I really liked her. She just was not, like she, she didn’t waiver, it was an English teacher. She went on a point system and she made it next to impossible to get an A. But in a way in the end, it kind of really motivated, I think kids get motivated to really try. She was sort of a challenge to earn the points. To get the A. So it was really hard to do, but looking back I think oh actually she wasn’t, she was a pretty good teacher. I mean I learned a lot even if I didn’t like her at the time. I thought she was unfair. You know when you work so hard and you still fall a couple short. Like you felt like she purposely trying to keep you down from that A.” (15)

As a child

When asked about what her teacher emphasized most:
“I guess just working hard and being prepared and not letting the minimum be okay Shaker schools think it’s a college prep and you’re expected to kind of expect it. Not that everybody goes to college, but the very minimum gets you into college, there is not. To graduate from Shaker, you’re going to be eligible. You’ll have enough to go to college so I think they expect more.”

“I mean I think honestly high school was harder than college for me. Yeah, and I couldn’t believe how many people I met in college who were so ill prepared. Who
Graduate couldn’t write a paper couldn’t even write a sentence. You know, had no idea how to structure a paper. and I thought, wow our school system prepared me for college.” (15)

OU “was a terrible program. I learned nothing about teaching. I worked with the lady I taught with for student teaching was wonderful. But as far as prep I think . . . they gave you no information about the standards what was expected in each grade level. Like, what do kindergarteners learn, what do first graders, what is in the curriculum for that grade level. I took a whole class on handwriting. Like who the hell cares about that?” (20)

“Taking classes as a grad student, working towards other things, it becomes more interesting because it’s more relevant. So you’re with your peers and you’re talking about things you’ve done.” (17)

Graduate “I guess it’s hard to teach teachers, I think the only way you can do it is throw them into the fire, to be perfectly honest. Let them follow a teacher, you know, student teaching, that’s really where you need to see it.” (20)

As a teacher When asked about the importance of theory vs. practice: “I mean honestly I don’t know that having your masters necessarily makes you a good teacher. I mean my assistant though she’s more than a GED, she’s got a high school diploma and she’s actually going to school right now. She is as good as any teacher in this building. And then I’ve seen teachers with master’s degrees that, especially if they’ve not even been in the classroom, it’s just like, you know, being brand new. I think having that knowledge makes you worldly, it makes you open minded, it’s important to go to college for the experience of being out in the real world but I don’t know that it makes you a better teacher. So I guess I’d say somebody with a GED and ten years of good experience, like somebody who’s natural at it. Because you could have a GED and work for ten years and still be crummy.”

When asked is college or practical experience was more important or were they the same: “just as important.” (21)

As a teacher When asked about what grade she liked teaching best: “I like preschool best. I think it’s much more open and freeing and flexible with the things I want to do, and creative. As you start getting, even in the kindergarten, although you have some flexibility for creativity the curriculum is so strict that you have to stay on task. You can’t like say, oh, well, I don’t feel like doing that this week, I want to do something else. I must get this done, I must get this done, and then even as first grade teacher,
it’s really, like it’s just, you cannot, you have to stay focused on task. And that’s really hard for me.”

Asked if you vary from lesson plans:

“Well, you get behind. Like the district is on a schedule, their on a scope and sequence. Like we have these posters. I don’t follow these. I mean, I do, I do, I know what I have to do in preschool. But, like in kindergarten, in first grade, I found out, like the other teacher is like, oh my gosh, we didn’t cover this standard, we’ve got to get this in this week before it’s over, you know. And she was just like, we’ve got to hit all these standards this quarter.”

“I guess, depending on the principal they might come by and look at your lesson plans. But she always tells us that she wants our lesson plans to reflect the scope and sequence. So, if I, but I don’t, but sometimes I’m doing things that don’t hit this quarter, per se, I’m not going to limit myself to the teaching of that because it’s not supposed to be taught, done until spring. You know, I mean, if, like graphing or something wasn’t in the first quarter, but I do it all the time. So, I’m not going to limit it. Where, I think as you get older you have to be more strict, and stay within the scope and sequence.” (21-22)

Montessori: “I’d choose that education for my children, at least for the preschool and kindergarten experience I just think it gives them a really great foundation.” (22)

In describing Montessori:

“It’s very hands on. Everything is very concretely taught. Very little to no worksheets. I’m not saying that they won’t do some here and there, but it’s not out of being forced to do it, it would be more out of a choice. Or, um, you know, you’d look at it more like for the skill of learning to cut, not so much like a cut and paste would be, because we need to learn to cut, not so much that we need to complete a worksheet. But you can learn to cut in lots of different ways. You don’t have to do a worksheet to do it. Everything is very individualized. There’s not, there’s no whole group. I mean, you do like a circle time to do things like, everybody’s going to do on some level, like calendar, like routine stuff we would do a circle time, read a book to a whole class. But all the work is done individually. So when the kids are in here, there’s 20 kids, there’s 20 different things going on at one time. And they’re all working at their own level. So some are trying to learn colors and some are reading. You know, so everything in Montessori is very incrementally stepped so that, within one skill of, a math skill, there’s a bunch of different steps to ease them into the final goal. So, it’s not like, you’re going to learn to add, it’s like okay, what are the skills you need before you add. You need to know how to count, so there’s a lesson on counting. There’s lessons on learning
numbers, and there’s lessons on number/numeral matching, and there’s lessons—you know, and they all start from easier to harder, so the easiest skills first, the hardest skills later. The most concrete skill to the more abstract. So, everything manipulated and then-so they would manipulate things to count, and then they might, then they would do it more abstractly like on paper, or writing the numbers kind of thing.” (23)

When asked if there was a teacher guide book: “No, the lesson, it’s very, like, you can add in your own things and make up your own lessons, but as far as the curriculum, it’s guided by this lessons first, this lessons next. You know, like in language. The first lesson is always what they call nomenclatures, just naming things in and around the environment. Then you would do object-object matching. Then object-picture matching, because now we’re getting more abstract. Then picture-picture matching. So if you teach rhyming words, you do rhyming objects first, and then you would do rhyming pictures, and then rhyming words. So, um, and it’s ordered, and the shelves are set up that way. I can’t say mine are in the right order right now because they move things around. But from left to right, it’s easier to harder.”

In describing the role of the teacher in Montessori: “In Montessori they call you, you’re really not a teacher, you’re a director, because you’re supposed to follow the child, and they lead the way to what they want to learn, and then you direct them and help them through that. So, you know, if they’re showing an interest in, whatever, maps, you know, then you, you know, you don’t have to worry, ok, well, we didn’t get math in today, we’re just going to do maps, because you love maps and you could do it all day if that’s what you want to do. Because you want to have them be excited, and be focused, and really want to take interest in what they want to learn. You know, you have to direct them, you have to move them towards things if they’re not doing something. Like one, challenge them, so if they’re just kind of wavering in something that’s too easy for them, you have to encourage them to, you know, we need to move on and try something a little bit more challenging.” (24)

As a teacher

Describing teacher role as leader in teaching: “Just to set examples on appropriate behavior. I can’t expect a child to talk quietly if I’m not talking quietly, that kind of stuff. I want to set the example so that they…monkey see monkey do.” (24)

In reference to parents: “Yeah, so but we want them to understand that this is education and curriculum based. This is not just play, we are not just babysitting all day in that they are in

Teaching appropriate behaviors- modeling

Curriculum based education is more professional than play?
school now so they are expected to act like they are in school, you know, they need to come everyday, if they are sick of course they don’t come but you just can’t say oh I didn’t feel like it, I had to get up this morning, so they don’t need to go, it is no big deal, because it is a big deal. We are setting a tone here in preschool for you know the rest of their school that education is important. We are having fun but it is still important.”

As a teacher  In reference to how other teachers view them:
“They see us as the foundation. teachers value preschool more than maybe a non-teacher because they know this is where it starts. I mean our kindergarten teachers are so happy when they get our kids because they don’t have to teach them how to walk in a line, they don’t have to teach them to share, I mean not every kid is going to be perfect but there is such a jump ahead advantage that the kids have that I really think that our teachers value.” (28)

As a teacher  Asked do you think continuing education is an important part of being professional?
“I think so or at least being open to new strategies and whether you go back to school or go to workshops or talking to people or colleges.” (29) “Yeah because I think part of being a professional is knowledge of what you are doing and your job skill although there are lots of people that know lots about children that don’t act professionally necessarily you know, so I guess it is part of a component of it.” (30)

Continuing education is a component of being professional

As a teacher  In reference to district pressures:
“I think the district keeps asking us to do more and more and more, it is just impossible to do it all. Implement this curriculum and do this curriculum and do that curriculum and you must do this and there isn’t just enough time in the day to do it all, I mean you just can not, if I were to do all the curriculums they want us to do, yeah that’s ok, If I did everything they wanted me to do we would be sitting on the carpet doing circle time the entire morning. I mean between, I only do part of the calendar because I can’t do it all. And I can’t even do the calendar everyday, as much as I’d like to. Then I wouldn’t be able to do all the other Montessori Curriculum, the Trophies curriculum, Math curriculum, there is this PATHS curriculum, I mean there is just so many things that they want us to do, and I try to get as much as I can. What I think is most important, so and then I also being part of this UPK grant, they have expectations of us that doesn’t necessarily jive with the Montessori philosophy. Some of it we just have to say it doesn’t work. You know they don’t have a housekeeping area Montessori does not have housekeeping, so we try have a book corner with some
furniture, you know we try to accommodate it, Montessori doesn’t have blocks but now we have blocks because UPK said we needed blocks.” (31) “I think it’s all good for kids but some of it takes away from what I need to do with what the Montessori philosophy says.”

Struggle with requirements of UPK that don’t meet Montessori philosophy. But says it’s still good for kids. Need to follow up on that.

As a parent In reference to what she wants her kids to learn: “I don’t want him sitting doing worksheets and stuff I’m hopping their singing ABC’s...(talks about how she doesn’t like how long their themes last at her sons school and feels they need to connect with the time of year better to be relevant.” (33) “I will just die if she’s sitting doing worksheets all day. it will kill me.” (35)

Wants kids learning hands on and relevant.
### Professional as Collaborator

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Temporality</th>
<th>Collaborator</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Childhood to adulthood</td>
<td>In reference to how she grew up in a big family: “I mean, we were all responsible for our own laundry, that kind of stuff. I mean, obviously when we were little, we did our, my mother did those things, my father did those things. But I know my oldest sister did a lot of carting us around, you know driving us to things we needed to get to. So, I mean, I think, but so did my parents. I think it’s just whoever could do it whenever they could did stuff.” (5) Jill describes herself as “I’d say I’m pretty responsible, busy, I feel like I’m more of the emotional one.” (7) Jill describes her parents as being “very liberal in their thoughts.” (7)</td>
<td>Democracy- importance of leader facilitate but group has the say and collaborate</td>
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<tr>
<td>As a teacher</td>
<td>In describing the role of a leader: “Just setting the example, and showing excitement to, so that-you know, being a leader. A leader just to set examples on appropriate behavior. I can’t expect a child to talk quietly if I’m not talking quietly, that kind of stuff. You know, I want to set the example so that they, you know, monkey see monkey do kind of a thing.” (23) “I think that within colleagues and adults, every role, there are different roles that are important. Some are more comfortable and somebody needs to be a leader or else nothing gets done. You know, or you’re butting heads. But I think everybody’s opinion needs to be—I mean as a leader you need to be, that somebody who might facilitate and get things done, but that doesn’t mean that they make all the decisions, you know what I mean. You know, everybody, I think it’s important to be a team and get along, and bounce ideas off each other.” (24-25) “Being a team player. I don’t think anybody’s a good teacher that keeps to themselves.” (25)</td>
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<tr>
<td>As a teacher</td>
<td>“I think our whole preschool department works really well together, and we do lots of planning together, and as each of us comes up with ideas we say hey, this is what we want to do, if you want to do it to. Or we say, I’m thinking we should do something like this, let’s you know, and then we work it out together so that we’re on the same page and not reinventing the wheel. You get your best ideas just from other people.” (25)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Jill names being a team player as an important professional quality of preschool teachers. (30)</td>
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APPENDIX H

SAMPLE CONTEXT ANALYSIS TABLE OF EMERGING THEMES
Appendix H

Sample Context Analysis Table of Emerging Themes

Sophia: Struggles, Supports and Agency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Struggles/Challenges</th>
<th>Supports</th>
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<tr>
<td>District</td>
<td>Comparing Blake Montessori to other schools she has taught in the district:</td>
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<td>“What I don’t really enjoy is the pre-k through eighth grade. I think it doesn’t seem to work well in public. At least not in the public schools I’ve been in. I don’t like the behavior. They (older kids) get sassy, very disrespectful. I don’t like the fact that our little ones see that. They see it in the halls, sometimes they almost get run over by them.”</td>
<td>“It’s in a nice neighborhood for the most part much nicer school than the other schools I’ve worked in.”</td>
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<td>“We are not always included (as preschool teachers in district wide activities). Like there were certain things like professional development workshops that M and I tried to sign up for and we were not included. It was only kindergarten through like fifth grade or something. It was an autism sensory. We thought oh that would be great! you know and about different ways with working with autistic children who might have sensory implied issues. And they wouldn’t let us in.”</td>
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<td>“Yeah, and a lot of times you’ll notice like they’ll say we’re k-8 when really its pre-k-8. They just sometimes I think forget. But maybe because it might be new in a lot of schools too. I mean I don’t really feel like disenfranchised or anything.”</td>
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<td>In reference to the CEO: “The CEO obviously, for some reason, doesn’t like any of us and probably wants us all fired. I’m not quite sure what’s going on there.” “Basically, I think if he had it his way we’d all (be cut out) and he’d get everybody else new in. Now why? I don’t know if it all just comes down to money or-I really don’t know, it’s kind of weird.”</td>
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<td>In reference to customer service model: “I think is that what they want you to do that but it doesn’t always— you know, I’m a big one about lead by example and I don’t always see that example being followed, maybe with parents, yes, but as far as teachers, no. You can’t possibly micromanage every single person.”</td>
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<td>“People are scared about having jobs. I mean that’s a lot of stress and pressure and people are seriously worried about losing their job. So that puts a</td>
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huge-and you don’t feel like you’re valued. It’s really I mean, you still do your job and you still do the best you can but it’s still-you know, I had somebody telling me, oh I’ve been taking the HQT things because they’re looking at everybody’s qualifications with a fine toothed comb and I want to make sure, and she is such a great teacher. In this atmosphere it’s all kind of like you just don’t know what they’re going to pull. You don’t know and it’s really odd and I don’t understand where they’re coming from, I don’t know why they’re so combative. Hostile, I feel like they’re hostile and I don’t know why.”

Challenges for teachers in other buildings:
“Some of my friends are in buildings who have principals who are just horribly mean. Just mean and nasty and I think that that can wear on you. But they still give their all, like it always amazes me.”

Leadership
“Some of the unprofessional things that go on, I think it really does have to come- the principals are going to have to do it because the principals are the ones in the building. When I listen to some of my friends talking about their principals I’m like why do those people have jobs? It’s not good for the staff and the morale. It’s not good for the kids, I mean, they’re not making decisions that make sense for the kids.” Sophia gave example of stories from her friends where the principles did not listen to the teachers concerns about the safety of the hallways because they didn’t know how to work the bell system.” (10) “The principal has to be the one to oversee this and put these things in place and if they’re not able to or they’re unwilling or they don’t want to then they kind of have to go.” But who’s overseeing them? Well you have the regional but the regional’s been contacted in both of those situations, nothing has happened.

“And it’s like what do you do? You’ve got these words coming from the top—it’s all about customer service, it’s all about being a premier school district but you don’t have that being implemented. And teachers are trying, teachers-because we’re the ones on the front lines. We’re the ones who get to know these kids personally and who are really invested in them and their families and who really care but our hands are so tied. You know, and that, in turn, is kind of demoralizing and defeating and you just feel like, well what am I doing here, but you can’t give

Principal
“I just had a nice talk with my principal this morning. She was saying oh you guys are doing a good job down there. So yea I mean I hope so (value them). Sometimes I don’t know, I don’t know what the perception of special ed is. I hope that they value it and I hope they know we’re working hard and maybe we’re not making the huge gains that you know you might see. At least not with all students but we’re making little gains and I hope those are valued.”

“We have a UPK grand and so my principal has to do a lot of work for that. And that grant is suppose to give us money to make our program the best program we can be and get the best achievement results of our students.”

“We got the new principle and she said, you know I’d like to include the special ed which was great, that was so nice and it’s been wonderful. So. that’s a huge support right there, just saying you’re just as important. Your valued, you’re children are valued, you know so that was a support. It’s a lot of work, they try to work with us. They try to say, okay, you need this you need that, we’ll try to order that. you know they try to make sure that we’re included in different things like the black history program and we go on field trips and that comes of the UPK grant money so we’re allowed to go on more field trips than most people.”

“They just kind of, they are not always breathing down your neck, which is supportive. They kind of trust you that you’re a professional and that you’re doing what you need to be doing. So, that’s nice.”

“I always so oh my gosh I’m so blessed. I got out of there and I didn’t go there I ended up here and no, I don’t feel like that here.”

“I think it really does come from your principle. I
up because you can’t give up for the kids and it just, it’s hard. And I don’t know if they get it and, to me, it’s frustrating. “

think you need to have an effective principal. I’ve had principals in those exact same schools. I had one principal who just came in while the other one was on maternity leave and she was phenomenal. She was like the most amazing person. She was like my idol. She was amazing the way she carried herself, the way she didn’t let parents talk to her- she would listen and she cared but she wasn’t going to let people disrespect her she wasn’t going to let people disrespect others. You need to bottle what she had and put that- that’s the magic thing. The way she carried herself, the way it was just like I respect myself, I respect you, we’re going to work together.”

Customer service
“You need to treat parents and kids with respect, obviously. I mean and that’s what they’re saying, they are saying these are our customers, we need to retain them, we want them to come back. but I think there is a fine line there because you can’t just put up with anything just to keep them.”

Sophia suggested that she believes the relationship between parents and teachers should be collaborators rather than customer/service provider. When asked to explain what she believes is an important role of teacher and parent: “We’re working together. Not I’ doing this for you but yeah, because everybody has a part to play and in fact parents have the biggest part to play and I think that role really needs to be emphasized. I know people are saying it now much more than they used to but I think they need to be saying it more and more and more and more and hammering it home.”

Parents
“There’s not much parent involvement as you think. Like my attendance the kids coming to school is terrible. It’s really disappointing. And there are times when I sent projects home for them to do at home and maybe get four or five back out of fifteen, sixteen.”

Parents
In talking about the difference between the schools she has taught in on the east side versa west side: “I just feel like the behavior is better (west side) maybe there’s more parent involvement.” Sometimes parent involvement is great- “Then again on the other hand, we had a black history program last month and in the afternoon class we had six kids and five out of the six kids parents came. So that was great! and I didn’t expect it. I was like wow! So you know it’s I guess it just kind of depends.”

Other teachers
Especially like with the special ed preschool and then the support team, those are the people you hang out with the most. Like the speech therapists and the occupational therapists and the physical therapist you know so those are very strong and the
Academics vs. DAP
“I think that there’s definitely much more emphasis on covering state standards (in public preschool) than there would be somewhere else.”

“I’m trying to think would I be doing something different- for instance, I took home my math teacher book over the weekend because I was like, I should be doing more Math lessons. You know I don’t know if I would worry about that if I was in a child care setting. I mean I would be covering things, like we would have the pegs and we’d be counting, but would I do a mini lesson? probably not. And I find myself doing things where, you know, here is the letter B it says bbbb. Here’s Mmmmmm now let’s sort the picture by the sound. Like, would I do that? Probably not. But would I still be talking about letters? would I still be reading? Would I still be singing rhyming songs and talking about colors and yes I would definitely be doing all of that.”

When asked what her biggest challenge is- “Just trying to be developmentally appropriate but still academic at the same time which, I think those go together. I’m just trying to figure out the best way to do it.”

Benefits
“Well the big one is the money. Make way more money than you would (in daycare) which is great. I think you know as far as you know we’re not worrying about the overhead of the building and all that stuff. Maybe getting supplies might be a littler bit easier.” When asked if she is more respected because she is in a public school- “Probably, probably, I mean I don’t know it’s funny because if you tell people what you are doing- oh I’m teaching special ed preschool, sometimes I get the feeling people don’t realize that you have a degree for that. You know like I have a master’s degree. But oh it’s preschool. I think if you said yeah in Midwestern public schools, yeah I think it is more respected because they know okay you have to have your bachelors you’re a teacher. Because it’s in a school system it’s not a day care setting it is more respected.”

Agency
When Sophia and another preschool special education teacher were told they could not participate in a workshop on Autism sensory issues: “We even lied and said that we were kindergarten teachers. They wouldn’t let us in. They must have said nope wrong. So that was a little bit interesting like wow I’m surprised.”

In reference to the customer service model: “I’m not interpreting it that way (customer is always right) I don’t know how they are. I don’t think that that’s true in this instance. but I mean, no I don’t want to think of my students as my customers, that seems a little odd.” Sophia suggests that she can see parents and students more as collaborators.
APPENDIX I

SAMPLE FOLLOW-UP ANALYSIS OF EMERGING THEMES
Appendix I

Sample Follow-up Analysis of Emerging Themes

CeCe sample follow-up analysis

Reflection and Response

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In what ways does she reflect upon how her understanding of professional identity position her</th>
<th>Response to contextual messages about professional identity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I feel if they think that we were supposed to keep up with every single lesson that they provide, but it can’t be because you can’t use everything.”</td>
<td>“Yes, you know once you close your door you use what you can use just like I guess talking about other places, you just use it, it’s here and everything is a support, you know you can bring it out as a support system like the paths. I don’t do every lesson in paths but I use it to fit my class.”</td>
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CeCe recognizes that district curriculum decisions are made without the classroom teachers.

When asked if things would change if they were a mandatory grade: “No because any of these classrooms you can close a classroom door and you teach. So you use whatever methods and even a Montessori and everything is a support.” Gives example.

“Right, so you have to do what you have to do. And we use what we can use and the same with the trophies. Right now we’re the trophies themes. They don’t go with a lot of different things. I mean why would you do weather this week and you do the letter w two day. You know why would you do spring stuff in and it’s just a lot of things that can be fit in. Why wouldn’t you do, if you’re going to do zoo why didn’t you do zoo theme the week that you’re going to the zoo and not have to do it on week whatever. So we were talking about that. Just try to change some things around but hopefully it won’t be but you just think that maybe if the child goes to a different school in the middle of the year they might miss out on, because if everyone is going by this same lesson plan, the same theme week they might have missed something if they’re here and go somewhere else. So or are we going to be in trouble if we change it around. So we were just talking about that me and the other preschool teacher.”

We’re going to talk about that. I don’t know what we’re going to do but we were just talking about if we don’t change it around we’re just trying to…they say we have to do it this week and it’s going to be the zoo and we’re going to the zoo whenever and we’ll just bring it back out again and introduce it again. You know talk about it again or whatever. So we were just discussing it me and the other preschool teacher.”
APPENDIX J

ANALYSIS TABLE OF OVERALL THEMES ACROSS PARTICIPANTS
# Appendix J

## Analysis Table of Overall Themes Across Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>What is significant to participants as professionals</th>
<th>Challenging contextual messages</th>
<th>Acts of agency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jill</td>
<td>• Relationships • Collaboration • knowledgeable of Montessori</td>
<td>• Babysitter • Technician • Service provider</td>
<td>In own classroom • Improvise curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophia</td>
<td>• Relationships • Knowledgeable of DAP • Collaboration</td>
<td>• Kindergarten Readiness • Technician • Service provider</td>
<td>In own classroom • Improvise curriculum, relationship In public space • assert voice about DAP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CeCe</td>
<td>• Caring relationships • knowledgeable of Montessori, • Collaboration</td>
<td>• Babysitter • Technician • Service provider</td>
<td>In own classroom • Improvise curriculum, relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>• Caring through tough love • Knowledgeable of practical experiences • Collaboration with other teachers</td>
<td>• Babysitter • Technician • Service provider</td>
<td>In own classroom • Improvise curriculum, rules, relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nanci</td>
<td>• Caring through tough love • Knowledgeable of practical experiences • Collaboration with other teachers</td>
<td>• Babysitter • Technician • Service provider</td>
<td>In own classroom • improvise curriculum, rules</td>
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References


