A Dissertation

entitled

Teacher-Child Relationship Quality: Understanding the Impact of Teacher Beliefs and Behaviors

by

Shelley McNally

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy Degree in

Curriculum and Instruction Early Childhood Education

________________________________________

Dr. Ruslan Slutsky, Committee Chair

________________________________________

Dr. Amanda Bryant-Friedrich, Dean
College of Graduate Studies

The University of Toledo

December 2016
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An Abstract of

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High quality teacher child interactions are important to academic achievement and social success for children at all levels of education. Of particular importance the interaction quality in early childhood establishes a foundation for how children construct relationships with future teachers, influences the attitudes they have about school and ultimately impacts overall school success. Positive relationships are the most beneficial for children but not all children enter school with the same chance for developing high quality relationships with teachers. Teachers can enrich and improve the relationships they have with children by examining their personal beliefs about children and understanding child characteristics that most often impact the relationship. This dissertation aims at investigating teacher-child relationship quality by examining teacher beliefs and behaviors regarding teacher perceived relationship quality, discipline, classroom practices and children. Working with four preschool teachers, data was collected using the following methods: the Student Teacher Relationship Scale, the Teacher Belief Q-Sort, 3 hours of observation, and interviews. Data was analyzed using the constant comparative method, descriptive analysis, and matrix analysis.
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List of Abbreviations

STRS .................. Student Teacher Relationship Scale
TBQ ................ Teacher Belief Q-sort
Chapter One
Introduction

There is a consensus among researchers that high quality positive relationships with teachers described as emotionally supportive with an underlying sense of warmth and responsiveness are more beneficial to children than ones that focus on primarily instructional support, and are less socially and emotionally responsive (Cadima, Doumen, Verschueren, & Buyse, 2015; Downer, Sabol, & Hamre, 2010; Hatfield, Hestenes, Kintner-Duffy, & O’Brien, 2013; Howes, Phillipsen, & Peisner-Fienberg, 2000; Merritt, Wanless, Rimm-Kaufma, & Cameron, 2012). Loris Malaguzzi, (1998), the late founder of the world renowned early childhood education programs in Reggio Emilia, Italy described relationships as the primary connecting dimension of education. He considered relationships to be more than just “a warm, protective envelope, but rather as a dynamic conjunction of forces and elements interacting toward a common purpose” (p. 68). He also believed the relationships children construct had significant influence on how they developed self-worth and purpose. The quality of teacher-child relationships described by Malaguzzi allows for reciprocal trust and exchange that benefits the overall outcomes for children (Malaguzzi, 1998; Rinaldi, 2012). Based on consistent research and teaching philosophies that emphasize the importance of the teacher child relationship, this study is interested in investigating teacher beliefs about components of teacher child relationship quality and how those beliefs impact teacher interactions with preschool children.

Teacher Beliefs

Supportive environments are part of a complex process of developing a classroom culture. Choices teachers make regarding emotional, instructional and organizational support are partly influenced by their beliefs about children; discipline and behavior
management; and what their role is in presenting curriculum (Brown & Smith-Feger, 2010; Coplan, Bullock, Archbell, & Bosacki, 2015; Rimm-Kaufman, et. al., 2006). Teachers come to classrooms with histories, experiences and backgrounds that inform their decisions about classroom practices and some of those backgrounds include preconceived ideas or judgements that influence their perceptions about children’s potential for academic achievements or social development (Coplan, et.al., 2015; Parks & Kennedy, 2007). Socio-economic status, race and ethnicity, existing academic skills, and gender play a significant part in teacher perceptions about children’s potential and teacher-child relationship quality (Gallagher, et.al, 2013; Ho, Gol-Guven, & Bagnato, 2012; Parks & Kennedy, 2007; Murray, Murray, & Waas, 2008). Teacher beliefs also influence the behavioral expectations they have about children and impact the way in which they interact with children (Churchill, 2003; Ho, et.al, 2012).

Teacher beliefs are also influenced by state and national educational policy (Brown & Smith-Feger, 2010). Worldwide, beliefs about children, their capabilities and potential, and their position within the school hierarchy inform and impact the choices school officials make about curriculum, assessment, and school climate. In some countries the national conversation surrounding those choices has led to stronger systems of education, more rigorous and consistent teacher preparation, and investment in all levels of education (Hammerness, van Tartwijk, & Snoek, 2012; Levin, 2012; Sahlberg, 2012; 2013). For example, Finland redefined and professionalized education in the 1960’s as a bold attempt to strengthen their economy (Hancock, 2011; Sahlberg, 2012; 2013). In other areas around the world cities like Reggio Emilia, Italy have made the
decision to take responsibility for the young as a way to shape society and invest in the community as a whole (Delrio, 2012).

The Finnish and Reggio Emilia systems both support a strong commitment to the teacher-child relationship that benefits both teacher and child (Sahlberg, 2012; 2013; Rinaldi, 2012). In both systems, teachers and children stay together for extended periods of time, up to five years, in which time the teachers develop a deep sense of understanding about each student and his/her needs (Hancock, 2011; Malaguzzi, 1998; Sahlberg, 2012). The quality of the teacher-child relationships described by these systems allows for reciprocal trust and exchange that benefits the overall outcomes for children (Hancock, 2011; Malaguzzi, 1998; Rinaldi, 2012).

The national conversation regarding educational policy in the United States struggles to include the important aspect of relationship quality because of its complex nature. Instead the United States has taken a top-down approach to framing the system, resulting in a testing culture that assesses teacher performance and student achievement using limited data from standardized tests (Ravitch, 2011). The testing culture has created a group of negative consequences including a gradual shift in priorities for teachers which impact the relationships they construct with children (Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006).

The testing culture has impacted teacher priorities because new teachers struggle to reconcile learned pedagogy from college course work with the realities of accountability pressure (Brown & Smith-Feger, 2010; Jung & Jin, 2014; Mahmood, 2013). Testing and accountability has also impacted practicing teachers’ rationale for decisions they make about curriculum and discipline (Darling-Hammond, 2012; Jung and
Jin, 2014; Mahmood, 2013; Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006; Valli and Chambliss, 2007). When faced with increasing pressure to perform well on standardized tests, teachers are found to interact with children more negatively and report feeling pressure to use techniques that garner results but are not considered developmentally appropriate (Brown & Smith-Feger, 2010; Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006; Valli & Chambliss, 2007).

The current study is most interested in the rationale teachers have for making decisions given that some decisions, specifically those related to classroom practices, discipline, and beliefs about children, can create negative emotional climates that in some cases are considered abusive. According to McEachern, Aluede, and Kenny (2008) teachers who display a consistently negative attitude and/or exhibit behaviors that are demeaning, prejudicial, controlling, unpredictable, and emotionally non-supportive are emotionally abusive to students. Certain teacher behaviors like yelling, threatening, ignoring harassment, singling out particular students or withholding support are also considered emotionally abusive (McEachern, et.al, 2008; McKenzie, 2009). Given that the pressure to produce high test scores results in less appropriate practice and that specific groups of children are more likely to experience negative relationships with teachers it is important to investigate teacher beliefs regarding constructs that support or negate emotional support in preschool classrooms.

High quality teacher child interactions are important to academic achievement and social success for children at all levels of education. A particularly important difference is that interaction quality in early childhood establishes a foundation for how children construct relationships with future teachers, influences the attitudes they have about
school and ultimately can impact overall school success. Positive relationships are the most beneficial for children but not all children enter school with the same chance for developing high quality relationships with teachers. Teachers can enrich and improve the relationships they have with children by examining their personal beliefs about children and understanding child characteristics that most often impact the relationship.

**Teacher-Child Relationship Quality**

Relationship quality is complex and difficult to determine but within the literature there are three dimensions of the teacher-child relationship that are widely accepted as contributing to the overall relationship quality: closeness, conflict and dependency (Pianta, 2001). Pianta (2001) describes each dimension as follows. Closeness refers to the degree to which teachers experience feelings of warmth, affection and open communication with a particular student. Conflict refers to the degree to which a teacher perceives the relationship as full of discord or struggle. Dependency refers to the degree to which a teacher perceives a child as over-reliant, consistently seeking the company of the teacher, or seeking out the support of the teacher. Closeness and conflict reoccur most frequently in the literature as influences on the quality of teacher child relationships.

**Teacher Child Relationship Quality in Early Childhood.** Establishing high quality relationships with teachers is especially important in early childhood classrooms. Teacher child relationship quality in preschool and kindergarten is associated with kindergarten readiness skills such as richer vocabulary, letter recognition and early math skills; and school adjustment skills such as self-regulating behaviors and participating in school related activities (Cadima, et. al, 2015; Cote, Japel, Seguin, Mongeau, Xu, & Tremblay, 2013; Howes, Burchinal, Pianta, Bryant, Early, Clifford, and Barbarin, 2008;
Jones, Bub, & Raver, 2013). Trajectories for academic success and positive school adjustment for children are also related to relationship quality established in preschool and kindergarten (Curby, Brock, & Hamre, 2013; Curby, Rimm-Kaufmann, & Ponitz, 2009; Buyse, Verschueren, Verachtert, & Van Damme, 2009). Teacher-child relationship quality in preschool and kindergarten has also been found to be predictive of the kinds of relationships children will develop with teachers and peers over the course of their elementary experience (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Jerome, Hamre, & Pianta, 2009; Palermo, Hanish, Martin, Fabes, & Reiser, 2007; Rudasill, 2011). The predictive nature of relationship quality is especially important because positive relationships with teachers have been found to be a mediating factor for children at risk for school failure (Baker, 2006; Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Jones, et. al, 2013).

Preschool experiences set the stage for later school success and influence the ability of the child to adapt to the expectations of formal school (Howes, et.al, 2008; Garner & Waajid, 2008). The nature of teacher-child relationship quality, beginning in preschool, is of particular concern because not all children enter school with an equal chance of developing high quality relationships with teachers, and certain populations are at higher risk for developing less positive relationships. Children who enter preschool, and are identified as: male, African-American, having learning disabilities, living in poverty or having lower socio-economic status, and/or exhibiting aggressive externalizing behaviors like hitting or yelling are often perceived by teachers to have less quality relationships with teachers (Gallagher, Kainz, Vernon-Feagans, & White, 2013; Howes, et.al, 2000; Jerome, et.al, 2008; Koepke & Harkins, 2008; Rudasill, 2011).
Recognizing that some groups of children are at higher risk for less quality relationships with teachers is particularly problematic for several reasons. First, children from these populations are already at higher risk for academic failure and other school related difficulties. Secondly, because research tells us that the quality of the teacher-child relationship in preschool is predictive of later relationship quality, children who establish lower quality relationships in preschool begin their formal school experiences at a disadvantage. For example, children who enter preschool and establish patterns of teacher-child interactions that are high in conflict are more likely to continue that pattern through elementary school (Birch & Ladd, 1998; Buyse, et.al., 2009; Howes, et. al, 2000). Preschool children who have developed relationships high in conflict with their teachers have also been found to have diminished academic readiness for kindergarten, are perceived by teachers to have less school competence and are more likely to have behavior problems in elementary school (Howes, 2000; Garner & Waajid, 2008; Palermo, et. al, 2007). In a longitudinal study focusing on the quality of teacher-child relationships in first grade and third grade, Rudasill (2011) found that “teacher child relationship quality in first grade predicted teacher-child relationship quality in third grade” (pg. 154). Teacher ratings of closeness and conflict have also been found to be moderately stable from kindergarten through sixth grade with conflict showing greater stability (Baker, 2006; Jerome, et.al, 2009).

Keeping in mind the predictive nature of teacher child relationship patterns, and the evidence that some children enter school at risk for establishing less quality relationships, it is important for teachers at all levels of experience to consider the quality of the relationship they are constructing with children. When children enter kindergarten
they are often expected to adjust to the rigors of academic curriculum and engage in socially appropriate behavior (Myers & Pianta, 2008; Wildenger & McIntyre, 2012), but not all children come to school with the social and emotional scaffolding required to make the developmental transition. Children still developing social and emotional skills necessary for kindergarten need more supportive environments, not less. Children can benefit from teachers who engage in on-going embedded professional development that focuses on dimensions of relationship quality, the impact relationship quality has on child outcomes, and supports teachers in creating positive classroom environments.

**Supportive Environments**

High quality teacher-child relationships are based on the teacher’s ability and willingness to: be emotionally available; construct interconnected supportive environments in the classroom; understand the components of teacher child relationship quality and the factors that impact it; and engage in professional development related to enriching relationship quality (Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Merritt, et.al, 2012; Pianta, Stuhlman, & Hamre, 2002; Swick & Williams, 2006). Much of the research on teacher-child interactions and subsequent relationship quality point to three main domains of interaction quality: emotionally supportive environments, interactive and content rich instructionally supportive environments, and consistent organization of the day (Colmer, Rutherford, & Murphy, 2011; Mashburn, Pianta, Hamre, Downer, Barbarin, Bryant, Burchinal, Early, & Howes, 2008; Merritt, et.al, 2012; Myers & Pianta, 2008; Thomason & La Paro, 2009). Supportive environments in early childhood play a critical role in developing behavior patterns and self-regulations, both of which are important to developing positive relationships with teachers and school success (Jerome, et.al, 2009;
School success is not exclusively measured by test scores but can also be measured by evaluating growth in academic performance, work habits, disciplinary record, involvement in school related activities, social success and overall attitudes about school (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Rudasill, 2011).

**Emotional support and availability.** Emotional support is especially important to overall school success because it provides a foundation for social success and self-regulation, two aspects that are associated with developing a close relationship with teachers (Birch & Ladd, 1998; Rudasill, 2011). Teachers who are emotionally supportive engage in specific behaviors that create a positive emotional climate. Teachers who are emotionally supportive are described as warm, kind, sensitive and attentive (Merritt, et al., 2012). Emotionally supportive teachers also use a positive affect when engaging with children, choose guidance rather than punishments as a method of classroom management and positively engage children in conversations. They are aware of children’s social and emotional needs and engage children in exchanges that continue to strengthen their emotional knowledge (Curby, et al., 2013). Finally, emotionally supportive teachers respond thoughtfully to social situations and consider them opportunities for teaching and learning (Hamre & Pianta, 2005).

The specific behaviors exhibited by emotionally supportive teachers construct an amiable emotional climate. Emotionally supportive and available teachers create a sense of security in their classrooms. An emotionally secure classroom environment includes: fostering connections between peers, referring to children by name, becoming knowledgeable about children’s family and interests outside of school, giving children individualized attention, encouraging them to work independently and fostering...
children’s skills at engaging in group debate, conversation, and discussion (Downer, et al, 2010; Gandini, 2012).

**Instructional Support.** Instructionally supportive environments in early childhood classrooms provide children with multiple opportunities to experience, interact with, and formulate ideas about a variety of topics (Katz, 2015; Rinaldi, 2012). Instructional support focuses on the pathways and methods for providing children with content knowledge through concept development, quality feedback and language modeling (Pianta & Hamre, 2009). Teachers who are instructionally supportive recognize that their interactions with children should be intentional and responsive to the developmental level of the group and individuals (Carlson-Paige, Bywater-McLaughlin, & Wolfsheimer-Almon, 2015).

Teachers who are instructionally supportive use strategies that help students critically analyze and use higher-order thinking skills, like posing problems, using open-ended questions, or encouraging discussions about children’s work that do not seek specific answers (Foreman & Fyfe, 2012; Pianta & Hamre, 2009). Positive instructional support also involves providing children with verbal feedback about their work in the form of comments, suggests and questions. In addition, positive instructional interactions offer the opportunity for children to apply what they have learned using experiences which are relative to them and provide them with extended amounts of time to understand and revisit concepts (Edwards, 2012; Gandini, 2012; Pianta & Hamre, 2009).

**Organizational Support.** Emotional and instructional support are balanced and maintained in a classroom that has a well-defined yet flexible system of organization. One component of organizational support is establishing a method of guidance that is
A proactive guidance system includes clear expectations, consistent follow-through of consequences, and multiple opportunities for children to master self-regulation and conflict resolution (Merritt, et.al, 2012; Thomason & La Paro, 2009). The second component of supportive organization is having consistent predictable routines and rituals. Routines provide children with a way to understand and organize time. Routines and rituals create opportunities to engage in interactions that increase language development, social skills, and sense of ownership over a child’s day (Pianta & Hamre, 2009).

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to better understand teacher-child relationship quality and to examine how teacher behaviors and beliefs impact relationships. High quality teacher-child relationships that maintain supportive environments are necessary because they provide social support for children to engage in the curriculum and take risks that result in overall school success (Howes & Smith, 1995; Birch & Ladd, 1997; 1998, Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004). Much like healthy primary attachments, positive attachments with teachers can provide protective environments where children can safely take social and academic risks resulting in an overall more positive and productive school experience (Buyse, et.al, 2011; Colmer, et. al, 2011; Verschueren & Koomen, 2012). When they are combined with high quality instructional interactions, emotionally supportive environments and predictable routines, teacher-child relationships are associated with higher levels of academic skills, acquisition of language, more positive social interactions, higher social competence and fewer behavior problems (Downer, et.al., 2010; Mashburn, et.al., 2008). Teachers, thus, have the potential to use their relationship
as an additional tool for helping children succeed in school (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Henricsson & Rydell, 2004; Howes & Smith, 1995; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004; Wentzel, 2002).

Over the course of several years emotional support has become less of a focus than learning content specific instructional methods for teacher preparation programs and professional development opportunities as schools and teacher education programs seek to use more evidence based practices (Darling-Hammond, 2012; Rimm-Kaufman, Storm, Sawyer, Pianta, & LaParo, 2006). Given the wealth of research, the argument can be made that just as teacher candidates and practicing teachers need to learn effective ways of helping children acquire basic skills such as literacy or math, they also need to learn methods of promoting a positive classroom climate through high quality teacher-child relationships.

Developing a classroom environment that supports high quality teacher-child relationships has the potential of benefitting both teachers and children and improving the overall school success of all children. This study is particularly interested in current teacher beliefs about classroom practices that influence teacher-child relationship quality because teacher perceptions about children, and their role as the teacher have been found to be more significant in developing positive relationships than teacher experience or education (Burchinal, Howes, Pianta, Bryant, Early, Clifford, & Barbarin, 2008; Churchill, 2003; Wentzel, 2002).

To add to the literature about teacher-child relationships it would be informative to investigate teacher beliefs about specific dimensions of supportive environments that contribute to overall relationship quality, and observe how teachers interact with children.
Using information gathered about teacher beliefs could be used in undergraduate courses with pre-service teachers and in on-going professional development for current teachers. Through training and awareness of specific beliefs, teachers would be more informed about what to focus on as they attempt to establish relationships with young children that support academic growth, self-regulation, school adjustment and social development. Children, especially those at risk for developing poor quality relationships, will benefit as teachers become more aware of the important connection between positive emotional climate and academic success.

**Guiding Questions**

1. How do participants perceive their relationships with children in their preschool classrooms?
2. What beliefs do participants hold about discipline? What beliefs do participants hold about classroom practices? What beliefs do participants hold regarding children?
3. How do beliefs about discipline contribute to teacher-child interactions during free play and instructional situations? How do beliefs about classroom practices contribute to teacher-child interactions during free play and instructional situations? How do those beliefs about children contribute to teacher-child interactions during free play and instructional situations?
Chapter Two

Review of Literature

Education and Relationships

Teacher education and professional development programs vary greatly but most focus on preparing teachers to effectively deliver curriculum content, manage classroom behavior, and assess growth. While all of these components are critical to quality educational experiences, they cannot be separated from the emotional climate developed through interpersonal relationships (Hamre, Pianta, Downer, DeCoster, Mashburn, Jones, Brown, Cappella, Atkins, Rivers, Brackett, & Hamagami, 2013). Years of research on emotional quality and cognitive development supports the belief that a positive, high quality emotional climate provides social support for children to engage in the curriculum and take risks that result in overall school success (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Buyse, Verschueren, Verachtert, & Van Damme, 2009; Hamre & Pianta; 2005; Howes & Smith, 1995; Howes, 2000). Teacher training and professional development is important because on-going professional development helps shape teacher attitudes about children and teacher beliefs regarding classroom practice (Mashburn, A., Pianta, R., Hamre, B., Downer, J., Barbarin, O., Bryant, D., and Burchinal, M., & Early, D, 2008). Teacher attitude and beliefs also help determine the kinds of relationships teachers are able and willing to construct with children and how those relationships will either support or challenge the development of children in their classrooms (Hamre, Pianta, Burchinal, Field, LoCasale-Crouch, Downer, Howes, LaParo, & Scott-Little, 2012; Harrison, Clarke, & Ungerer, 2007; Pianta, Howes, Burchinal, Bryant, Clifford, Early and Barbarin, 2005).
**Dimensions of Teacher-child relationship quality.** Three dimensions of the teacher-child relationship that contribute to overall relationship quality are closeness, conflict and dependency (Pianta, 2001). Pianta (2001) describes each dimension as follows. Closeness refers to the degree to which teachers experience feelings of warmth, affection and open communication with a particular student. Conflict refers to the degree to which a teacher perceives the relationship as full of discord or struggle. Dependency refers to the degree to which a teacher perceives a child as over-reliant, consistently seeking the company of the teacher, or seeking out the support of the teacher.

Closeness and conflict reoccur most frequently in the literature as influences on the quality of teacher child relationships. As expected, perceived levels of closeness are associated with more positive interactions and emotional classroom climates. Perceived levels of conflict are related to less positive interactions and more negative emotional classroom climates. Teachers have the potential to view their interactions, and subsequent relationships with children, as tools for planning positive emotional climates and instructionally supportive environments. A positive emotional climate moderates the risk of early school failure and provides a supportive foundation for children to engage in the curriculum and take risks that result in success in school (Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Morris, Millenky, Raver & Jones, 2015).

School success is not measured exclusively by scores on high stakes tests, although those scores can give important information, the definition of school success includes other factors. Overall school success can also be measured by collectively evaluating academic growth over time, the quality of children’s work habits, disciplinary records, levels of engagement and involvement in school related activities, social
competence, school adjustment and the overall attitudes children communicate about school (Buyse, Verschueren, Verachtert, & Van Damme, 2009; Hamre & Pianta, 2001). Each of these are associated with the quality of relationships children develop with teachers and peers.

In a discussion about how relationships are a foundation of the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education, Loris Malaguzzi (1998), the late Italian leader in early childhood education, described relationships as connections that reinforce a children’s sense of identity and gives them the self-confidence necessary to participate in the many activities of school. He believed “that the way we {adults} get along with children influences what motivates them and what they learn” (Malaguzzi, 1998). He was able to eloquently state what the literature suggests- that the quality of the teacher-child relationship helps determine how children will construct relationships with people, concepts, materials and community (Burchinal, Peisner-Feinberg, Pianta, & Howes, 2002; Hughes, Im, & Wehrly, 2014; Ladd, Birch, & Buhs, 1999).

**Interaction Quality.** There is considerable research supporting high quality teacher child interactions because the quality of interactions is associated with academic outcomes, social development, and overall school success (Burchinal, Howes, Pianta, Bryant, Early, Clifford, and Barbarin, 2008; Buyse, et al., 2009; Hamre & Pianta, Curby, Rimm-Kaufman, & Ponitz, 2009; O’Connor and McCartney, 2007). Consistently positive teacher child interactions are considered the mechanisms through which learning occurs and teacher ratings of higher academic achievement in skills necessary for reading and math success including language acquisition, pre-literacy and language skills, and mathematics (Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Jones, Bub, & Raver, 2013; McCormick,
O’Connor, Cappella, & McClowry, 2013). High quality teacher child interactions are also associated with behavior trajectories for children over time and can impact overall school success (Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Jerome, et al., 2008; Rudasill, 2011).

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One example of a link between high quality teacher interactions and academic achievement comes from a multi-year study looking at whether there were associations between child care quality and pre-academic skills in 4 year old children. Cote, Japel, Seguin, Mongeau, Xu, & Tremblay (2013) found that children who experience high levels of child care quality at ages 2, 3, and 4 had positive associations with numeracy, receptive vocabulary and school readiness scores at age 4. They analyzed data from 257 families from Montreal who had their child enrolled in child care for at least 10 hours a week. The researchers conducted parent interviews, a child care quality assessment when the participating children were 2, 3, and 4 and an individual cognitive assessment with participating children at age 4. Child care quality was assessed using the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECER-S), Infant/Toddler Environment Ratings Scale (ITER-S) and Family Day Care Rating Scale (FDCRS). Cognitive outcomes were assessed during home visits by trained research assistants who administered tasks that assessed school readiness, receptive vocabulary, and numeracy-related skills. A Number
Knowledge Test was used to measure the development of number concepts and the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-Revised was used to assess vocabulary. School readiness was assessed using the Lollipop Test which assesses children knowledge about colors and forms; spatial relations; numbers; and letters.

This study looked at two dimensions of quality care – teaching and interactions and provisions for learning. Teaching and interactions referred to the quality of interplay between the teacher and children, and the extent to which the teacher used resources to promote children’s participation (Cote, et. al, 2013). Provisions for learning referred to the availability, accessibility, and diversity of activities children could engage in independently (Cote, et. al, 2013). Two distinct groups of children emerged from data on Teaching and Interactions - one group that experienced low and stable quality over time and a second group that were exposed to higher initial quality that slightly increased over time. In multiple analyses, a trajectory of high level Teaching and Interaction was associated with higher cognitive scores on numeracy, receptive vocabulary and school readiness skills. Findings from the Teaching and Interaction quality analyses confirm previous studies suggesting that “child care higher in quality contributes positively and moderately to children’s cognitive development” (Cote, et.al, 2013, p. 761), especially one that emphasized verbal interactions and general exchanges with children through personal communication, encouragement, listening, and positive peer support.

Interaction quality in preschool and kindergarten is also associated with behavior patterns over time. Children who develop positive close relationships with teachers are more pro-social, engage in school activities, and have greater academic success (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Jerome, et al., 2009; Portilla, Ballard, Adler, Boyce, & Obradovic, 2014).
Unfortunately, conflict in the teacher child relationship for kindergarten children is associated with decreased social competence, self-regulatory behavior, and is predictive of future social interactions with teachers and peers (Birch & Ladd, 1998; Curby, Brock, & Hamre, 2013; Portilla, Ballard, Adler, Boyce, & Obradovic, 2014). Teacher-child interactions also impact lasting attitudes children develop about school and can be a mediating factor for success, especially for children at risk (Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Howes, Phillipsen & Peisner-Feinberg, 2000).

Rudasill (2011) supports some of these findings and adds a dimension to the literature by examining how gender, child temperament and the frequency of interactions impact teacher perceptions of relationship quality over time. Using existing data from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development study of early child care (NICHD SECC) Rudasill (2011) looked at two specific temperament characteristics that represented dimensions of reactivity and regulation—shyness (reactivity) and effortful control (regulation). Shyness was defined as the tendency to withdraw from unfamiliar people or environmental stimuli. Effortful control was defined as the child’s ability “to activate an appropriate response in a situation where an inappropriate response is desired” (Rudasill, 2011, p. 148). Data for this study were collected three times in Phase II and Phase III of the larger project. The first set of data was collected when children were in their preschool year and then again when they were in first and third grade. Teachers participated in the study if they had study children enrolled in their classrooms.

The study used three measures to gather data regarding children’s temperament, teacher-child interactions and teacher-child relationship quality. Mothers assessed their child’s temperament using the Children’s Behavior Questionnaire (CBQ; Rothbart,
Ahadi, & Hershey, 2001). The study used the shyness subscale to determine shyness, and an average score of subscales for inhibitory control and attentional focus was used to determine a child’s level of effortful control. Teacher-child interaction frequency was observed in first and third grade using a time-sample approach in which trained observers engaged in eight 10 minute cycles with each minute containing 30 seconds of observation followed by 30 seconds of recording. Observers noted the presence of a teacher or child behavior that signaled an interaction; the frequency of teacher-initiated interactions and the frequency of child-initiated interactions. Teacher-child relationship quality was measured using the STRS (Pianta, 2001). Using path analyses Rudasill (2011) constructed models that estimated direct associations between gender, shyness, and effortful control, and first & third grade teacher perceptions of conflict and closeness. The models also allowed for indirect associations between child characteristics and relationship quality through first grade and third grade teacher-child interactions.

Rudasill (2011) found that teacher-child relationship quality was predictive for the participants in her study. Children lower in shyness, lower in effortful control and boys were likely to have more conflict in their relationships with first grade teachers and were also more likely to be rated by third grade teachers to have relationship high in conflict. Children in these categories were also more likely to receive teacher-initiated interactions in third grade which was positively related to conflict. Children with lower levels of shyness, higher effortful control and girls were more likely to have close relationships with first and third grade teachers. Children who initiated more interactions with first grade teachers were less likely to receive teacher-initiated interactions in third grade which was positively related to closeness.
Portilla et.al (2014) also investigated relationship trajectory by looking at teacher-child relationship quality across the kindergarten and first grade year. Specifically they focused on whether a child’s gender would predict behavior patterns; if the teacher-child relationship across kindergarten would influence later relationships; and whether children’s functioning and relationship quality predict later behavior. This study looked at a diverse group of 338 kindergarten children from 29 classrooms in 6 public schools in California. Data from three different measures were collected in the fall and spring of the children’s kindergarten year and in the spring of their first grade year. The researchers used the Student Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS) to collect data on teacher perceived relationship quality; the MacArthur Health and Behavior Questionnaire (HBQ) to collect data on child functioning specifically related to inattention/impulsivity and school engagement; and a subscale of the HBQ to measure academic competence.

The findings reaffirmed previous conclusions. First, girls were more likely to develop teacher perceived close relationships and demonstrate more school engagement at all three time points. Boys were more likely to develop relationships perceived by teachers to be higher in conflict and demonstrate more impulsive and inattentive behaviors across all three time points. Portilla et.al. (2014) also found that children who experienced more closeness in kindergarten demonstrated more school engagement and fewer issues with impulsive/inattentive behaviors across kindergarten and more academic competency in first grade. More conflict with teachers was associated with less school engagement, more inattentive and impulsive behaviors across all three time points but not necessarily associated with academic competencies.
The one main, but relatively important difference Portilla et al. (2014) found was that even when children experienced relationships high in conflict in the spring of kindergarten they were still able to develop relationships with first grade teachers high in closeness. This finding also supports Rudasill’s (2011) observation that interaction frequency can help children. Rudasill (2011) found that children who establish quality relationships with teachers through child-initiated interactions can overcome previously negative relationships.

**Associations in Relationship Quality**

We want to think that all children enter school with an equal chance of developing high quality relationships with teachers but the research would suggest otherwise. Certain populations are at risk for developing less positive relationships. Children who enter preschool, and are identified as: male, African-American, having learning disabilities, living in poverty or having lower socio-economic status, and exhibiting aggressive externalizing behaviors like hitting or yelling are often perceived by teachers to have less quality relationships (Birch & Ladd, 1998; Howes, et.al, 2000; Jerome, et.al, 2009; Koepke & Harkins, 2008; Portilla et al., 2014; Rudasill, 2011).

In a study examining general trends in teacher perceived dimensions of relationship quality, Jerome et.al (2009) examined early childhood characteristics that predict differences in initials levels of and growth over time of conflict and closeness. They examined: stability of teacher ratings of conflict and closeness from kindergarten to sixth grade; initial levels of conflict and closeness in kindergarten and then general trends in growth of conflict and closeness over the first seven years of school; and
variations in these trajectories based on child, family, and environmental traits present at age five.

Participants were from a subsample of children from a National Institute of Child Health and Human Development study of early child care (NICHD SECC) (Jerome, et. al, 2009). This study had 878 children from the larger study that recruited participants who had given birth from hospital visits across 10 sites in the United States. Data were collected at 7 different times over the course of the study. Children were included as participants in the study if information existed for them for at least three of the 7 time points.

The researchers used several measures for data collection. The Student Teacher Relationship Scale, or STRS (Pianta, 2001) was used to gather data regarding teacher perceived levels of closeness and conflict (Jerome, et. al, 2009). Demographic information was collected when mothers agreed to participate in the larger study and when children were one month old. Maternal sensitivity was rated by trained observers at ages 6, 15, 24, 36 and 54 months. Child attachment was classified by trained observers using the strange situation technique (see Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978) in which participants were video-taped using the strange situation procedures and later children’s behaviors were rated and categorized into one of the three attachment classifications. Quality of home environments was assessed through the home observation for measurement of the environment (Cladwell & Bradley, 1984) at age 54 months by trained observers. Quantity of non-maternal childcare prior to 54 months was determined from parent interviews occurring at 3-month intervals before the age of 36 months and then at 4-month intervals. The mean number of hours a child attended non-
maternal care was averaged from birth through 54 months. Academic achievement at school entry was assessed using the Woodcock-Johnson test of achievement-revised to assess ability at 54 months. Finally, the maternal rating of behavior at 54 months was collected from mothers using the child behavior checklist (Achenbach, 1991).

The researchers found that teacher perceived levels of closeness and conflict were moderately stable over time with different teacher’s perceptions of conflict relatively more stable over the first seven years of school (Jerome, et. al, 2009). When compared to closeness, conflict may have more to do with attributes of the child, i.e. externalizing behaviors than characteristics of teachers, environment or other interactions (Jerome et.al, 2009). The researchers also confirmed their hypothesis that conflict increased from kindergarten to sixth grade whereas closeness decreased over the entire seven years. After fifth grade both closeness and conflict declined which was speculated to be a consequence of the changing nature and function of teacher-child relationships and communication between elementary and middle school teachers.

There were also characteristics that predicted relationship quality (Jerome, et. al, 2009). They found that children who were male and/or Black, with more hours in non-maternal care, with lower academic ability and demonstrated more externalizing behaviors were rated as having more conflict with kindergarten teachers. This is particularly problematic for several reasons. First, children from these populations are already at higher risk for academic failure and other school related difficulties. They need more supportive environments, not less.

Preschool experiences also set the stage for later school success, influence the attitudes children develop about school and influence the ability of the child to adapt to
the expectations of formal school (Burchinal, et.al, 2002; Silva, Spinrad, Eisenberg, Sulik, Valiente, Huerta, Edwards, Eggum, Kupfer, Lonigan, Phillips, Wilson, Clancy-Menchetti, Landry, Swank, Assel, & Taylor, 2011). When children transition from preschool to kindergarten they are often expected to adjust to the rigors of academic curriculum and engage in socially appropriate behavior (Cadima, Doumen, Verschueren, & Buyse, 2015). Not all children are equipped with the social and emotional scaffolding required to make the developmental transition (Garner & Waajid, 2008).

Secondly, because research tells us that the quality of the teacher-child relationship in preschool is predictive of later relationship quality, children who establish lower quality relationships in preschool begin their school experience with a deficit. For example, children who enter preschool and establish patterns of teacher-child interactions that are high in conflict are more likely to continue that pattern through elementary school (Birch & Ladd, 1998; Berry & O’Connor, 2010; Buyse, et.al., 2009; Howes, Phillipsen, & Peisner-Feinberg, 2000; Rudasill, 2011). Teacher ratings of closeness and conflict have also been found to be moderately stable from kindergarten through sixth grade with conflict showing greater stability (Jerome, et.al, 2009; Berry & O’Connor, 2010).

Results related to closeness were not necessarily surprising. Children were perceived by teachers to have relationships higher in closeness if they were girls, came from higher quality home environments, and had higher levels of academic ability. Closeness was not associated with maternal education, race of the child, maternal sensitivity, hours in non-maternal childcare, behavioral problems or attachment to mothers (Jerome, et.al, 2009).
For each dimension of teacher child relationship quality there are common associations with child characteristics and predictability in relationship quality. Understanding the trends in associations is important for teachers so they can be aware of their own beliefs and attitudes towards different populations of children influence how they interact with children who specific characteristics or behaviors.

**Gender differences.** Relationships high in perceived levels of closeness and conflict are consistently found to differ between genders in preschool and the pattern continues into elementary. Girls are found to establish relationships higher in closeness than boys and the gap between closeness ratings for boys and girls tends to widen throughout elementary (Jerome, et.al., 2009; Rudasill, 2011; Portilla, et. al, 2014). Boys are consistently found to establish relationships with teachers which are higher in conflict (Ewing & Taylor, 2009; Howes, 2000; Jerome, et al., 2009; Koepke & Harkins, 2008; Stuhlman & Pianta, 2001).

Much of the research on teacher-child relationship quality is conducted with diverse populations in low socioeconomic environments. A question that is raised by this body of research is whether teacher-child relationship quality is impacted by teacher attitudes and misaligned expectations for children of different backgrounds and limited resources. In a study specifically looking at gender differences in teacher perceived relationship quality, Koepke & Harkins (2008) examined gender differences in a population of children from high socioeconomic backgrounds. The authors also wanted to gain insight into how children perceived the teacher-child relationship and determine if gender differences were present for child perceptions.
The sample included 698 children ranging from kindergarten to fourth grade in a small upper middle class community in the northeastern United States (Koepke & Harkins, 2008). This was a mostly homogeneous group of children with over 80% identified as White, 9.8% identified as Asian, 3.6% identified as Black, 3% identified as biracial with the remaining children identified as Latino/a, Middle Eastern, or Eastern European. Teachers were recruited from four elementary schools in the same suburban community and totaled 35 in all. Of the teachers 94% were female and all were White with 98.8% considered highly qualified.

Data were collected in May of the 2006-2007 academic school year. Teachers and children completed surveys to assess their perceptions of the teacher-child relationship in all three dimensions: closeness, conflict, and dependency. The Student Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS) was used to assess teacher perceived relationship quality. The STRS is a 28-item Likert-type rating scale that assesses a teacher’s feelings and beliefs about his/her relationship with individual children. Children completed the pilot version Child-Report Student Teacher Relationship scale (Child-R STRS) meant to assess the child’s beliefs and feelings about his/her relationship with the teacher. Children also completed the Relatedness Questionnaire (Wellborn & Connell, 1978) which is designed to assess relationships of interest using two subscales: emotional quality & psychological proximity seeking. Using hierarchal linear modeling (HLM), associations between gender, age of the child and teacher-child relationship quality were tested.

Koepke & Harkins (2008) found that gender predicted effect on teacher ratings of conflict. Teachers rated boys’ mean raw scores for conflict 3.49 points higher than that
of girls. After controlling for the nested nature of teachers rating multiple children in the classroom, they also found that teachers rated their relationships with boys as significantly higher in conflict than their relationships with girls and that levels of conflict did not change from kindergarten to fourth grade. They also found that teachers rated their relationships with girls to be significantly higher in closeness.

Children reports showed that they viewed relationships differently and reported relationships as significantly less close than teacher reports. By second grade, when the pilot Child-R STRS showed most reliability, boys were more reliable when they responded to statements regarding conflict and girls were more reliable when they responded to statements regarding closeness. Boys also rated their relationships with teachers as having significantly more conflict than girls (Koepke & Harkins, 2008). The authors suggest that boys interpersonal radar “did not attune to the relational disconnect and hence they are most likely unaware that their teachers’ perceptions of dyadic closeness is discordant with their own” (Koepke & Harkins, 2008, p. 858). This study supports previous research regarding a gender difference in relationship quality and adds to the literature regarding the likelihood that boys of all socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to have relationships with teachers that are higher in conflict than their female peers.

Although relationship quality with teachers is more similar than different with boys and girls, the influence of gender related behaviors on teacher perceived relationship quality is significant and profound (Runions, 2014). In general, teachers perceived their relationships with girls to be more positive. It is hypothesized that this may be true because girls are more developmentally ready for school and are socialized to adapt more
readily to the behavior expectations of school than boys. Girls also develop either naturally or through gendered socialization, more complex emotional knowledge and socially acceptable behaviors than boys (Garner & Waajid, 2008; Henricsson & Rydell, 2004). Girls also communicate differently than boys. They are more likely to engage in verbal exchanges that indirectly address conflict by talking about their emotions, maintain relationships, nurture others and value cooperation (Leman, Ahmed, & Ozarow, 2005; Pellegrini, Galda, Bartini, & Charak, 1998).

While girls communicate to maintain balance within relationships, boys have different goals. The culture of boy behavior uses powerful actions and words as a way to show group solidarity while at the same time establishing an individual identity (Danby & Baker, 2001). William Pollack (1998), the child psychologist who has worked extensively with young boys and adolescents, describes something called the boy code which is a set of socially constructed gender roles and expectations placed on boys. It is imperative for boys to adhere to these gender roles and expectations in order to be accepted as male. He proposed that boys are expected to be tough, aggressive, and refrain from expressing their emotions. Young boys are rewarded by important adults and members of their social group for behaving in ways that adhere to the code and reported patterns of communication may support this idea (Pollack, 1998). Instead of preserving relationships or diffusing conflicts, the goals of social interactions between and among boys are widely to maintain status within a group (Danby & Baker, 2001; Pollack, 1998).

It is not unreasonable to think that contrasting communication patterns and behavior expectations create conflict in classrooms, especially when the majority of early
childhood teachers are female. The irony is that boys seem to benefit more than girls from close relationships with teachers but they are more likely to struggle with less positive, highly conflictual relationships throughout their school experience (Gallagher, Kainz, Vernon-Feagans and White, 2013).

**Behavior and associations to school readiness, adjustment and social competence.** Children exhibit behaviors that teacher perceive as indicating school readiness, school adjustment and/or social competence. These behaviors are associated with teacher perceptions about closeness and conflict (Baker, 2006; Merritt, Wanless, Rimm-Kaufmann, Cameron, & Peugh, 2012). For example, Palermo, Hanish, Martin, Fabes, & Reiser (2007) conducted a study examining the role teacher child relationship quality played on preschooler’s readiness for the transition to kindergarten. They defined kindergarten readiness to be a child’s ability to perform basic tasks such as counting, letter recognition, and having the necessary language skills to communicate effectively.

Six classrooms in three preschools over the course of 2 years were selected to participate through convenience sampling procedures. Researchers worked with 95 children and their teachers for this study. The sample was diverse with almost half being girls, almost half of the participants from non-Hispanic White backgrounds and the remaining participants from Hispanic, Native American, Asian-American or African-American backgrounds. The sample also included with a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds. There were four teachers, one male and three female. Data were collected in two waves over the course of 2 years. If children were in the participating class both years then data were only used from year one (Palermo, et al., 2007). Data were
collected in the spring semester of preschool. Lead teachers completed questionnaires regarding teacher-child relationship quality, children’s behavior, and academic readiness.

Teachers completed the STRS (previously discussed) to assess teachers’ perceptions of relationship quality. Data were collected from two subscales of the Child Behavior Scale (CBS; Ladd & Profilet, 1996): The Prosocial subscale was used to measure children’s prosocial orientation and the Peer Exclusion subscale was used to assess children’s peer group exclusion. Teachers completed the Child Behavior Checklist-Teacher Report form (CBLC-TRF; Achenback, 1991) to assess children’s aggressive behavior. Finally, academic readiness was assessed using a measure of academic readiness completed by teachers that examined children’s logical thinking, mathematical, reading and writing capabilities (Fabes, Martin, Hanish, Anders, & Madden-Derdich, 2003).

Data were analyzed using descriptive analysis and path analysis. Descriptive analysis indicated that in general children had positive relationships with teachers and that teachers rated children as moderately ready for kindergarten. Path analysis was used to test the hypothesis that there is a connection between teacher-child relationship quality and academic readiness.

The results of their study found that teacher child relationship quality was significantly related to a child’s readiness for kindergarten. In particular teacher ratings of closeness were associated with greater readiness and ratings of conflict were related to decreased readiness. This study also reported teacher perceptions of closeness were associated with children who behaved more pro-socially (Palermo, et al., 2007). In contrast, children who were reported by teachers to have relationships higher in conflict
were more likely to behave aggressively and demonstrate fewer pro-social behaviors. These characteristic resulted in more peer exclusion and diminished academic readiness. This study supports the role that the teacher-child relationship plays in adapting to school and suggests that “positive social relationships with teachers and peers may maximize young children’s academic adjustment” by helping them to feel included and motivated to participate in academic tasks (Palermo, et al., 2007, p. 419).

In a separate longitudinal study which evaluated teacher child relationship quality and its impact on social and academic adjustment in first grade, Buyse, et.al (2009) found that teacher child closeness was associated with better psychosocial adjustment, and ratings of teacher child conflict were associated with worse psychosocial adjustment. These associations were observed through the third grade. In this study psychosocial adjustment referred to a child’s aggressive behavior, popularity with peers and feelings of well-being at school. Academic adjustment was defined as acquisition of reading and math skills. There were limited associations between teacher child relationship quality and academic adjustment but the authors did find that relationships with more conflict were related to poorer mathematic achievement. This study also determined a gender difference in levels of psychosocial adjustment with girls demonstrating better adjustment than boys.

There is evidence that child behavioral characteristics and their impact on relationship quality and school adjustment is common for children around the world. In a study of children in Belgium, Cadima, Doumen, Verschueren & Buyse (2015), looked at how self-regulation, teacher-child relationships and classroom climate contribute to
school adjustment and transition. They also found connections between behavior and teacher-child relationship quality.

The researchers investigated whether behavioral engagement in kindergarten predicted engagement in first grade; the extent to which self-regulation, teacher-child relationship quality and peer-teacher conflict predicted behavior engagement and learning in kindergarten; and how those same set of predictors influenced behavioral engagement in first grade. The sample size was 145 children and their kindergarten and first grade teachers. There were 75 girls and 70 boys who participated in the study. All the teachers were trained and held a professional certificate in education. The data were used from a larger short-term study with data waves in preschool, kindergarten and first grade (Cadima, et al., 2015). Children participated if they have inhibitory control data from kindergarten and the follow up data in first grade.

Participating children were observed at the beginning of their kindergarten year using videotape. Trained researchers coded the recorded observations. Parents completed a demographic questionnaire. Data were collected in two waves during the kindergarten year and after the transition to first grade another two waves of data were collected. Teacher-child relationship quality was assessed in the beginning and end of the school year. Another wave of observations was completed at the beginning of the first grade year. At the end of the school year, first grade behavioral engagement was assessed using teacher ratings on a questionnaire and a separate set of observations completed over several periods throughout the day by different observers who were unfamiliar with the first set of observations.
Self-regulation, or inhibitory control, was assessed using two drawing tasks from a behavioral battery designed to measure effortful and inhibitory control. This measure looks at the child’s capacity to “suppress a dominant behavior by capturing his or her ability to slow down fine-motor activity” (Cadima, et al., 2015, p. 5). Children were asked to trace a geometric shape over the course of three trials. The first trial the child completed the task with no directions, the second trial asked the child to draw as quickly as possible and finally the child was asked to draw as slowly as possible.

Teacher-child relationship quality was assessed using the two subscales of STRS (previously discussed): conflict and closeness. Using the same subscales from the STRS perceived peer-teacher conflict was addressed using a within-level and between-level variables. The researchers created a within-level variable that described the teacher perceived levels of conflict between peers and teachers which differentiated individual child conflict with conflictual levels in the classroom.

Observed classroom organization was assessed using the Classroom Assessment Scoring system (CLASS; LaParo, Pianta, Hamre & Stuhlman, 2002). The CLASS is an observational measure of the quality of interactions in a classroom. There are three dimensions of interactions that are assessed with the measure: emotional support, classroom organization and instructional support. Cadima et al., (2015) focused on three sub-dimensions of classroom organization: Behavior Management, Productivity, and Instructional Learning Formats. Classrooms were observed for an extended amount of time, in this case 3 hours, and teacher-child interactions were scored on a 7-point scale from low to middle to high on each dimension. The scores for each dimension were combined into a single score for classroom organization.
Behavioral engagement in learning was assessed using two measures. The first was the Teacher Rating Scale of School Adjustment (TRSSA) which is a teacher report survey that was completed at the end of the kindergarten and first grade year. The subscale Teacher Rating Scale of School Adjustment (TRSSA) was used to assess teacher perceptions of children’s engagement at the end of kindergarten and first grade. This subscale measures the extent to which children work independently. The second measure was the Behavior Assessment System for Children-Student Observation Scale (BASC SOS; Reynolds & Kamphaus, 1992) completed at the end of the first grade year. This observational measure uses a time sampling procedure in which behaviors are coded sequentially using a coding scheme provided across 30-second intervals for 15 minute observations (Cadima et al., 2015).

The researchers used descriptive and correlational data analysis. They found that teachers reported relatively low levels of conflict and high levels of closeness (Cadima, et al., 2015). Teachers also reported that children were generally engaged in kindergarten and first grade class activities. For kindergarten children self-regulation was positively related to behavioral engagement and teacher-child closeness at the end of kindergarten. Teacher perceived conflict was related to behavioral engagement in kindergarten. Two path models were also performed to test whether self-regulation, teacher-child relationship quality and perceived peer levels of conflict contributed to behavioral engagement in kindergarten and when kindergarten engagement and class organization contributed observed behavioral engagement in first grade (Cadima et al., 2015). Not surprisingly, the researchers found that behavioral engagement in kindergarten predicted behavioral engagement in first grade.
Cadima et al. (2015) found that higher levels of self-regulation and teacher-child closeness contributed to more behavioral engagement in kindergarten which predicted observed engagement in first grade. Findings also indicate that children who exhibited higher levels of self-regulation skills were perceived by teachers to have higher levels of behavioral engagement. Self-regulation skills like paying attention, waiting for a turn, and refraining from off-task behavior help children adjust to the rigors of the classroom. They also found that children perceived to have closer teacher-child relationships exhibit higher levels of behavioral engagement. This study continues to support the literature that says child behavior contributes to teacher perceptions of relationship quality, school readiness and school adjustment.

**Associations with race and socio-economic status.** Patterns of disproportionate teacher perceived levels of closeness and conflict are also visible in regards to race and socio-economic status (Baker, 2006; Hamre & Pianta, 2005). Previously I discussed the study conducted by Jerome et al. (2009) who studied teacher reported levels of closeness and conflict as well as attributes of children that potentially predicted differences in relationship quality dimensions. Not surprisingly, teachers in this study perceived having closer relationships with children who came from homes that rated higher in quality using the Quality of Home Environment at 54 months measure. This measure rated the learning materials available to the child, language stimulation, physical environment, parental responsiveness, parent’s modeling of social maturity, and parental acceptance of the child. Teachers also perceived having closer relationships with children who exhibited higher levels of initial academic achievement.
Unfortunately, an alarming result also emerged related to race. The authors found a consistent gap between teacher ratings of conflict for Black and White children. Teachers rated their relationships higher in conflict with Black children and the risk of these children having relationships high in conflict continued to increase throughout elementary and into middle school. In this study, Black children entered kindergarten with higher levels of perceived conflict and that gap continued to grow throughout sixth grade, whereas the gap decreased for White children. The authors explored the possibility that other factors such as gender, high/low achievement or maternal ratings of behavior may have impacted the levels of conflict and superseded the characteristic of race. They concluded that “differences between teacher ratings of Black and White children appear to exist for all Black children, regardless of their academic achievement, gender, behavioral problems, maternal sensitivity, maternal education, or time spent in non-maternal childcare” (Jerome, et.al, 2009, pg. 936).

There is support in the literature that racial backgrounds influence teacher perceptions of relationships. Murray, Murray and Wass (2008) conducted a study to determine if there was agreement among children and teachers on the quality of their relationships and how those perspectives influences school adjustment. The researchers gathered data from both teacher and child points of view. The sample was comprised of young children from diverse backgrounds who were attending school in low income urban settings. Participants were 157 kindergarten children and their teachers drawn from five public schools in 12 classrooms in a large urban area in the United States (Murray, et al., 2008). The children attended a full day kindergarten and were primarily
children of color: 56% were African American, 26% were Hispanic, 7% were White, 3% were Asian-American and 4% had mixed racial backgrounds.

Children’s perceptions of social support from teachers were assessed using an adapted version of the *My Family and Friends* (MFF-C; Reid, Treder, & Jaccard, 1989). Children also completed a *School Liking and Avoidance Questionnaire* (SLAQ) which gathers information about children’s perceptions on school liking and school avoidance. Teachers used the MFF teacher version (MFF-T) to assess their perceptions of the type and quality of support they provide to individual children (Murray, et al., 2008). Teacher perceptions of children’s school adjustment were assessed using two subscales of the *Teacher Rating Scale of School Adjustment* (*TRSSA, Birch & Ladd, 1997*): The School Liking and School Avoidance subscales. These subscales are used to assess teachers’ perception of individual student’s affective reaction to school (Murray et al., 2008).

Data were collected over a six-week period at the end of the kindergarten school year (Murray, et al., 2008). Assessments completed by children were individually administered by the second author and were read aloud. All testing was completed outside of the classroom to provide a sense of comfort and safety to the children. Teachers completed all measures during a three week period that aligned with the six week period for collecting child data. Data was analyzed using MANOVA tests which indicated that race was a significant factor in teacher perceptions of emotional support. Teachers reported providing Hispanic-American children significantly more emotional support and companionships than African American children.

The authors also examined any associations with teacher race and child race by developing a code for racial match. They grouped all students who were the same race as
their teacher in one category and students of a different race than their teachers in another with a total of 53 students in the racial match group and 104 students in the racial mismatch group (Murray, et al., 2008). Results indicated significant differences. Teachers reported better overall relationships with students who shared their race. Teachers also reported higher scores on emotional support and school liking for children who shared their race.

The authors note however that “although teachers perceived relationships differently according to racial group, there were no significant differences in child perception of relationship quality or child perception of school adjustment” (Murray et al., 2008). The authors presented this as a concern because the results would indicate that a child characteristic, such as race, influences teacher perception about teacher-child relationships and the level of support they offer children. For this study, teacher support is vital because the population is already at risk for school failure.

Gallagher, et.al, (2013), also support findings that race and economic status impacts the teacher child relationship. They expanded the literature by looking at a rural population and examined how child demographic factors and teacher factors were associated with relationship quality in the fall and again in the spring. They also looked at how children’s behavior and literacy skills were related to closeness and conflict in the spring.

A sample of 199 kindergarten and first grade students enrolled in 20 classrooms in rural schools in the southeast participated in the study. Demographic information was collected from the family and the results of analysis revealed a highly diverse group of children in which 30.9% were White, 45.5% were African American, 17% were Native
American and 8% were other. All teachers were female, thirteen identified being White, 6 were African-American and one teacher selected other.

Data was collected through a series of child- and teacher-report questionnaires and a child assessment battery. Teacher child relationship quality was assessed in the fall and spring. Children’s early literacy skills were formally assessed in the fall. Maternal education was assessed through mother reports and a family questionnaire completed in the fall. Families also provided child demographic information on the family questionnaire. Teacher reported ethnicity and experience using a questionnaire completed in the fall. Teachers also reported on child behavior using The Classroom Behavior Inventory (Schaefer, Edgerton, & Arson, 1977). Child literacy skills were assessed using the Woodcock Johnson Tests of Achievement, III (WJTA, III: Woodcock, Mather, & Shrank, 2004). Teacher-child relationships were assessed using the STRS-short form (previously described). Teachers completed a STRS for individual children in the fall and spring.

Among their findings was child’s demographic factors, specifically ethnicity and gender, predicted higher teacher perceived conflict in the relationship. Teachers rated their relationships with kindergarten children who were identified as African American as lower in closeness and higher in conflict at the beginning of the school year with conflict continuing to increase throughout the school year. This study also reinforced gender differences and behavior associations with teacher child conflict stating that teachers perceived to have more conflict with boys than girls. They also found that positive relationships may help reduce negative outcomes while conflicted relationships may make disadvantages worse and that “boys benefitted more from good relationships with
teachers” (Gallagher, et al., 2013). They also found what teachers struggled most with was children who were “less regulated, less attentive, and more hostile in their reactions” (Gallagher, et al., 2013). Teachers struggled with all children who exhibited those behavior characteristics regardless of gender, race or socioeconomic background.

The quality of student teacher relationships and interactions are part of a complex system for overall school success. This makes it a salient tool in providing children with the kinds of environments that position them to be most successful. Plenty of questions remain about how the quality of teacher child relationships impacts academic achievement and social success. What is clear from the research is that vulnerable populations, i.e. children living in poverty, children with special needs, boys, African American children, and children whose race does not match that of their teacher can benefit most from high quality teacher child interactions. Hamre & Pianta (2005) found that when kindergarten teachers were aware of risk factors, and proactively addressed them with high emotional support, children had greater academic achievement and positive school adjustment. In this study the authors found that instructional support was not a moderating factor for academic success but that “having teachers who attend to their social and emotional needs may be as or more important to academic development than specific instructional practices” (pg. 962).

**Practice vs. Pressure**

Since the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) issued the first Developmentally Appropriate Practice position statement in the 1980s, teachers in early childhood have debated the best method for teaching young children, often debating two main positions –a teacher-directed vs. child-centered approach to their
work with children. In most cases teachers appreciate a child-centered approach but are challenged by outside influences like the ongoing accountability movement that favors the more traditional teacher-centered practice or by their own beliefs about their role as a teacher and their beliefs about children (Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006).

**Teacher centered vs. Child-centered practices.** Teacher-centered practices, based in behaviorist theory, incorporate repetition, direct-instruction, teaching specific skills in small steps and compartmentalizing them from real-life experiences (Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006). Teacher-centered practices work under the assumption that learning is a direct result of the stimuli presented so teachers plan linear activities with a predetermined goal or behavioral outcome that is assessed soon after introducing concepts to children. A teacher-directed approach limits children’s choices, reinforces individual work rather than collaborative work with peers, and uses rewards and punishment as a system of classroom management (Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006). An example of a teacher-directed approach to learning about the alphabet looks something like this: (1) a teacher introduces a specific letter to the class through a demonstration or book, (2) the teacher engages the whole group in an activity using the letter, (3) the teacher presents an activity for all the children to complete that has a predetermined outcome such as completing a tracing worksheet for the letter being studied, (4) and then the child would be assessed on their ability to recognize and name the letter as well as represent it on the worksheet (Johnson & Jenkins, 2009). Success, of the child and teacher, is determined by a child’s ability to demonstrate mastery of the skill using the chosen assessment tools.

Child-centered programs, based in the cognitive learning theories of Piaget and Vygotsky, focus on providing children repeated social and academically oriented
experiences that help children construct their own understanding of concepts with informal lessons that reinforce accurate knowledge (Malaguzzi, 1998; Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006). Child-centered practices work under the assumption that children learn at their own paces and that repeated experiences help children solidify and expand their understanding of concepts within the context of their environment (Rinaldi, 1998; 2012). Child-centered programs focus on the whole child, address academic and social development of children based on individual need, and values socially-constructed knowledge (Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006). Loris Malaguzzi (1998), the late Italian educator and advocate for a child-center constructivist approach to early childhood, believed that knowledge belongs to a child’s social development in process and that the aim of teaching is to: provide children with conditions for learning, to offer rich problem solving situations for them to puzzle over, and become a “complementary resource to the child and offering multiple options, suggestive ideas, and sources of support” (Malaguzzi, 1998, p. 83).

Carolyn Edwards (2012) discusses listening to children as a way of entering into a relationship with children that allows the teacher to observe, appreciate and support the active learning of children. Teachers who listen to children in this way and work from a child-centered perspective plan experiences that are related to the lives of the children, provide children with multiple opportunities to choose involvement in activities and introduce concepts across content areas (Edwards, 2012; Rinaldi, 2012). For example, teachers can provide children with multiple opportunities to demonstrate their emerging understanding of reading and writing. A child who is exposed to a literature rich environment with repeated open-ended experiences using reading and writing materials is
going to learn to recognize the alphabet as a system of symbols used in communication. In this example, the child would be assessed on how they demonstrate their understanding of the alphabet as a system of symbols, and not exclusively on their ability to recognize and reproduce individual letters and sounds (Johnson & Jenkins, 2009).

**Teaching in a high-stakes environment.** With a wealth of research supporting child-centered approaches teachers continue to struggle with accepting and implementing the most developmentally appropriate approach in classrooms because they face a multitude of pressures. One example that places great pressure on teachers is the accountability movement and the expectation that all children will master curriculum objectives and be ready for grade level work at the same time. In a study of 34 kindergarten teachers, Parker and Neuhrarth-Pritchett (2006) found that teachers who embraced a child centered approach felt pressured to by teachers in the next grade level to focus more on the academic aspect of the classroom in order to prepare children for first grade. The authors collected data from 34 kindergarten teachers in a rural school in the southeastern United States. All the teachers were female, 18 had bachelor degrees and 16 had master degrees. Only one teacher identified herself as African American. The study collected data using surveys, interviews and observations. Interviews lasted an hour and questioned teachers about their instructional beliefs and practices.

Parker & Neuhrarth-Pritchett (2006) used six key questions to assess teacher beliefs. Assessment of teacher responses produced three categories with 9 teachers characterizing themselves as primarily teacher-directed, 16 characterizing themselves as both teacher-directed and child-centered and 9 classifying themselves as primarily child-centered and the self-reports were confirmed by observations of the kindergarten
teachers. Teacher responses to interview questions were compared and contrasted for themes within each category. Study results indicated that all participating teachers believed that kindergarten had become more academic, they all experienced pressure from peers to prepare children for the next grade, and they all valued a child-centered approach but not all transferred that belief into their practice with some not understanding or able to communicate the benefits of child-centered practices.

Even when they value the child-centered approach teachers revert to using teacher-directed methods to produce immediate measurable results (Brown & Feger, 2010). Teachers, especially those new to the profession, struggle to reconcile what they have learned in their training courses regarding appropriate practice with the current reform pressures of the classroom (Mahmood, 2013). Pre-service teachers involved in training and preparation programs are subject to the views of their education institutions and through course offerings programs can shape or change the beliefs incoming students have about child development (Brown & Feger, 2010; Jung & Jin, 2014).

In a study of student perceptions about play in early childhood classrooms Jung & Jin (2014) examined how college students enrolled in classes focusing on early childhood and child & family studies perceived play and how they understood the role of play in learning and as part of the curriculum. They surveyed 207 college students across all four years of undergraduate study using the Future Professionals Survey designed by the authors and a team of professional colleagues. Their results indicated that students, freshman to seniors valued play and considered it important. Differences emerged when students responded to their perceptions about play and learning and play in the curriculum. Students early in their program held positive perceptions about play but as
they entered the final years of their study their perceptions about play and learning and play in the curriculum shifted and “participants appeared to view play as only potentially helpful or even less helpful in children’s learning” (Jung & Jin, 2014, p. 370). There could be a number of reasons why students in this study began to change perceptions about the importance of play in early childhood but the results indicate that something took place in their training programs that changed their perceptions.

New teachers are also trying to figure out what their identity is as a teacher. They enter the field having been educated in schools that have implemented high-stakes testing and draw from their own experiences as a frame of reference for understanding the profession of teaching (Brown & Feger, 2010). In a case study that followed nine pre-service teachers in Texas, Brown & Feger (2010) focused on three of the nine, and explored the questions: “(a) how do preservice teachers figure their identities as early educators in high stakes early education contexts, and (b) how do they plan to address policy makers’ reform in their own early education environments?” (p. 289-290).

Teacher candidates were recruited because they were participating in a three semester program for training early childhood educators in urban Texas. The program prepared educators to work with children in early childhood through fourth grade. They engaged in a combination of course work complimented with field experiences that took place in Texas public schools classrooms. Cooperating teachers were required to implement a mandated K-12 curriculum known as the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) and were required to take the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills test (TAKS) in Grades 3-11 (Brown & Feger, 2010). Pre-K teachers were required to
implement at Texas Education Agency’s voluntary pre-K guidelines which are aligned with the TEKS.

Each participating teacher candidate was interviewed five times over the course of their teacher preparation program. Interviews asked questions related to the following:

1) How would they describe their experiences within the Texas public school system?

2) How they felt policies affected public education?

3) How they would describe their perceived role of the student, the teacher and the mandated curriculum?

4) How they would describe their conceptions of themselves as early educators?

5) How did the coursework and field experiences influence constructs of role of student, teacher, mandated curriculum and conceptions of self as teacher?

6) How they envisioned seeing themselves address the policy makers’ demands for improved student achievement in their own classrooms?

Interviews were coded using external codes from a conceptual framework and internal codes developed from emerging themes in the transcripts. Trustworthiness was strengthened by using member checks, triangulation across data sources, and peer debriefing. Questions, critiques and additional input from a community of scholars were used to revise the article.

The authors found that participants’ experiences in public school systems provided a weak understanding of what it meant to be educated. Their experiences provided them with a weak understanding of the purpose of public education with the majority of tension surrounding issues of student achievement (Brown & Feger, 2010).
All three participants saw the state’s accountability system as a problem. They felt that improvement meant moving away from high-stakes reform but their experiences within the public school system “did not provide them with much knowledge or experience as to how they might work past this issue in their future ECE classrooms” (Brown & Feger, 2010, p. 294). The three participants also wanted to avoid the mandated curriculum and to stay away from having to prepare children for the test, hoping to work in non-testing grades. They continually positioned the tests as something to avoid but they understood that they would be part of their teaching realities (Brown & Feger, 2010).

The authors also found that teacher candidates observed disconnects between what they were taught in the teacher education program and what was actually happening in classrooms. They each discussed learning how important it was to integrate constructivism and child-directed learning in the classroom but observed that “artifacts of the TEKS and TAKS tests dominated what was taught in the worlds of their field placement” (Brown & Feger, 2010, p. 296).

When prompted to discuss developmentally appropriate practice, each candidate demonstrated an understanding of and attraction to the concepts but struggled with what it meant and how to put into practice because it was something that was not discussed or modeled in the teacher preparation program. Participants defined developmentally appropriate practice using their cooperating teachers as models and field experiences as reference points. These references and experiences did not always define developmentally appropriate practice correctly as exampled by one participant stating that the teacher was very aware of what is developmentally appropriate and “has made comments about not teaching certain things because they learn that in first grade, even if
some students seem ready” (Brown & Feger, 2010, p. 296). The same participant noted
that appropriate practice is based on “children being ready to learn the curriculum, and
when asked again to discuss child-directed teaching practices, she stated ‘I don’t think
that’s practical for kindergarten’” (Brown & Feger, 2010, p. 296). These statements
indicate that the participant was defining appropriate practice based on a time-line
imposed by school adopted curriculum goals and not the individual developmental levels
of children.

The authors concluded that even as participants engaged in a professional
development program aimed at demonstrating how to work as an early childhood
professional they struggled to move beyond the idea that teaching young children was
more than delivering content through engaging activities (Brown & Feger, 2010). The
course work and field experiences kept them focused on how to deliver mandated content
to students and “seemed to erode much of the sediment that made up the initial figured
conceptions of what effective instruction for young children entailed” (Brown & Feger,
2010, p. 302).

This study also reinforces that pre-service teacher are forming a belief system that
will impact the decisions they make about classroom practice. Belief systems play a part
in teacher dispositions which have an effect on student outcomes (Meuller & Hindin,
2011). The National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE)
defines disposition as professional attitudes, values, and beliefs demonstrated through
both verbal and non-verbal behaviors as educators interact with students, families,
colleagues, and communities. Teacher belief systems are developed and reinforced
through coursework and professional development but also through field placements and mentorships with other teachers (Meuller & Hindin, 2011).

The national trend on accountability is a challenging and formidable influence on teacher beliefs and practices. Placing the livelihood of the school district and its teachers on test outcomes has changed the way many teachers view the goals of their work, impacting their choices because the bulk of their concentration is focused on accountability (Koyama & Kania, 2014; Milner, Sondergeld, Demir, Johnson, & Czerniak, 2012). In the accountability culture, teachers are required to make difficult choices that support and provide test practice rather than provide practice using higher-order thinking that engages the learner and encourages personal investment in learning the content (Valli & Chambliss, 2007).

In a longitudinal qualitative study conducted by Valli & Chambliss (2007) within a larger study of reading and math instruction in a school system that serves culturally diverse students with moderate to high levels of poverty, researchers compared two types of reading lessons taught by a veteran teacher. Over the course of two years, researchers found that the teacher’s engaging and emotionally supportive practices changed significantly when she was implementing an intervention reading lesson that prepared children for the state’s high stakes test.

In year one, the teacher was observed implementing a reading program that combined the use of active engagement through orchestrated lessons meant to encourage participation and higher order thinking about the text. For this lesson, the students were split into groups based on reading levels. In each group the students were expected to read, write, contribute to conversation and listen to other speakers. The teacher selected
texts that would be of interest to the groups, met with each group for discussion and interaction with the texts, and provided a more open-ended format for vocabulary and comprehension assessment.

In year two, and at the suggestion of the participant, the same teacher was observed implementing a supplementary intervention lesson for children who were culturally diverse and at risk for performing poorly on high stakes tests. Her methods of instruction focused specifically on test taking. She made a text choice that “lent itself to the type of short-response questions” (Valli & Chambliss, 2007, pg. 63) they would be asked on the test. She gave students a publisher’s practice packet that concentrated on vocabulary and comprehension using multiple choice bubble sheets. The packet also included four open-ended questions similar to what would be on the test. In this group the students were asked to read, write, speak and listen but all in preparation for the test.

There were two significant outcomes for this study that reflects on teacher curriculum choices and their consequences for school climate. First the students in the intervention class felt less likely to success and less prepared for the test. Secondly, the climate of the intervention classroom was negatively impacted by the focus placed on the test. The curriculum choices made by the teacher in the first year strengthened the relationships between the teacher and students because they were encouraged to personally connect with the curriculum content (Valli & Chambliss, 2007). Conversely in the intervention group, the teacher started with a positive attitude but admitted to quickly becoming frustrated and interacting more negatively with students. The researchers concluded that “activity goals and tasks designed solely for test-taking
purposes seemed to have dramatically transformed the nature of classroom discourse and teacher-student relations” (Valli & Chambliss, 2007, pg. 72).

**Accountability in Early Childhood Education.** Early childhood education, defined as infancy through third grade, has been largely protected from the accountability movement in the past but is now feeling more and more pressure to standardize the way the youngest children are taught. According to the NAEYC position statement on developmentally appropriate practice (2009) “mandated accountability requirements, particularly third grade testing, exert pressures on schools and teachers at K–2, who in turn look to teachers of younger children to help prepare students to demonstrate the required proficiencies later” (p. 3).

The alignment between what children experience in preschool and what they are expected to know as they enter kindergarten is changing the way teachers think about early education and impacting classroom choices. In a qualitative study Hatcher, Nuner, & Paulsel (2012) compared beliefs about kindergarten readiness and the role preschool plays in preparing children for the transition. The authors interviewed 13 teachers and 16 parents from three separate programs in two different states. The participants also completed a demographics questionnaire. After multiple readings of interview transcripts, coding the interviews for themes and units, and peer review of different points of data analysis the authors determined six themes. Among the themes was an increased emphasis on and urgency to prepare children academically for kindergarten accompanied with a general sense of anxiety about new and more rigorous kindergarten expectations. For example, Hatcher et.al. (2012) stated that:
“Eleven teachers and 12 parents described literacy skills (both general and specific) as essential to kindergarten readiness. Specific skills such as letter recognition, sound/letter association, recognizing sight words and names, and writing—especially the ability to write one’s own name—were noted. One teacher from Program A described her changing expectations for writing, based on local kindergarten practices: I want their names to be written with a capital first letter and lower case. … The children in this program come in the beginning of the morning and sign in on a question of the day. … I don’t like to see them [children] going into kindergarten and immediately being corrected. (Teacher 2)” p.6.

A troubling consequence of the accountability trend in early childhood is the impact it has on the choices teachers make regarding emotional climates in classrooms. Even though research has repeatedly determined that “children develop best when they have secure, consistent relationships with responsive adults and opportunities for positive relationships with peers” and “development and learning advance when children are challenged to achieve at a level just beyond their current mastery, and also when they have many opportunities to practice newly acquired skills” (NAEYC, 2009, p. 13), new teachers are trained to focus on delivering the mandated content rather than developing skills that foster conditions for learning (Brown & Feger, 2010).
Supportive environments

There is agreement among researchers that teacher-child interactions are of high quality when they are based on the teacher’s ability and willingness to: be emotionally available; construct interconnected supportive environments in the classroom; understand the components of teacher child relationship quality and the factors that impact it; and engage in professional development related to enriching relationship quality (Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Merritt, Wanless, Rimm-Kaufman, Cameron, & Peugh, 2012; Pianta, Stuhlman, & Hamre, 2002; Swick & Williams, 2006).

Much of the research evidence on teacher-child interactions suggests that there are three main dimensions to interaction quality: emotionally supportive environments, interactive and content rich instructional support, and consistent organization of the day (Colmer, et.al, 2011; Mashburn, Pianta, Hamre, Downer, Barbarin, Bryant, Burchinal, Early, 2008; Merritt, et.al, 2012; Myers & Pianta, 2008; Thomason & La Paro, 2009). Within each dimension, teachers make choices that create positive or negative environments for children. Supportive environments in early childhood play a critical role in developing behavior patterns and self-regulations, both of which are important to later school success (Maldonado-Carreno & Votruba-Drzal, 2011; Hamre, & Pianta, 2005).

Emotionally supportive environments. Emotional support is especially important to overall school success because it provides a foundation for social development and self-regulation. Teachers who are emotionally supportive engage in specific behaviors that create a climate that has physiological, emotional, and developmental consequences. For example, Hatfield, Hestenes, Kintner-Duffy and
O’Brien (2013) conducted a study that attempted to identify how classroom quality impacts preschool children’s stress response systems. More specifically the study focused on how classroom quality, specifically warm interactions, classroom management and instructional discussions related to activity in the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis and the sympathetic nervous system (SNS). The HPA axis produces cortisol which is the hormone that can impact behavior and brain functioning, and regulates bodily functions and emotional expression. Salivatory cortisol is widely accepted as a measure of activity in the HPA axis (Hatfield, et. al, 2013). Activity in the SNS is related to increased salivary alpha-amylase (sAA) production, which is an enzyme in the mouth that aids in digestion (Hatfield, et. al, 2013). Levels of activity in the HPA axis and SNS were therefore determined by measuring cortisol and sAA levels in the saliva of participating children at different points of a typical day: after children arrived, mid-morning after free play and in the afternoon.

They conducted the study with sixty-three typically developing preschool children with diverse backgrounds between the ages of 36 and 59 months from 14 classrooms in child care centers in North Carolina. The child care centers were broken up into two categories based on the state’s Star Rated License. High quality centers were rated a 4 or 5 star and low quality centers were those rated 3 or below. Children spent an average of 38.75 hours a week in child care and had been enrolled in classrooms for at least 2 months prior to data collection. Trained observers spent two days in the classrooms. The lead author used the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS Pre-K; Pianta, LaParo, & Hamre, 2008) as a measurement of observed teacher-child interactions while two graduate students used a modified version of the ECERS-Revised (Harms, Clifford,
& Cryer, 1998). The CLASS instrument assesses three domains of classroom or process quality: emotional support, classroom organization and instructional support.

Emotional support was the only indicator of process quality that appeared to be related to children’s levels of cortisol and sAA. As measured by the CLASS-PreK “classrooms with higher levels of warm, sensitive interactions with the teacher and peers, more frequent child-initiated activities, and increase sensitivity for children’s emotional expression and autonomy displayed a decline in cortisol from morning to the afternoon and lower total sAA over the day” (Hatfield, et. al, 2013, p. 353). Highly organized classrooms with quality materials did not mediate the need for emotional support in regards to cortisol levels (Hatfield, et. al, 2013). Results indicated that even when classrooms had a variety of materials for children to use independently if the classroom climate did not include warmth and emotional support, and teachers with child-centered beliefs about play, children experienced cortisol increases throughout the day which would indicate continuous levels of stress.

Hatfield et al. (2013) established that emotionally supportive environments result in physiological and emotional stability for children and can in some instances reduce stress. Curby, Brock, and Hamre (2013) also looked at emotionally supportive environments but wanted to determine if exposure to emotional support consistency is associated with achievement gains and social competence/problem behavior. The researchers suggest that the strength and benefits of emotional support come more from consistency in responsiveness rather than quantity of warm responses.

Curby et al. (2013) examined the average levels of observed emotional support and the consistency as predictors of children’s outcomes. In their study consistency
referred to “the degree to which a teacher’s interactions are rated as offering the same level of quality in emotional support throughout a day of pre-K” (Curby, et. al, 2013, p. 294). They collected data from two waves of a larger study by the National Center for Early Development and Learning. The first wave, named the Multi-State Study of Pre-Kindergarten collected data from six states in 2001-2002. The second wave, named the State-Wide Early Education Programs Study collected data from five states in 2003-2004. The sample for the study included 2439 participating children, 1758 children had teacher-reported competency data and 1776 had teacher-reported problem behavior data. Children were on average 4.62 years old when they were assessed in the fall.

The researchers used several measures to gather data. First the CLASS (previously discussed) was used to provide a measure of the quality of teacher interactions. Children were observed by trained observers at least one time with many being observed multiple times. This study looked at emotional support which is determined by the CLASS using four dimensions: positive climate, negative climate, teacher sensitivity, and over control. Academic outcomes were assessed using the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-III (Dunn & Dunn, 1997) to capture children’s receptive vocabulary; the Oral and Written Language Scales (OWLS; Carrow-Woolfolk, 1995) to assess expressive language; and two subsets of the Woodcock-Johnson III Tests of Achievement: Rhyming and Applied Problems (Woodcock, McGrew, & Mather, 2001). Social outcomes were assessed by teachers using the Teacher-Child Rating Scale (Hightower, Work, Cowen, Lotyczewski, Spinell, Guare, and Rohrbeck, 1986) which is a 38 item teacher-report survey of children’s competence and problem behavior. Five data
sets were created and analyzed using hierarchical linear modeling which the researchers felt allowed them to respect the nested nature of the data.

The study results reaffirmed what other studies have suggested since there were consistent child level predictors of academic and social outcomes (Curby et. al, 2013). Across the board, boys tended to do worse on academic and social assessments than girls. Comparison of ethnicity determined that Black and Hispanic children tended to perform worse than White children, who were the comparison group, on academic assessments with an exception being letter naming in which Hispanic children did not score significantly different from White children and Black children scored significantly higher that White children. Multiracial/other groups scored worse than White children. For social outcomes, Hispanic children were considered by their kindergarten teachers to have significantly higher levels of social competence and fewer behavior problems than White children. With regards to social competence and problem behavior, Black and Multiracial/Other children were similar to White children (Curby, et. al, 2013).

The study results also extended the literature on the importance of emotional support by finding that consistency was essential as a predictor of academic and social outcomes. Data analysis models that used only the emotional support mean did not show any relations to outcomes, but models using standard deviations of emotional support calculated to determine within day consistency showed significant associations related to outcomes. Emotional support consistency was related to OWLS results, Woodcock-Johnson III Rhyming and letter naming, and competence in Kindergarten (Curby, et. al, 2013). The researchers concluded that children participating in this study who were enrolled in classrooms with more emotional support consistency performed better. The
researchers note that “the sole predictor emotional support consistency was a significant predictor of all seven outcomes” and that “either alone or in combination emotional support consistency is a better predictor of children’s academic and social outcomes than the emotional support mean” (Curby, et al., 2013, p. 303).

An interesting finding from this study was how subtle differences in emotional support consistency significantly related to outcomes. They found that supportiveness of emotional support did not range greatly and that on average the classrooms rated mid to high in quality but the significant differences in outcomes suggested that children were attuned to the emotional climate (Curby, et. al, 2013). Those subtleties are important because they provide children with an emotional environment that helps them feel comfortable and safe. Loris Malaguzzi (1998), in his description of an education based on relationships, suggests that the system of relationships in a classroom has an almost autonomous capacity to educate and when it is cultivated it supports the exchange of ideas that help children develop a sense of belonging and confidence to participate in school life.

**Emotionally insecure environments.** As the previous section has pointed out, emotionally supportive environment enrich and predict greater success for children. Unfortunately emotional abuse, or maltreatment, in classrooms does occur, and even though it is not addressed rigorously in the literature, it is found to happen to children already at risk, making it important to address at this point (McEachern, Aluede, & Kenny, 2008; McKenzie, 2009; Parks & Kennedy, 2007; Suski, 2014). Although the majority of environments are healthy, those environments that are not are cause for
concern and reiterate a need for teacher training, education and professional development regarding the development of emotionally supportive and secure environments.

Studies have shown specific groups of children are more likely to experience higher conflict, bullying by teachers and emotional abuse (Curby, et.al, 2013; Hartley, Bauman, Nixon, & Davis, 2015; McKenzie, 2009; Sylvester, 2010). Boys, children of racial backgrounds other than white, children with lower socio-economic backgrounds, children with special needs, and children at-risk for school failure are more likely to experience less quality emotional environments (Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Hughes, Wu, Kwok, Villarreal & Johnson, 2012; Ladd, Birch & Buhs, 1999; Rudasill, 2011; Suski, 2014).

There are limited examples in the literature but one qualitative report by McKenzie (2009) was conducted as an action research study with practicing teachers looking at perceptions of being white female educators working in schools serving students of color. The seven white female teachers were experienced with all of them teaching for at least 8 years and three teachers having more than 15 years of experience. They met once a month for six months and discussed why they felt schools were not serving children of color more successfully, and they were struggling to help their students achieve. The author felt confident that she would be able to participate in the conversations and professionally cultivate attitudes. However, what began for McKenzie (2009) as what she termed “interventionist action research” became an environment in which the participants readily released their hostility and racism toward students, admitting to being mean to students, and disclosing examples of maltreatment.
She determined three ways in which participating teachers engaged in “shaming the other” (McKenzie, 2009, p. 133). She felt that teachers engaged in criminalizing and pathologizing students of color by labeling children engaging in seemingly natural and age appropriate behavior with descriptors like gangsters and freaks. She also believed that participating teachers disrespected and blamed their students for teacher behavior. The teachers presented examples of their behavior that McKenzie (2009) interpreted as devaluing the children and reflected that teachers treated children like they thought they were accustomed to being treated, essentially justifying their behavior and blaming it on the circumstances of children. Finally she identified teacher behavior that was meant to humiliate and exclude children in an effort to control students and manage behavior. She provides an example of a teacher admitting to getting the entire class to taunt a student who did not want to come into the classroom and another who regularly puts kids in the hall for misbehavior. McKenzie’s (2009) report is one example of the ways in which teachers engage in subtle emotional abuse or maltreatment of children that is easily hidden.

In another example of a study comparing bullying victimization among general and special education students Hartley, Bauman, Nixon, & Davis (2015) found that students with special needs were 1.85% more likely to report verbal abuse from adults than their typically developing peers. Hartley et al. (2015) looked at self-reports from 3,305 students from a national sample of students ranging from grade 5 to 12 in 31 public schools from 12 states. The study focused on participants who reported victimization as two to three times per month or more. Participating students completed a comprehensive survey developed by researchers with an expertise in bullying. The survey, administered
in web-based form, was completed in classrooms by participating students. No external validation was used so results relied solely on the self-report of participants.

This report looked at both peer and adult bullying among general education and special education students with an emphasis on three forms of bullying: verbal, relational, and physical. Bullying was considered verbal if it involved actions like name calling. Relational bullying involved being excluded, threatened, talked about, or being the victim of rumors. Physical bullying involved being physically hurt intentionally by another person.

Overall, students with special needs were more likely to experience physical and emotional acts of bullying with verbally bullying being the most common with 62.8% of participants reporting victimization by peers or adults (Hartley, et. al, 2015). In regard to adult perpetrators of verbal bullying, adults were 1.85 times more likely to verbally bully students in special education classes; 2.23 times more likely to bully boys than girls in general education and, more likely to verbally bully students in high school. Within those high school students, adults were more likely to verbally bully students receiving special education services. For relational bullying, adults were 2.95 times more likely to bully students receiving services in special education; 2.44 times more likely to relationally bully boys; and more likely to relationally bully high school students vs. elementary or middle school students. Physical bullying continued the same pattern with adults reported to be 3.82 times more likely to physically bully students receiving special education services vs. those in general education courses; 3.72 times more likely to physically bully boys rather than girls in general education; and more likely to physically

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bully high school students and of those high school students more likely to physically bully students receiving special education services.

Hartley et.al (2015) concluded that the study added support to previous research that students with special needs are overrepresented as victims of bullying in American schools and that adults are perpetrating the bullying abuse at alarming rates. The authors also suggested that adult behavior may act to reinforce social acceptance of bullying behavior toward students receiving special education services and that continued teacher training and professional development is necessary to make sure school environments are safe and secure for all students.

The reality of emotionally abusive classroom environments is that teachers use forms of emotional abuse or bullying to condone their teaching practices (Riley, Lewis, and Brew, 2010; Sylvester, 2010). In an essay by Sylvester (2010), the author describes bullying behavior as “repeated, intentional, and within the context of an unequal power relationship” (p. 42). She describes how teachers, either intentionally or unintentionally, engage in bullying behaviors such as sarcasm, inflexibility in accepting assignments, implying incompetence, and threatening new students they consider behavior problems as harmful to students but are disguised as good teaching practices (Sylvester, 2010). The bullying behavior, although emotionally abusive, is condoned and supported because it is masked as behavior motivation, part of normal classroom instruction, appropriate disciplinary response or good classroom management (McKenzie, 2009; Riley, Lewis, and Brew, 2010; Sylvester, 2010).

In a separate essay, McEachern, Aluede, & Kenny (2008) outline emotional abuse in classrooms, and discuss teacher behaviors and the effects of emotional abuse on
students. They reviewed the limited research on emotional abuse in classrooms to determine a definition and found that there is a lack of agreement about what it means to abuse students. They could agree that emotional abuse, at least in the United States, involves constant use of verbally abusive language, harsh criticism used to demean, placing excessive unreasonable demands on students, and/or withholding warmth and affection (McEachern, et. al, 2008). Emotional abuse should not be confused with isolated incidents of poor judgment, frustration, or stress by teachers. Emotional abuse is an ongoing, repetitive, and sustained pattern of behavior that has a negative impact.

Discipline in classrooms is different than abuse but some practices should not include any of the following: punitive methods for suppressing or preventing behavior; focus on a student’s character, personality, race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability; involve name calling or labeling; demeaning, negative or derogatory comments about student; denying the feelings of the student; yelling, screaming or name calling; inconsistent erratic behavior; or threats to control classroom (McEachern, et. al, 2008). The authors also identified six categories of emotionally abusive behaviors:

a) Demeaning
b) Discriminating, prejudicial, and biased
c) Dominating and controlling
d) Destabilizing and intimidating
e) Distancing and emotionally no supportive
f) Attitudinal behaviors that have a negative impact on the emotional climate (McEachern, et. al, 2008, p. 5).
Abusive teacher behaviors have important academic, behavioral, emotional and social effects on students (McEachern, et. al, 2008; Sylvester, 2010). Academically, abuse can impact students’ motivation for participating in school, completing school assignments, and create negative teacher-child interactions. Students who experience abuse, or maltreatment, from teachers can also be inattentive, distracted, unable to stay on task, perform at lower levels and struggle to focus on school work – all of which impacts their ability to succeed or develop academically (McEachern, et. al, 2008). Behaviorally, students who experience abuse in the classroom exhibit behavior problems and externalizing behaviors, rebel and display impulsively aggressive behaviors, experience anxiety or resist attending school, or become untrusting with some feeling isolated and alone (McEachern, et. al, 2008).

Specific behaviors exhibited by emotionally supportive teachers construct an amiable emotional climate (Malaguzzi, 1998). Emotionally supportive and available teachers create a sense of security in their classrooms. An emotionally secure classroom environment includes: fostering connections between peers, referring to children by name, becoming knowledgeable about children’s family and interests outside of school, giving children individualized attention, encouraging them to work independently and fostering children’s skills at engaging in group debate, conversation, and discussion (Downer, Sabol, & Hamre, 2010; Gandini, 2012).

Teachers who are emotionally supportive are described as warm, kind, sensitive and attentive (Merritt, et.al, 2012). Emotionally supportive teachers also use a positive affect when engaging with children, choose guidance rather than punishments as a method of classroom management and positively engage children in conversations. They
are aware of children’s social and emotional needs and engage children in exchanges that continue to strengthen their emotional knowledge. Finally, emotionally supportive teachers respond thoughtfully to social situations and consider them opportunities for teaching and learning (Hamre & Pianta, 2005).

**Instructionally Supportive Environments.** The accountability movement has placed more emphasis on instructional methods that ask children to gain skills they are developmentally not ready for and stems from the belief that learning is a direct result of teaching (Carlsson-Paige, McLaughlin, and Wolfsheimer-Almon, 2015; Pinar, 2012). For example, in an essay by Carlsson-Paige, et al. (2015), the authors discuss how Common Core literacy requirements for kindergarten threaten effective approaches to instruction because they “place huge emphasis on print literacy and state bluntly that, by the end of kindergarten, children are to ‘read emergent-reader texts with purpose and understanding’” (p. 2). The authors state that many children are not developmentally ready to read in kindergarten and that learning to read is highly individual. In a review of the literature, the authors found no research to support early reading leads to long-term gains but there was support for long term gains for a play-based early childhood environment. Play-based, experiential environments provide children with the necessary experiences that build a foundation for reading (Carlsson-Paige, et.al, 2015). Play supports children as they understand that real things can be represented using symbols, strengthens their oral language development, and helps them solidify ideas and represent experiences they have inside and outside of school.

The essay by Carlsson-Paige et al. (2015) reinforces the use of instructionally supportive environments. Instructionally supportive environments are those in which
“teachers ask questions that require problem-solving and higher order thinking, provide opportunities to apply previously learned knowledge to new situations, embed learning within real-world contexts, initiate frequent feedback loops that prolong learning moments, and model the use of language for multiple purposes” (Downer, Sabol, and Hamre, 2010, p. 706). Instructionally supportive environments are also found to predict academic skill acquisition, particularly language skills, and social skills for prekindergarten children (Burchinal, et al., 2008) but not all children are experiencing instructionally supportive environments.

In a study of preschool children in California, Howes, Fuligini, Hong, Huang, & Lara-Cinsomo (2013) examined how the instructional context predicted teacher-child relationship quality. The researchers examined the experiences of 118 low-income, predominantly Latino children who were enrolled in a center-based preschool for the first time at the age of 3 years or 4 years (Howes, et. al, 2013). Children were observed in 65 classrooms which were located in publicly sponsored districts or in private non-profit preschools. Classrooms had an average of 20 children and 3 adults with the majority of teachers having an Associate’s degree or higher in child development or a related field.

The researchers wanted to examine any links between dimensions of instructional context experienced by children and the quality of the relationships they formed with teachers. Howes et al. (2013) described the instructional context of the early childhood classroom as including an instructional climate as well as the teachers’ instructional strategies. The instructional climate looked at the behaviors teachers engaged in as they worked with the whole group to enrich academic learning. Teacher instructional strategies were the ways in which teachers engaged young children in the learning
process, and for early childhood those generally fall into two categories, didactic or scaffolding (Howes, et. al, 2013).

Instructional context was assessed using several strategies. First, instructional strategies were observed and assessed using the Emerging Academics Snapshot (EAS) for child-teacher interactions. Instructional climate was assessed using the 7 point rating scale from the 2001 edition of Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS). Instructional climates and strategies were observed in a single day in the fall, after school was in session for two months by trained observers. Each class was observed for 3 to 4 hours during the morning. Observers completed 30 minute observational cycles and coded the first 20 minutes of the observational cycle for EAS and the final 10 minutes for the CLASS. The researchers assessed instructional strategies using two measures from the EAS- scaffolding and didactic strategies. Instructional climate was assessed using CLASS subscales of productivity, concept development, learning formats, quality of feedback, and children’s engagement (Howes, et. al, 2013).

In the spring of the same year, teacher-child relationships were observed for secure base behavior of target children in regard to interactions with their teachers using the Attachment Q-set. The spring observations were naturalistic in nature, lasted four hours, and focused on attachment-related interactions between teacher and target children (Howes, et. al, 2013). Observers used descriptive field notes to complete the Q-sort for each target child observed. All data were then analyzed for associations between observed and perceived teacher-child relationships.

The results of the study indicated that the children in the study experienced lower quality instructional and emotional climates, children experienced didactic instruction
more frequently than scaffolding, and, in general, teachers and children were observed as having less secure and more avoidant teacher-child relationships than teacher-child dyads from a decade ago (Howes et al., 2013). Children experienced instructional climates in the low range with these climates lower in learning format, concept development and quality of feedback. Children who exhibited higher avoidance behaviors experienced less scaffolding. Teachers engaged children with whom they perceived a close relationship with in both forms of instructional strategies.

The two domains of instructional climate were learning format and quality of feedback. These emerged as important for teacher-child relationship development (Howes et al., 2013). Learning format focused on the teacher’s ability to plan and effectively implement lessons that maximized children’s interest, engagement and developmental ability. Quality of feedback looked at the extent to which the teacher offered children verbal feedback that helped children continue to participate and deepen their understanding of a concept. The authors reinforce that for teachers to score high in these areas they have to know the children, be keen observers, be skilled and willing to use children’s perspectives in their planning and implement learning opportunities that really engage children.

Instructionally supportive environments are important because they provide children with the necessary concept development to make gains in academic areas like language and literacy (Burchinal, et al., 2008; Howes, Burchinal, Pianta, Bryant, Early, Clifford, & Barbarin, 2008). Unfortunately, studies indicate that children are experiencing low levels of instructional support, especially in preschool (Justice, Mashburn, Hamre, & Pianta, 2008; Howes, et al., 2008). Some researchers suggest that
the lack of instructional support may be due to disruptive behaviors that interrupt a teacher’s ability to implement learning plans making organizational supportive environments important to successful instruction and emotional support.

**Organizational Support.** Emotional and instructional support are balanced and maintained in a classroom which has a well-defined yet flexible system of organization. One component of organizational support is establishing a method of guidance that is proactive. A proactive guidance system includes clear expectations, consistent follow-through of consequences, and multiple opportunities for children to master self-regulation and conflict resolution (Merritt, et.al, 2012; Thomason & La Paro, 2009). A fair, caring, well established and effective guidance system helps support teacher-child interactions by focusing attention on instructional opportunities and not unacceptable behaviors. The second component of supportive organization is having consistent predictable routines and rituals. Routines provide children with a way to understand and organize time. Routines and rituals create opportunities to engage in interactions that increase language development, social skills, and sense of ownership over a child’s day.

In a study looking at general interaction quality and domain specific elements of teacher-child interactions and their associations to development, Hamre, Hatfield, Pianta, and Jamil (2014) found that elements of organizational support combined with emotionally responsive classrooms predict child outcomes. The researchers used a sample of 325 early childhood classrooms to gather data on responsive classroom teaching practices and domain specific elements related to organizational strategies like routines, positive behavior management, and cognitive facilitation. The researchers had several purposes. The first was to test a bi-factor model and compare it to a traditional
three-domain factor and to two- and one-factor models. Then to examine if general factors of responsive teaching and domain specific factors predict children’s executive functioning, social, and early academic development from fall to spring in one year of preschool (Hamre, et al., 2014).

This study was conducted with 325 preschool teachers and 1407 children enrolled in their classrooms (Hamre, et al., 2014). The teachers were drawn from a larger study involved in an 18 month study on two methods of professional development that was conducted in two phases. The first phase was a semester long course that concentrated on effective teacher-child interactions. The second phase was a year-long experience in which coaches worked with teachers to provide them feedback aimed at improving teachers’ interactions with child.

Data was collected throughout the study year (Hamre, et al., 2014). Teacher surveys were collected in the fall prior to interventions. Direct assessments of children were administered during the fall and spring of the study year. Classroom observations were conducted by trained observers who visited one classroom per day, staying for 2.5 to 4 hours beginning in the morning and staying until lunch or nap. Observations were conducted from January to March.

Several measures were used to collect data (Hamre, et al., 2014). Teacher interactions were assessed using the CLASS (previously describe in the literature review) and focused on emotional support, classroom organization, and concept development. Children’s early academic skills were assessed using the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test which captures children’s receptive language: the Woodcock-Johnson-III Psychoeducational Battery which is used to assess general cognitive abilities; and the
Test of Preschool Early Literacy which assess preschool children’s emergent literacy skills. Child self-regulation was assessed using the pencil tap test (Smith-Donald, Raver, Hayes, & Richardson, 2007) which tests for inhibitory control. Working memory was assessed using the backward digit span task (Carlson, 2005) and asks the child to speak a list of digits and then repeat them in reverse ordering, increasing the number of digits by one for each trial. Teacher-child relationships were assessed using the STRS-short form (Pianta, 2001) which is a teacher report survey that assessed relationship dimensions of closeness and conflict. Teacher, child and family characteristics were gathered through a series of surveys. Teachers completed a survey at the beginning of the study that captured their education, teaching assignment and experiences with professional development. Parents completed a family questionnaire that gave researchers basic information like child gender, race/ethnicity, family income, and maternal education.

Results demonstrated associations between children’s development, teaching practices like responsive teaching, and supportive environments that include structure, organization and routine. Children in classrooms where teachers engaged in responsive teaching showed more growth in language and literacy skills, increased working memory and had decreased levels of teacher perceived conflict. Children in classrooms with more positive guidance and management, predictable routines, and organization demonstrated growth in inhibitory control. Children in classrooms with responsive teachers made gains in cognitive, self-regulation, and relational functioning (Hamre, et al., 2014).

The authors state that the bi-factor model “suggests a role for both general elements of responsive teaching, with heavy loadings for dimensions such as teacher sensitivity, as well as the more domain specific element of cognitive facilitation” (Hamre,
et al., 2014, p. 1270). They warn that push for academic outcomes have made preschool and kindergarten teachers focus more on instructional teaching practices but that “exclusive focus on instruction fails to adequately reflect the true nature of early childhood teachers’ contributions to children’s learning” (Hamre, et al., 2014. p. 1271. Results from this study reflect that responsive teaching practices predicted gains in all domains including language and literacy.

High quality teacher child interactions are a mixture of theory and practice that when combined create supportive environments. Respect and reciprocity are the major foundations for high-quality teacher child interactions and create the basis for quality teacher-child relationships that have the potential to help children adapt to the rigors of formal education by giving children a sense of self and belonging. Research reminds us that emotionally supportive environments are not only important but when combined with high quality instructional interactions have been associated with higher levels of academic skills, acquisition of language, more positive social interactions, higher social competence and fewer behavior problems (Downer, et.al., 2010; Mashburn, et.al., 2008).

**Supporting Teachers: Professional Development aimed at Teacher-Child Relationship Quality**

Keeping in mind the predictive nature of teacher child relationship patterns, and the overwhelming evidence that some children enter school at risk for establishing lower quality relationships, it is important for new and experienced teachers to be more familiar with constructing high quality relationships. It is important that they know what factors impact the quality of the relationship as well as be familiar with research based strategies that support a high quality relationship. Ways to support teachers include helping them
understand dimensions of relationship quality; characteristics of children that have been shown to impact those dimensions; and how to use the relationship as a mediating factor for success.

Research is clear that children learn best through repeated interactions with peers, teachers, and materials. The quality of those interactions is predictive of the kinds of social and academic outcomes the child will have. Strategies for supporting high quality interactions must focus on developing emotionally supportive environments that use instructionally sound teaching methods, especially in early childhood. There is an endless list of possible day-to-day strategies that teachers could use that would support high quality interactions. For example, working in small groups with children will encourage richer discussions and provide more opportunities for connecting with children (Forman & Fyfe, 1998). To really support teachers in developing strategies for consistently engaging children in high quality interactions the literature calls for a system of support that includes teacher preparation and education, ongoing professional development, curriculum that emerges from the interests of children, consistent feedback and constructive evaluation of program quality (Hamre, et. al, 2013).

**Embedded professional development.** Mashburn et.al, (2008) recommends that preschool programs invest in professional development and program monitoring. Although their suggestions are focused toward preschool programs, the strategies are universal enough to implement in all early childhood settings. They suggest that professional development be embedded in the school culture.

An example of embedded professional development is mentoring programs in which more experienced teachers’ work with less experienced colleagues to evaluate and
enrich teacher-child interactions. Studies show that ongoing professional development helps teachers to improve their teaching practices. Zan and Donegan-Ritter (2013) conducted a study with Head Start directors and classroom teachers to determine what impact a coaching and mentoring intervention would have on teacher-child interactions. Four Head Start directors in Iowa were contacted to participate in this study. Each director selected four to six education supervisors to be trained as mentors with 19 total agreeing to participate. A total of 60 lead and assistant teachers from 30 classrooms agreed to participate in the study. Teachers were randomly assigned into intervention or comparison groups resulting in 38 teachers in the intervention group and 22 teachers in the comparison group.

Teachers participated in professional development that included workshops, video-based self-reflection, peer coaching, mentoring. Teachers and mentors participated in four bimonthly interactive workshops that lasted three hours each. Workshops covered topics focused on emotional (first workshop) and instructional support (final three workshops). Each intervention teacher was also videotaped monthly for 15-20 minutes during a structured time and again for 15-20 minutes during unstructured time. Videos were copied and shared with mentors and project staff. Teachers watched their own videos and used a structured reflection tool to analyze and evaluate their work. After the video-based self-reflections were completed teachers and mentors met to share information and support teachers through one-to-one conversation using the self-reflection tool as a guide.

Mentoring meetings were held monthly and led by Head Start supervisors. Each mentor worked with one classroom team comprised of one lead and one assistant
classroom teacher. The mentors used written guides to focus the conversation and engage teachers in reflective conversations about what they learned from the video self-reflections. Mentors also participated in professional development by completing a two day training to use the CLASS with reliability. Mentors also met monthly with project staff in small groups to develop important skills like effective communication, descriptive praise, and constructive feedback.

Videos were coded using the CLASS (previously described). Each teacher’s video was divided into two segments approximately 15-20 minutes long. Segments were coded by trained graduate students and a second coder independently coded a random selection of 10% of the videos (Zan & Donegan-Ritter, 2013). Comparison teachers were videotaped in September and April. T-tests were then conducted for each group for dimensions of the CLASS in September and again in April.

Results indicated that intervention groups had statistically significant improvements for four of the ten CLASS domains between September and April. Intervention group participants showed improvement in Behavior Management domain, Productivity domain, Quality of Feedback domain, and that language modeling increased significantly. The comparison group also showed statistically significant albeit negative change in two domains during the same time period. Negative Climate and Regard for Student Perspective both decreased. Additionally, results indicated that degreed and non-degreed teachers showed identical patterns of improvement which indicates that the professional development experience was equally effective for all participating teachers. This study supports the concept that ongoing mentoring and coaching can improve teacher-child interactions and result in improved learning environments for children.
Pianta, Stuhlman, & Hamre (2002) agree that mentoring as a professional development technique can support teachers. They add that the mentoring partnership should: consider goodness of fit between the two teachers; communicate with each other their understanding of the relationship; determine the process by which they will exchange information including the chain of command for any concerns or questions; and identify any external influences that are part of the school which could influence the partnership. Additionally, this relationship needs to be monitored and supported as part of a group collaborative among other staff members or other designated leadership.

Pianta, et al. (2002) recommends that professional development include interventions that assist teachers in understanding the kinds of relationships they have constructed with children and ways to continually improve the relationship quality. In a study that examined how effective a 14 week course among diverse early childhood educators impacted their beliefs, knowledge and practice researchers found that teachers demonstrated more effective emotional and instructional support (Hamre, et al., 2012). Researchers examined to what extent participation in a course on effective teacher-child interactions would impact positive changes in teachers: beliefs about their role as teacher, knowledge of effective teacher-child interactions, skill to detect effective interactions in video, beliefs about teaching early language and literacy, knowledge of the major domains of literacy and language development, and the use of effective teacher-child interactions.

Participants included 440 preschool teachers who participated in an 18 month study of two forms of professional development: a 14 week course and a yearlong consultation. Participants were recruited from a large community’s preschools and Head
Start programs across the United States. Five sites were eventually selected. Teachers were eligible to participate if they were lead teachers in publicly funded programs where the majority of children were eligible for kindergarten and did not have an IEP at the beginning of school year (Hamre, et al., 2012). Teachers who agreed to participate were then randomly assigned to one of two groups: the course group or the control group. Out of the 440 teachers, 217 teachers were in the control group and 223 were in the course condition group.

Teachers in the course condition participated in the Support of Language and Literacy Development in Preschool Classrooms Through Effective Teacher-Child Interactions and Relationships course that was designed to increase teachers’ knowledge about the role teacher-child interaction quality plays in learning and skill acquisition and to build skills for observing teacher-student interactions that help with language and literacy development (Hamre, et al., 2012). The course lasted 14 weeks and was conducted in 3 hour sessions through collaboration with local colleges. Teachers in the control group were provided usual supports and did not experience coursework during the course of the study.

Teacher’s beliefs about children’s learning were assessed using the Beliefs About Intentional Teaching. Teacher’s understanding of and knowledge about how interactions can lead to positive development was assessed using the Teachers’ Knowledge of Effective Teacher-child Interactions which is a 14 item scale that asks teachers to respond to a classroom scenario. Video Assessment of Interactions and Learning (VAIL) was used to assess teachers’ skill in detecting effective interactions. Teachers were asked to watch two videos and then identify up to five strategies the teacher used to engage
students. Beliefs About Importance of Literacy and Language Skills assess teachers by asking them to rate the importance of 12 skills for children as they transition to kindergarten. Teachers were also asked to sort specific skills into one of six language/literacy domains as a way to assess their knowledge about language/literacy skills. Finally, the CLASS was used to assess 11 dimensions of teacher-interactions.

Results from data analysis indicated that teachers who engaged in long term professional development showed positive improvements in the quality of teachers’ emotional and instructional interactions (Hamre, et al., 2012). Participants in the course treatment group endorsed more intentional teaching beliefs, demonstrated better understanding of effective interactions, and were better prepared to specifically identify multiple aspects of effective instruction from video examples (Hamre, et al., 2012). The teachers in the course treatment group also were more likely to report that language and literacy skills were vital to children’s development and demonstrated greater knowledge about these skills (Hamre, et al., 2012). Teachers in the course also demonstrated more child-focused and autonomy supportive interactions which are all part of the Emotional Support domain. Teachers were also more capable of engaging children in instructional support and demonstrated more effective use of strategies that encouraged and supported higher-order thinking, used more frequent and intensive feedback, used strategies like open ended questions and conversations, and expanded children’s talk (Hamre et al., 2012).

**Program Monitoring.** Although on-going professional development is important, program monitoring may be the most important strategy for supporting teachers. Program monitoring is an effective method because it involves direct observation and

Program monitoring is also the most important component to improving the situation for many teachers and children. Burchinal, Howes, Pianta, Bryant, Early, Clifford & Barbarin (2008) conducted a study to evaluate specific aspects of classroom quality and academic achievement in publicly funded prekindergarten programs. They found that a combination of positive interactions and instructional quality was most important to academic success. Separately the dimensions were not as effective on overall school success but when teacher engaged in interactive instruction that was emotionally supportive children performed better. Other regulatory factors like class size, continued education for teachers and specified curriculum did not guarantee the success of students. What did ensure success was the way in which teachers engaged children and the manner in which they presented instruction.

Even though teachers on average were responsive and interactions enhanced social competence, children did not experience highly interactive, responsive instruction that contained clear content rich information. For that reason, the authors recommend even programs that are considered high quality, in the case of their study, prekindergarten programs need regular on-going reflective professional development, training and curriculum initiatives that support the combination of high quality interactions and instructional support. Professional development opportunities should focus on instructional styles and child outcomes that use specialized training that is ongoing.
Supporting teachers is more complex than offering in-services a few times throughout the year. The circumstances in which they teach shift, different groups of children and parents present new challenges, and colleagues change. Because a teacher’s situation is always in flux, there is not one definitive way to support them in developing high quality interactions and positive relationships. To really support teachers, programs need to value the effectiveness of high quality interactions and promote them with ongoing professional development and teacher education, non-judgmental monitoring, and constructive feedback and evaluation. Program monitoring, when implemented to enrich relationships and improve overall outcomes for children, creates a culture of continual reflection that validates the teacher’s hard work and improves social and emotional outcomes for children.

Conclusion

The complex nature of teacher-child relationship quality is difficult to define but overwhelmingly researchers agree that the dimensions of closeness, conflict and dependency are components of overall relationship quality (Pianta, 2001). Establishing quality relationships in early childhood is essential because the support from positive relationships sets children up for success by providing children with a secure base to explore and engage in classroom activities that support academic and social development. High quality teacher-child relationships are also associated with academic achievement, social success, school readiness, school adjustment and social competence. Teacher-children relationship quality is also predictive of later relationship quality. Unfortunately not all children experience high quality teacher-child relationships with specific groups of children more likely to experience negative relationship quality. Consistently, particular
demographic characteristics and behavioral tendencies negatively impact teacher-child relationship quality.

Teacher beliefs about children, discipline and classroom policies create classroom climates in which teacher-child relationships are constructed. Those beliefs are influenced by personal experience, education and professional development, and outside pressures of accountability. Teacher beliefs also influence the kinds of supportive environments children experience. High quality supportive environments provide emotional, instructional and organizational support but teachers struggle to balance constructing all three.

Supporting teachers using ongoing long term professional development and support is essential to maintaining and improving the classroom climates for children in early childhood. Mentoring and coaching programs that use self-reflective practices have been found to provide the necessary combination of instruction, guidance and support to help teachers make gains in emotional and instructional climates.
Chapter 3

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to better understand teacher-child relationship quality through examination of teacher behaviors toward, and beliefs about, children, guidance and discipline, classroom practices, and interaction quality. Using naturalistic inquiry that assumes there are multiple ways of perceiving phenomena and a commitment to studying the actions of participants in a “setting that is not contrived, manipulated, or artificial” (Schwandt, 2001, p. 174) the study will focus on understanding the lived experience of four Head Start teachers and construct authentic situation-specific meaning from events in context (Guba, 1981; Schwandt, 1994). A theoretical framework based on the theory of attachment will guide the study but as with all naturalistic inquiry the flexible approach to studying human behavior prefers “theory to emerge from the data” (Charmaz, 2001; Glaser & Strauss, 2001; Guba, 1981; Strauss & Corbin, 1994).

Theoretical Framework

Theory of Attachment. Young children exist and develop within a complex system of relationships that are inter-related and interdependent (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Malaguzzi, 1998). Beginning with immediate family members, especially the primary care giver, children’s relationships gradually expand to include extended family members, cultural experiences and school experiences (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; O’Connor & McCartney, 2007; Swick & Williams, 2006). It is within this complex system of relationships that children experience interactions with others that determine their level of trust and sense that they can rely on adults to provide for them what they need. These early relationships also determine to what extent children will be able to relate to others,
engage in new situations and develop a sense of self in relationship to others (Ainsworth, 1989; Bowlby, 2007; Malaguzzi, 1998).

Theorists believe that attachment between infants and caregivers develops as the caregiver responds to signals provided by the infant, such as crying, that attract the caregiver and activate a behavior in the caregiver that responds to the signal (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall. 1978; Bowlby, 1979). Throughout their first year, infants begin to recognize the caregiver who responds repeatedly to his or her signals, develops a basic understanding of his or her environment, and recognizes other attachment figures (Ainsworth, 1969; 1989). Based on the actions of primary caregivers in an infant’s first year, the infant also begins to develop a basic sense of self and constructs “expectations of regularities in what happens to him or her” (Ainsworth, 1989, p. 710). Primary caregiver-child attachment supports emotional development of infants and prepares them for how to engage with other attachment figures such as grandparents, siblings, extended family, or outside caregivers that they see on a regular day-to-day basis. The quality of responsiveness from the primary caregiver is especially important because it informs the infant what to expect from other caregivers, is considered a foundation for emotional development, and determines whether the infant will be securely or insecurely attached (Bowlby, 1969; Ainsworth, 1989; Waters & Cummings, 2000). The quality of primary caregiver-child attachment is also closely associated with children’s social and academic achievement over the course of a lifetime (Ainsworth, 1989; Buyse, Verschueren, & Doumen, 2011).

A secure primary attachment is important because it provides a secure base for infants to explore their environments, a safe haven to retreat to for comfort and a point of
reference for how they should organize the information they are rapidly exposed to (Ainsworth, et.al, 1979; Bowlby, 2007; Colmer, Rutherford, & Murphy, 2011; Waters & Cummings, 2000). Children who are securely attached are found to be more pro-social, develop quality relationships with peers, engage in complex play, develop a healthier worldview, and have positive mental health gains (Howes & Smith, 1995; Birch & Ladd, 1998; Gestwicki, 2013). Secure attachments help children develop confidence, competence and resilience which are all important characteristics for later emotional and psychological success (Verissimo, Santos, Fernandes, Shin, & Vaughn, 2014). During infancy and the toddler years the primary attachment is critical but the extension of attachment to secondary caregivers provides a buffer from the stress when a primary caregiver is unavailable (De Schipper, Tavecchio, & Van IJzendoorn, 2008). That makes it necessary for infants and toddlers to form attachments to other loving adult caregivers (Bowlby, 2007; Howes & Shivers, 2006; Pallini & Laghi, 2012).

Attachment theory demonstrates how the quality of relationships formed in infancy can influence a child’s future physical and emotional development by considering the primary care-giver as a secure base for exploration (Colmer, Rutherford, & Murphy, 2011). Attachment theory provides a theoretical framework for this study as high quality teacher child interactions can similarly impact development, especially regarding secure base behaviors. Secure attachment to teachers is important to social competence, social adjustment and peer acceptance, and emotional security (Howes, 2000; Howes & Smith, 1995). Much like healthy primary attachments, secure attachments to child-care providers can offer a protective environment where children can safely take social and academic risks resulting in an overall more positive and
productive school experience (Howes and Smith, 1995; Buyse, et.al, 2011; Colmer, et.al, 2011).

In summary, attachment theory proposes that caretakers who engage in interactions that encourage proximity and secure base behaviors will construct close relationships that support children as they take risks. Attachment theory suggests that the caregiver response to signals from the child is the basis for what kind of relationship will be constructed. It also proposes that caretakers and children enter into relationships with their own experiences, understandings and beliefs that influence relationship quality. Using these fundamental principles of Attachment Theory, this study will examine how teachers respond to children and develop secure base behaviors, and what experiences or beliefs influence teacher decisions.

Choosing a world view

Qualitative Methods. Relationship quality is difficult to quantify because of its complex and salient nature. Each relationship has its own unique set of characteristics, experiences and intensity. Each teacher has personal experiences, values, and expectations that frame what he or she believes to be true or important about the relationships they construct with children. The classroom also serves as cultural context which is very complicated and calls for “interpretation not causal explanations” (Schwandt, 1994, p. 123). The phenomenon of teacher child relationship quality is well suited to be studied using qualitative methods because the purpose of such research is “not to measure something but rather to understand fully the meaning of the phenomena in context and to provide thick accounts of phenomena under study” (Leininger, 2001, p. 360). This study’s goals align with qualitative research purposes because it is not
attempting to produce generalizations but hopes to “examine particularistic phenomena that may be characteristic of particular individuals, groups or institutions using qualitative criteria” (Leininger, 2001, p. 360).

Qualitative research also focuses on the individual experiences of participants in naturalistic settings and attempts to make sense of phenomenon based on the meaning given to it by participants and researchers (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). This study will explore the complex nature of how relationships are constructed in the classroom from multiple perspectives but apply meaning and interpretations only to the specific individual experiences and understanding of participants and researcher (Altheide & Johnson, 1994).

In her final words of Number our days, Myerhoff (1978) reinforces the importance of telling the participants’ stories when she says that “stories are a renewal of the word” (p. 271) and “humankind as storyteller, is a human constant” (p. 272). Glesne and Peshkin (1992) also emphasizes how telling the story of people is important for participants, researchers, and readers. She points out that a good qualitative study “encourages you to compare description and analysis in your own experiences and to use it in a way that makes sense of your own particular situation” (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 176). This study hopes to develop a “working hypothesis that relates to a particular context” (Guba, 1981, p. 77) in which participants’ narratives and multiple perspectives build a better understanding of teacher-child relationship construction that participants, and other educators, could use in their development of high quality teacher-child relationships (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; House, 1990).
For these reasons, this study used naturalistic inquiry resulting in mostly interpretive representation of participants’ experiences. The study used a survey, observations, participant responses to an interactive Teacher-Belief Q-sort, and interviews to gain insight about teacher beliefs and how they impact relationship quality. Through the use of prolonged engagement, triangulation, thick description, and reflexivity this study hopes to add to the literature by presenting a more robust, comprehensive image of teacher-child relationship quality (Guba, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Schwandt, 2001).

Before I continue to outline the design elements of the study I would first like to continue the discussion of qualitative research with particular emphasis on the essential elements of a naturalistic or constructivist inquiry including the evolution of the paradigm and the emergence of grounded theory, and characteristics of establishing trustworthiness for a qualitative study. In this section, I would like to outline my understanding of qualitative research methods and how they will be addressed in the study.

**Eras of Scientific Research**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose there are three eras of scientific research – prepositivist, positivist, and the postpositivist. Each era provides a foundation for the next and has shaped, in some way, the methods for research in the present. The prepositivist era was the longest as scientists took the position of passive observers. Aristotle, the most well-known mind of the era, presented two principles: the Law of Contradiction and the Law of the Excluded Middle. The Law of Contradiction states that no proposition can be both true and false, while the Law of the Excluded Middle states that a proposition must be either true or false.
The positivist era presented five assumptions that still prevail as foundations of scientific inquiry, and from which naturalistic researchers experience resistance. The first assumption is that there is a single reality that “inquiry can converge, and that that reality is separable or fragmentable into independently manipulatable parts” and that the parts can be “singled out for study without essentially influencing the other” (Guba, 1981, p. 77). The second assumption is that observers can and should maintain a discrete distance to preserve objectivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The third assumption is that observations made at one time or place would be seen at another place and time that is similar thus allowing for the generalizing of results. This assumption is important because “it is frequently asserted that inquiry would have no point if this were not true” (Guba, 1981, p. 77). There is also an assumption of linear causality that makes it necessary to observe a cause/effect relationship within inquiry. The final assumption relates to bias and proposes research is, and should remain, value free and that “the methodology guarantees that the results of an inquiry are essentially free from the influence of any value system” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 28).

The post-positivist era emerged as leading scientist challenged the positivist approach and developed ideas about research that were almost exactly the reverse of positivism, (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For example, where positivism considers there to be one reality, postpositivism uses multiple methods in capturing as much of reality as possible (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1986). The post-positivist research paradigm also has different intentions and assumptions than the positivist view (Schwandt, 1994; 2001). It is argued that the two, although similar in value, cannot be
reconciled because research from a post-positivist perspective has its own basic beliefs, characteristics and criteria for trustworthiness.

Both the positivist and post-positivist paradigms position the researcher to value the work in different ways. The important part of choosing a research paradigm comes from recognizing what the research hopes to do. The post-positivist approach emphasizes multiple realities, interactions between the researcher and researched, connecting the research to the time, context and history of the observed with limited generalizations, understanding that each component of the research is shaped throughout the experience, and that the inquiry is influenced by values which cannot be absent from the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**Characteristics of Naturalistic Inquiry**

Qualitative research emphasizes the process of making meanings that are not measured in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Rather, qualitative research is interested in how relationships are socially-constructed. A specific type of qualitative inquiry is the naturalistic or constructivist style which has its own set of fourteen characteristics. Although each characteristic is important and interconnected to the next, a complete overview of naturalistic inquiry would be too extensive for this paper. For the purpose of this section, I will focus on the following key characteristics 1) naturalistic setting; 2) researcher as instrument; 3) emergent design; 4) building trust; 5) presentation of data; 6) grounded theory; 7) negotiated outcomes; 8) multiple methodologies; and 9) special criteria for establishing trustworthiness.
Naturalistic Inquiry and Setting. Naturalistic, or constructivist, inquiry is a form of disciplined inquiry that looks at truth differently from positivist or rationalist researchers (Guba, 1981; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Naturalistic inquiry emphasizes understanding and representing social actions from the point of view of the actors, assuming that truth is a matter of consensus among the actors and is an examination of the lived experiences of participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Schwandt, 2001). The naturalistic researcher conducts research in the natural setting of the participant because they believe “that realities are wholes that cannot be understood in isolation from their contexts, nor can they be fragmented for separate study of parts” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 39; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Schwandt, 1994).

Researcher as Instrument. Naturalistic inquiry examines human behavior and understands that it is impossible for a non-human instrument to appreciate, interpret or construct meaning from social actions or situations. Therefore, naturalistic inquiry uses the researcher as the instrument for data collection. Lincoln & Guba (1985) provide the following rationale for using the researcher as an instrument. They argue that the researcher as instrument has the ability to recognize and respond to emotional cues and be flexible, adapting at a moment’s notice to the participant in a way that continues to build rapport and address any issues without timely modification. Researchers are also able to collect and process information immediately, generate new hypotheses and test them quickly or ask for clarification, correction or additional detail from participants.

Grounded Theory. Grounded theory refers to the discovery of theory from data collected systematically through social research (Glaser & Strauss, 2001). Unlike rationalistic research which uses previously established theories that ask the researcher to
test hypotheses related to a specific theory using a predetermined plan of action, grounded theory requires constant expansion, revision, and refinement of the research design (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). According to Charmaz (2001) “the grounded theorist builds the research as it ensues rather than having it completely planned before beginning data collection” (p. 265).

Glaser & Strauss (2001) identify four properties of grounded theory: fitness, understanding, generality and control. Fitness refers to theory that fits the data of the specific area being studied through induction rather than deduction. When grounded theory is faithful to the realities of the area being studied it “will make sense and be understandable to the people working in the substantive area” (Glaser & Strauss, 2001, p. 235). Understanding the theory makes them ready to accept the information and use it to build their skills and knowledge. A grounded theory is also general enough to apply to multiple situations within the substantive area and be flexible enough “to make a wide variety of changing situations understandable” and “readily reformulated, virtually on the spot, when it does not work in application” (Glaser & Strauss, 2001, p. 236). Lastly, grounded theory provides the user enough control to make the application worth trying and flexible enough to revise methods of application when necessary.

Grounded theory also provides theoretical analysis of data that fits the data and the area being studied through a set of systematic procedures used to shape, manage and organize collected materials (Charmaz, 2001; Schwandt, 2001). Systematic procedures compare data to identify similarities and differences that help the researcher identify themes, questions, and/or new directions used to build the research design as it unfold and stimulate future research (Charmaz, 2001; Schwandt, 2001). Referred to as
comparative analysis, grounded theorists use a system of data collection procedures to generate data for comparison, code the data and then elaborate on the processes through memo-writing (Charmaz, 2001; Glaser & Strauss, 2001). Coding helps define what the data is about, organize the data into emerging categories, and prepare it for analysis. Memo-writing helps elaborate on how the codes are connected, similar or different and is the bridge to final analysis.

**Emergent Design.** The naturalistic researcher believes in a research design that unfolds as the project progresses. The design is initially constructed with flexibility and is never complete until the end of the inquiry because the inquiry is based on the interactions between researcher and participant, that of which cannot be determined in advance (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 209). The starting design of the researcher is a general broad strokes idea that as the inquiry progresses will “become more and more focused; salient elements begin to emerge, insights grow, and theory begins to be grounded in the data obtained. Hypotheses can be formed and questions posed” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As data is collected, frequent inductive data analysis can show new theories, questions, hypotheses, gaps or misunderstandings that can be addressed in the next day’s data collection.

**Presentation of Data.** The method of choice for reporting naturalistic inquiry is the case study. A case study presents the topic of inquiry as a focal point in a real life context and is directed at understanding the topic at the emic level, representing the lived experiences of the participants (Schwandt, 2001). The thick description of case study reporting helps establish criteria for trustworthiness by illustrating themes and serving as reference points for an inquiry’s credibility, transferability, and dependability (Lincoln &
Guba, 1985). Because the case study is rich in description it provides the reader with information that helps them understand the topic of the report (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The case study also provides the reader with an avenue to personally connect with the topic and build on their previous knowledge (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

**Negotiated Outcomes.** The naturalistic researcher negotiates meanings and interpretations with the people from which their data has been collected. The main objective of naturalistic inquiry is to reconstruct the realities of participants which makes their input throughout the process necessary to fully understand the complexity of their interactions and values (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Throughout the course of the study, the researcher seeks to negotiate with participants regarding meaning, clarification, approval and corrections so that the information presented is credible (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Negotiated outcomes are significant and necessary to naturalist inquiry because the process supports the basic principles of the paradigm. For example, the naturalistic researcher is attempting to accurately represent the meaning of context so it is useful to take that information to participants for clarification, correction or additional detail. Naturalistic inquiry also has moral and political influences. Negotiated outcomes help to protect participants from exploitation, dissemination of misinformation or manipulating outcomes to use against groups of people (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**Building Trust and Rapport.** Naturalistic inquiry is an exercise in understanding human behavior so that means researchers must put themselves in the role of participants and “attempt to see the situation from their perspective rather than impose academia and preconceptions on them” (Fontana & Frey, 1994, p. 367). Trust needs to be cultivated
and developed before any sensitive information is discussed or requested. Trust is essential to the trustworthiness of the information collected because “it is the foundation for acquiring the fullest, most accurate disclosure a respondent is able to make” (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 79).

Rapport, a foundation of trust between researcher and participant, encourages participants to talk and share information (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Spradley, 1979). It generally refers to the harmonious relationship between the researcher and participant and means that trust has developed to the degree to which there is free flowing information, a positive feeling during observations and interviews, and that a mutual respect has developed even if researcher and participant have differing world views (Spradley, 1979). Trust and rapport need to be maintained throughout the course of the inquiry and beyond. To maintain trust and rapport researchers have to be aware and responsive to emerging needs and cues of a relationship. Spend time with participants equitably, be aware of social interactions and stay removed from contextual politics and establish boundaries (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). It is also important to build and maintain trust through multiple ways of interacting with individual participants.

**Multiple Methods.** The naturalistic researcher understands that research is shaped by interactions, values, backgrounds, and experiences. Because the naturalistic researcher believes that there are multiple realities and no one source of truth, the researcher employees multiple ways of capturing the lived experience of participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). The researcher may use observation (Adler & Adler, 1994; Bogdan, 1972) or interviews (Fontana & Frey, 1994; Oakley, 2001), collect artifacts or documents, take video or audio recordings (Harper, 1994), or use surveys to name just a
few. The naturalistic researcher uses multiple-methods, or triangulation, to develop an in-depth understanding of a topic using multiple perspectives (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

The naturalistic researcher is also aware that the study can progress in an unpredictable way. For that reason, methods for data collection may be identified and planned prior to the study but there remains a flexibility in their usage depending on the way in which the study unfolds. The naturalistic researcher can choose among the methods, often adapting or adding a method as the study reveals the need for a new perspective (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher also never depends on one method to determine understanding of the topic and one piece of information “should never be given serious consideration unless it can be triangulated” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 283). Thus using multiple methods is a way to build trustworthiness within the study and “is best understood, then as a strategy that adds rigor, breadth, and depth to any investigation” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

**Trustworthiness.** Criteria for establishing the worthiness of research findings are summed up with questions regarding truth value, applicability, consistency and neutrality. Each category has its own set of criteria used to judge inquiry findings (Guba, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Positivist, or quantitative, research applies four criteria to inquiry: internal validity addresses questions of truth value, external validity addresses questions of applicability, reliability addresses questions of consistency and objectivity addresses questions of neutrality.

The conventional criteria used to judge quantitative inquiry is inappropriate in a naturalistic inquiry because qualitative research has a different set of goals, and asks different kinds of questions than quantitative research. Thus criteria for trustworthiness
in qualitative studies are not equal to, but are comparative with, criteria used for quantitative inquiry (Guba, 1981). The following section will briefly discuss how trustworthiness in qualitative research applies a different set of criteria, namely credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability to evaluate the quality of research.

**Credibility.** Credibility addresses the question of truth value and shows whether or not a researcher has “represented those multiple constructions adequately, that is, that the reconstructions…are credible to the constructors original multiple realities” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 296). This means that the researcher has provided, as closely as possible, an accurate account of interactions and representation of the people studied and those representations have been approved by those studied. There are several techniques that researchers use to increase the likelihood that a match between what the participant has constructed as reality and what the researcher is representing. The following section will briefly outline a few of these activities.

1. **Prolonged engagement** requires that researchers spend substantial amounts of time in the natural setting of participants in order to build trust and rapport. Researchers invest time in learning the culture so that there is a less likely chance of gathering misinformation or distortions from either the researcher or the participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Lincoln & Guba, 1985)

2. **Persistent observation** requires the researcher to use the prolonged engagement with participants to observe and identify “those characteristics and elements in the situation that are most relevant to the problem or issue being pursued” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 304). Persistent observation compliments the scope of prolonged
engagement by providing the researcher with depth of knowledge on the topic of study (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

3. **Peer debriefing** is an on-going process the researcher uses to test findings with a disinterested peer. The researcher shares on-going analysis of the data, any tentative conclusions and other findings with someone who is not intimately connected to the study. Peer debriefing helps to expose any researcher bias and helps the researcher stay “fully aware of his or her posture” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 308) throughout the study. Peer debriefing also tests the emerging hypotheses of the researcher, making sure that the direction the researcher is taking makes sense to the study. The process of sharing data with a disinterested party also helps the researcher develop next steps, ask new questions, and make adaptations to methodological design. The final benefit of peer debriefing is emotional and psychological support. Confidentially discussing the emotions and feelings involved with the long process of naturalistic inquiry with a professional peer can help ease the stress that comes naturally with field work (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

4. **Negative case analysis** is the process in which a researcher revises or reworks hypotheses until it accounts for all known cases (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). For instance, a researcher proposes a hypothesis then reviews data. If a case appears that disproves the hypothesis then the researcher revises it until no cases exist. This technique provides “a useful means to make data more credible by reducing the number of exceptional cases to zero” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 312). The possibility that a researcher will be able to reduce all exceptional cases is slim, but using negative case
analysis to get as close to zero as possible “provides confidence that the evaluator has tried and rejected all rival hypotheses save the appropriate one” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

5. *Progressive subjectivity* is the process the researcher uses to monitor his or her developing construction and protects the emerging construction from researcher privilege (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). This technique is used when researchers record their prior assumptions, constructions, and expectations of findings before beginning any activity with the study and archive them for review. At regular points during the study, the researcher records his or her developing constructions. These records serve to help insure that the researcher is not giving too much privilege to the prior constructions or finding only what was originally expected, but that they reflect a level of attention to and adaption of constructions that are relevant to the study topic and participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

6. *Member checks* are the most important technique for establishing credibility because they provide an opportunity for the participant to react to what the researcher has developed in regards to analysis, interpretations, conclusions and observations in an ongoing process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Informal member checks take place regularly, sometimes daily, throughout the length of the inquiry. They allow participants to immediately correct errors, challenge any interpretations they perceived as inaccurate, offer additional information, and serve as a way to give the participants a voice in the unfolding of the project (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Schwandt, 2001). Formal member checks are usually completed just prior to submitting a final report and are used to clarify any errors or interpretations, discuss any disagreements and give participants a final opportunity to feel adequately represented (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).
**Transferability.** Transferability addresses the question of applicability and refers to the degree to which results from a qualitative study can be transferred to other contexts or settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The responsibility of the inquirer is to provide sufficient detail using thick rich description of context so that a reader may determine if the findings can be applied, or transferred, to the new context or situation. It is the responsibility of the reader to “engage in a reasonable but modest speculation about whether findings are applicable to other cases with similar circumstances” (Schwandt, 2001).

**Dependability.** Dependability addresses the question of consistency and emphasizes the need for the researcher to create a record of how the inquiry was conducted, how the inquiry documents changes in context or methodology, and how those changes impacted the course of the study (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Guba & Lincoln (1989) suggest using a dependability audit so that outside reviewers can examine the logic of the researcher, judge the researcher’s decisions, and understand the many complex factors which led to the researcher’s decisions. The dependability audit examines “to what extent is the process an established, trackable, and documentable process” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) and is closely linked to confirmability. Both dependability and confirmability rely on an audit trail that Schwandt (2001) defines as:

> “an organized collection of materials that includes data generated in a study; a statement of the theoretical framework that shaped the study at the outset; explanations of concepts, models, and the like that were developed as part of the effort to make sense of the data; a description of the procedures used to generate data and analyze them; a statement of the
findings or conclusions of the investigation; notes about the process of conducting the study; personal notes; and copies of instruments used to guide the generation and analysis of data” (p. 9).

**Confirmability.** Confirmability addresses the question of neutrality. It is concerned with making sure that findings are “rooted in contexts and persons apart from the evaluator and are not simply figments of the evaluators’ imagination” (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 243), thus emphasizing that data can be tracked to original sources and that the logic used by the researcher is accessible for examination (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). A confirmability audit is used to determine if all data in the form of facts, figures, and constructions can be traced back to original sources and that the process used to make interpretations can be confirmed by other researchers.

In the previous section I have briefly discussed components of naturalistic inquiry that are fundamental to a high quality research project, and most applicable to the present study. The goal of the preceding pages was to provide the reader with an overview of qualitative research and to demonstrate my working knowledge of how naturalistic inquiry is conducted. In the next section I will describe the methods and procedures I will use to carry out the current study.

**Site Selection and Setting**

The study took place in four urban preschool classrooms in the northern Midwest. Two of the classrooms were public Head Starts while two were private preschools. Sites were selected based on availability of teachers and willingness to participate. Both private preschool sites were licensed and nationally accredited centers. All the classrooms worked with children within the range of 3 to 5 years old but each class
varied in individual age range. Private preschool 1 had children in the youngest range who had just turned or were turning three by the time data collection began. Private preschool 2 had children ranging from 3 to 5 with half the class preparing to transition to kindergarten in the fall of 2016. Head Start 1 had children ranging from 3 to 4. Head Start 2 had children who were all 5 or about to turn 5 and would be transitioning to kindergarten in the fall of 2016. Three of the four classrooms had diverse populations including Caucasian, African-American, Hispanic-American and Bi-racial children. Head Start 2 had a population of predominately Caucasian children and one African-American.

**Gaining entrance**

Initial recruitment began with a local Public School-Head Start partnership. The method for initially contacting and recruiting teachers was decided by the Transformational Leader. I followed up initial contact with a recruitment letter that briefly explained the study, participant roles and responsibilities as well as the benefits of participating in the study. Consent forms were attached to the recruitment letters and any interested teachers were asked to return the consent forms to me.

From that initial round of recruitment only one Head Start teacher agreed to participate. A second round of recruitment was initiated after only one teacher agreed to participate and I widened the recruitment to include private preschool teachers and Head Start teachers in the neighboring state who were working with children ages 3-5. The wider search involved calling individual sites to gain access through site administrators. I explained the study to administrators and if they agreed to the study they passed the information on to their teachers. Administrators emailed or called me back if any of their
teachers were interested, or I called administrators back one week after initial contact to see if any teachers were interested. If a teacher was interested I met with them individually to briefly explain the study. This round of recruitment secured three additional participants.

Once teachers agreed to participate I made initial contact with them to schedule our first meeting where I briefly explained the Student Teacher Relationship Scale and set up dates for the first observation. All four original participants completed the study.

Participants

Four preschool teachers from Northern Ohio and Southern Michigan participated in the study. Three of the four had Bachelor Degrees in early childhood or a related field. One had an Associate Degree. All four participants were lead teachers in their classrooms. All four participants had at least seven years of experience. All four participants were Caucasian females.

Procedure/Methods

To understand better the choices I have made regarding data collection methods I will include information related to a pilot study I was involved in, and how my experiences collecting data for that pilot study helped shape the methodology for the present study. In the fall of 2014, I was part of a pilot study looking at teacher candidate attitudes about teacher-child relationship quality. During the pilot study I recruited undergraduate students taking courses in Early Childhood Education at a university in an urban area of the Midwest. Out of six teacher candidates who agreed to participate I randomly selected four. Each participant was completing contact hours in a preschool classroom in four different early childhood centers in the area. They had been working with their cooperating teachers for several months and were at the end of a semester long practicum placement when I
began data collection. Data for the pilot study was collected using similar methods planned for this study. Each candidate completed a Student Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS) short form for each student in his/her classroom. I observed each participant twice for one hour per observation for a total of two hours per participant. Lastly, I interviewed each participant once during the course of data collection. Based on limited amounts of data from the pilot study I determined that teacher experiences and beliefs about children, school climates, and academic goals were influencing their decisions and behaviors. I wanted to know more about what influenced teacher behavior as well as provide a more robust representation of how teacher-child relationships are constructed.

Data for this study were also collected using questionnaires, observations and interviews. I also decided to add a teacher-response Q-sort that helped teacher prioritize their beliefs about children, discipline and guidance. Questionnaires and responses to the Q-sort were collected and scored by the researcher. Observations were made during morning free play using a laptop and later edited for clarity. Interviews were transcribed verbatim. The focus group interview was transcribed verbatim. Collection of data began in January 2016 and ended March 2016 after all teachers completed an STRS for each child in their class, were observed three times, completed three teacher belief q-sorts and were interviewed three times. A final focus group interview was conducted after all individual data were collected. Below is a more complete discussion of each data collection source.

**Questionnaire.** The Student Teacher Relationship scale (STRS)-long form (Pianta, 2001) was chosen to assess teacher perceptions of relationship quality with individual children in their classrooms. Each teacher was asked to complete an STRS for each child in his or her classroom. The STRS is a teacher report instrument that looks at teacher
perceptions about levels of closeness, conflict and dependency in individual relationships with children. The measure can be used to assess teacher perceived relationship quality with children 3 to 12 years of age. The STRS-long form uses a 5 point likert-type scale consisting of 28 survey items. Surveys took approximately 5 minutes per child to complete. Participants were able to complete the STRS survey for each child over the course of a week and returned to me prior to starting observations.

To protect the identity of the children, no names were used during the study. Children were identified on the STRS long form using number codes. The STRS long form also asked for the demographic information of gender, race-ethnicity and age. That information was used to determine if any patterns emerged related to demographic information and teacher-child relationship quality. Using the results from the STRS, two children from each classroom were identified: one child with whom the participant perceived a close relationship and one child with whom the participant perceived a relationship high in conflict and/or dependency. During the first observation, the researcher asked the participant to identify those specific children i.e. “Please point out Child A and Child B”. In some cases, child A or B were not present during observations but the observation was conducted with or without them.

Observation. The pilot study also revealed that revising the observation method would be necessary and that having a semi-structured yet flexible approach for observing participants would produce a more detailed description of teacher responses and interactions. Field notes for the pilot study used a time sample method in which the interactions of participants were recorded at one minute intervals for two observations each
lasting one hour. Although field notes were extensive they provided a general picture of participants but were limited in scope and detail.

This study used some of the same observation framework as the pilot study. For example, observations were completed in each participant’s natural setting, i.e. classroom, playground, gym. Observations were conducted during a typical day and during which time free play and some small group instruction took place. Based on the pilot study experience I increased observation time to three hours per teachers rather than two. Observations were also recorded using descriptive and analytic field notes that used thick description of context, setting and interactions between participants and children.

One of the goals of the study was to capture how teachers interact with one child with whom they perceive they have a relationship high in closeness and one with whom they perceived they have a relationship high in conflict. To address the different perceptions through observation, I used a 10-minute cycle of time sampling to observe the teacher. For eight minutes I observed and took field notes as the teacher interacted with the children in the classroom. At minute nine I noted any interactions between the teacher and the child who was perceived to have a close relationship with the teacher. At minute ten I noted any interaction between teacher and the child who was perceived to have a relationship high in conflict and/or dependency.

**Teacher Belief Q-Sort (TBQ).** The TBQ is a measure that assesses three aspects of teacher beliefs: discipline practices, classroom practices, and beliefs about children. This measure was chosen because it addresses a framework that helps teacher organize meaning and inform practice (Rimm-Kaufmann, et. al, 2006). The TBQ is comprised of three 20-item exercises that assess teacher priorities among their beliefs (Rimm-
Kaufman, et. al, 2006). Each participant was given a TBQ kit for each of three aspects of teacher beliefs. A kit included: five anchor cards; a set of twenty numbered statement cards that correspond with the individual aspects of teacher beliefs; an instruction sheet; and a recording sheet. Participants were asked to organize the anchor statement cards as headings and then sort the twenty numbered statements cards into five categories that range from less to more characteristic of their beliefs, with only four statements allowed in each category. This exercise does not devalue the lowest category but places it lower in priority compared to the other statements. Participants then transferred statement card numbers to a corresponding chart on the recording sheet which was used to document their responses to the exercise. It was recommended to participants to limit the time they spent on prioritizing statements to 30 minutes. Participants reported that it took approximately 30 minutes to complete and they forced themselves to make decisions at the 30-minute mark. Participants spent between 45 to 90 minutes and no more than 120 minutes over the course of the study completing Q Sorts.

The TBQ provided the necessary framework for teachers to think about their own beliefs and presented a starting point for participants to talk about why they make choices regarding important parts of the classroom that impact relationship quality. The benefit of the TBQ is that it allowed for multiple viewpoints and provided participants the opportunity to have more than one idea about a topic without having to narrowly commit to values without reflection as some measures require. It also provided a good starting point for establishing rapport with participants and developing follow up interview questions. An additional benefit was that teachers were engaged in a reflective exercise.
that encouraged them to actively consider what they believe about important teaching practices with the possibility of professional growth.

**Participant Interviews.** Each participant completed three individual interviews and one group interview. Each interview lasted 30 to 45 minutes with a total amount of time equaling between 90 to 135 minutes. Interviews served several purposes. The first was to understand why teachers make the choices they make regarding discipline, children and classroom practices. The second was to gain insight into their perceptions about relationships they have with all the children.

The third, and possibly the most important, was to advance what House (1990) describes as the principle of mutual respect and non-manipulation. Although participants can provide feedback to me any time, the interviews served as formal member check in which participants could clarify misunderstandings, correct any disagreements and/or add description. The interviews also provided teachers with a platform for discussing their choices without retribution, reprimand or judgment, even if those choices are disagreeable. As House (1990) states,

> “respecting their reasons does not mean that we agree with them but that we note, record, and study what their reasons for their actions are, and seriously consider the strong possibility that people have good reasons for doing what they do, even when they are wrong” (p.159).

Each interview was constructed around TBQ statements and focused on one of three areas that the q-sort addresses. The first interview focused on beliefs participants had regarding children and included questions based on the first observations. The second individual interview focused on beliefs the participant had regarding discipline.
and behavior management and included any questions from observations made during the second one-hour observation. The last individual interview focused on the beliefs participants had regarding teaching practices and any questions from observations made during the third one-hour observation. The final group interview served as a debriefing where participants were able to share any final thoughts about the STRS results and add any additional insights to the project before data collection was officially complete. A copy of each participant’s vignette, findings from the data analysis and interpretations was shared with participants prior to submission for a final member check.

Data Analysis

Table 1
Addressing Data Analysis. Depicts how each research question will be addressed during data collection and data analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Data Collection Method</th>
<th>Data Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How do teachers perceive their relationships with children in preschool classrooms?</td>
<td>STRS Interview Questions</td>
<td>Survey Results Matrix Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What beliefs do teachers hold about discipline? Classroom practices? Children?</td>
<td>TBQ, Participant Interviews</td>
<td>Constant Comparative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do those beliefs contribute to teacher-child interactions during instructional situations?</td>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>Constant Comparative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Constant comparative Analysis**

The current study used the constant comparative method as its primary method of data analysis. The constant comparative method for analyzing data is used in generating theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1994) but can be used to in processing data in a continuous
way (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The constant comparative method uses four stages in processing data: comparing incidents applicable to each category, integrating categories and their properties, delimiting the theory and writing the theory. Each stage progresses into the next, and earlier stages remain part of the process, shaping and developing data collection until it is completed or analysts come to a stopping point.

When researchers use the constant comparative method they follow a set of procedures and steps to process data in an on-going way. First they identify units of information that they will use as defining categories. Categories are recorded and designated with codes. Codes can be constructed by the researcher or emerge from respondents (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The process of categorizing: brings together initial categories that appear to have related content; helps begin the process of identifying rules that describe category properties and are used to justify inclusion of any additional categories; and identifies the category set as internally consistent (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A detailed list of the codes used in this study and how they were defined can be found in chapter four.

It is during the categorizing process that the researcher: makes statements about possible defining properties of categories, gives categories names, regularly reviews categories, revises the organization of categories, and identifies categories that need additional follow-up. Memo writing during the constant comparative process is important for organizing ideas and categorizing because it can be used to uncover the properties of a category (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Schwandt, 2001; Schult, 2015). The use of multiple memo writing can help to “provide a kind of developmental history and when
taken as a set, provide a comprehensive, useful and universally applicable definition” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 342) of a category.

As more data are analyzed, the process begins to shift focus from comparing incidents with other incidents to comparing incidents to emerging rules and properties of categories (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Rules become more evident which makes category properties more explicit. Relationships become more evident during this process, and categories become more coherent and are more defined. As categories become more clearly defined, the list of categories reduces in size “because of improved articulation and integration” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 343).

At some point, researchers make the decision to conclude data collection and analysis using these four criteria: 1) exhaustion of sources; 2) saturation of categories 3) emergence of regularities in which integration feels complete; and finally 4) over-extension in which all new information feels far removed from other categories (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Once data collection and analysis has ended it is important for the researcher to review the category set once more, and optimally include peer debriefing to make sure nothing was overlooked, missed or underrepresented.

**Descriptive Analysis**

Descriptive analysis had a small but important role in data analysis. Descriptive analysis helps describe, show or summarize data in a way that is meaningful and clear for readers. Descriptive analysis helps illustrate patterns which emerge from the data and allows the researcher to present a “comprehensive summary of an event or events in the everyday terms of those events” (Sandelowski, 2000). Descriptive analysis has been chosen as a form of data analysis because it addressed a goal of the study which is to
accurately represent teacher-child interactions, and the complex nature of classroom dynamics using descriptions of actual events in the order they happened, and reflect meaning attributed to those events by participants. Descriptive analysis will also be used to summarize and describe the results of the STRS.

**Matrix Analysis**

Matrix analysis is a systematic recording and displaying of features of a study with multiple constructs that helps examine and determine relationships between components (Schult, 2015). For this study descriptive and matrix analysis will be combined to describe and represent data from the STRS. Matrix analysis will be useful in determining any emerging relationships between teacher-perceived relationship quality and child characteristics and will help capture how different characteristics are connected or linked.
Sequence of Data Collection

Table 2
Sequence of Data Collection. Depicts the schedule for administering questionnaires, distributing Teacher-Belief Q-sort, completing observations and conducting interviews.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS)</td>
<td>Teacher-perceived relationship quality</td>
<td>Week one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Belief Q-Sort 3</td>
<td>Beliefs about children</td>
<td>Week two</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation #1</td>
<td>Beliefs about children</td>
<td>Week 2 and 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview #1</td>
<td>Beliefs about children</td>
<td>Week 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher-Belief Q-Sort 1</td>
<td>Priorities about discipline and behavior management</td>
<td>Week 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation #2</td>
<td>Discipline and behavior management</td>
<td>Week 4 and 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview #2</td>
<td>Discipline and behavior management</td>
<td>Week 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Belief Q-sort 2</td>
<td>Priorities about teaching practices</td>
<td>Week 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation #3</td>
<td>Teaching practices</td>
<td>Week 6 and 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview #3</td>
<td>Teaching practices</td>
<td>Week 7 and 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second STRS</td>
<td>Teacher perceived relationship quality</td>
<td>Week 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Focus Group Interview</td>
<td>Debriefing</td>
<td>Week 9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 4

Data Analysis

High-quality teacher child relationships are important contributors to the overall success of children. The quality of teacher-child relationships in preschool is especially important because they are predictive of future relationships, associated with school-readiness, and can be mediating factors for children who are typically at risk for school failure. The purpose of this study was to examine how teacher beliefs and interactions contributed to the teacher-child relationship quality.

In this chapter, I present how four preschool teachers prioritized their beliefs regarding discipline, classroom practice and children, the types of interactions that they engaged in with children, and how each teacher perceived their relationships with the children in their classrooms.

This chapter will have four sections. The first section introduces the participants. The second section presents the common beliefs among participants regarding discipline, children and classroom practice and individual participant responses to the Teacher-Belief Q-sort. The second section will discuss discipline related interactions and the frequency with which participants engaged in them. The third section will discuss secure base related behaviors and the frequency with which participants engaged in them. The fourth section will provide descriptive analysis of results from the Student Teacher-Relationship Scale.
Meet the Teachers

**Ava.** Ava was a preschool teacher who worked in the Northern Ohio. She is a white middle class woman who has a non-licensure Bachelor of Science degree in early childhood education. She worked for Head Start for 20 years beginning as an assistant teacher and during the study was a lead teacher in a multi-age classroom of 3, 4 and 5 year olds. She worked with two groups of children, a morning group and an afternoon group for 3.5 hours Monday through Thursday. Ava said she always knew she wanted to work with preschool age children, and specifically the population of young children that Head Start serves, so she could help children who may not have the same chances of developing skills for school success.

“I like this age better where I can get to them early. Kind of give them the ‘Head Start’ that I think they need. I didn’t want to do a regular preschool where I think the kids already have a good head start in most cases because their parents are, or some parents are, more educated so they talk to their kids more or they know what to do with their kids. I wanted to reach a population of kids who don’t get that at home and to try to help those families and those kids so they would be successful in school.”

Ava was influenced by her education, mentor teachers and professional development opportunities. She described how past mentor teachers presented information about best practices and that those trainings influenced her most, especially regarding guidance and discipline. Ava had Fridays without children and was able to use that time for tasks like maintaining documentation, completing government required paperwork, and classroom preparation. That time was also used to keep her connected to
the field of early childhood. Some of the ways she stayed connected to the latest issues in early childhood included but were not limited to: weekly meetings with other educators and mentor teachers, regular professional development in the form of trainings and speakers, participating on committees, and attending conferences. At the time of data collection, Ava was preparing to attend a statewide conference on early childhood.

**Beth.** Beth was a preschool teacher who worked in the Northern Ohio. She is a white, middle class woman who was the lead teacher in a classroom with three, four and five year olds. She had two associate degrees from a local community college, one of which was an early childhood technology associate degree. She had been teaching for a private company for seven years with experiences as an infant, toddler and preschool teacher. She was the lead teacher and also had a full-time assistant. She was also a cooperating teacher for students who were seeking their degrees in early childhood education from a local university.

Beth felt like she was supported because she could approach her administration if she had a question or needed some suggestions on lesson planning. She also felt supported because she developed a professional development plan with her administrator yearly and used the plan when choosing trainings. She is supported and encouraged to participate in trainings that are offered through a statewide resource and referral program. The company she worked for was also preparing to send her to a statewide conference where she planned to participate in trainings and seminars that would keep her current on trends in early childhood. The site provided monthly trainings, or set up trainings, for the teachers to go to which addressed topics that they were struggling to manage. The company had a company-wide staff meeting that included teachers from multiple sites.
throughout the year and the site where Beth worked also planned occasional staff meetings without regularity. She is formally evaluated yearly and given informal feedback throughout the year.

She said that she always enjoyed the preschool age and working with younger children because she finds fulfillment in watching them develop. She focused on working with preschool age children and preparing them for kindergarten. She planned to return to a four-year university and eventually moving on to teaching at the elementary level with specific interest in working with kindergarteners.

“I really like how a lot of them want to learn. How they are so full of energy. They do love you. They give me hugs and they enjoy playing with me and um I just, like I said, I like to watch them develop. From when they come to me and they don’t even know how to spell their name, or even the first letter of their name to when they are going to kindergarten they are saying their whole name and they are spelling their whole name. And it’s just the development that I love to see.”

Cathy. Cathy was a preschool teacher who worked in the Northern Ohio. She is a white, middle class woman who was the lead teacher in a classroom with three and four year olds. Cathy had an Associate degree from an area community college and a Bachelor degree in individualized studies from a private college. She has been in the field of early childhood education for over 19 years with a variety of teaching experiences. Over the course of her 19 years she worked with both toddler and preschool age children as well as working at summer camps for school age children.
She described her desire to work with preschool age children as something she has always wanted to do. She enjoyed working with three year olds because they are eager to learn and she enjoyed guiding them to their next steps. Her first teaching experience was working with a before and after school age program for a local school district for two years. She then worked at a university child care program from 1997 until it closed in 2015. She transitioned to the position she had during the study immediately after the university child care program closed.

Cathy engaged in 20 or more hours of professional development every two years. She was notified of classes and potential experiences for professional development by her administration and can sign up to attend when and if they fit into her schedule. She was also responsible for finding trainings that she may be interested in attending using a statewide resource and referral service. Cathy attended monthly staff meetings that provided her the opportunity to talk with other teachers about what is happening in their classrooms and discuss with administration ways to approach different situations. Staff meetings were also helpful for Cathy because they included information about upcoming professional development opportunities and different ways of completing the 20 hours of required professional development. She stayed current on early childhood education topics by connecting with other teachers but had not been to a conference or part of a professional organization in several years.

Darla. Darla was a preschool teacher who worked in the Southern Michigan. She is a white middle class woman who has a Bachelor of Science degree in early childhood development from a state university in the northern part of the United States. She worked in privately owned or state run early childhood care facilities for almost 18 years. During
the study she worked in a classroom as a lead/head teacher and had a full-time assistant teacher. She had Fridays without children and was able to use that time for tasks like maintaining government required paperwork. The time was also used to keep her connected to the early childhood field. Some of the ways she stayed connected to the latest issues in early childhood included but were not limited to: weekly meetings with other educators, planning time, regular professional development in the form of trainings and speakers, participated on committees, and attended conferences.

Her first teaching position was with a well-known for-profit childcare company that was ran out of a fortune 500 company in the Northern Midwest. During her time with the company Darla was able to hold several positions. She began as a classroom teacher and moved her way up to program coordinator. She oversaw five toddler programs with approximately 10-20 teachers and 200 toddler age children. She also mentored parents by leading parent education meetings. In this position she felt like she had the best of both worlds. She worked with children and mentored their parents. Because the company had a very positive relationship with a profitable business, the company was able to provide Darla with ample materials and resources. Professional development opportunities were also well supported within the company and she was able to present at, and attend, multiple conferences at the state and national level. Sadly, the childcare company decided to close its centers in the Midwest. After they closed Darla worked as a preschool teacher for five years at a university child care center until it closed. During the study she taught in a multi-age Head Start classroom in which all the children need to be four by September 1st.
She described her path to teaching as one that developed from a love of children. Two things influenced her choices as a teacher. The first was building a strong foundation of knowledge from professors who were leaders in the field of early childhood publishing texts, worked in and with a university lab school, and provided current research about best practices to their students. The other influence she discussed was the professional development opportunities she experienced in her early years of teaching that provided opportunities for growth. She described being flown all over the United States for trainings and conferences that invested in her, kept her at the forefront of early childhood education and also made her feel like a professional.

“They would put us up in hotels so it was kind of like you felt like this was your profession. You felt, sometimes you don’t in early childhood because ‘you’re a babysitter’, so you felt like ‘I did make a good choice and I am making a difference’ because they cared about the education piece and training us in the right way of doing things.”

Teacher Belief Q-Sort Responses

Participants prioritized some common beliefs about discipline, children and classroom practice which are described in the following two sections. The first section outlines what belief statements teachers had in common in the categories of discipline, children, and classroom practice. The second section provides each participant’s responses to the TBQ.
Common beliefs

Beliefs about Discipline. After collapsing the categories of very characteristic/characteristic, and less/least characteristic, common discipline beliefs among teachers were as follows.

Very characteristic or Characteristic of Belief System:

1. A classroom runs smoothly when there are clear expectations of behavior.
2. Classroom rules should be discussed and posted.
3. Praise from me is an effective way to change students’ behavior.

Least Characteristic or Less Characteristic of Belief System:

1. Peer interactions are best left to recess and snack time:
2. Students learn best in primarily teacher-directed classrooms.

Beliefs about children: After collapsing the categories of most characteristic/characteristic, and least/hardly characteristic, common beliefs about children among teachers were as follows.

Characteristic/Most Characteristic of my belief system:

1. Students meet challenges best when they feel that their teachers care about them.
2. Students need to feel safe and secure in the classroom.
3. Students learn best by being actively involved in lessons.

Least/Hardly characteristic of my belief system:

1. Many of the students in my class try to get away with doing as little work as possible.
2. Students seldom take care of their materials if they are not supervised.
3. Students are more motivated by grades than they are by the acquisition of competence.

Beliefs about classroom practice. After collapsing the categories of most essential/essential characteristics, and least/less essential characteristics, common beliefs about classroom practice among teachers were as follows.

Practices that are essential/most essential characteristics of my teaching:
1. Having a morning routine.
2. Talking about our plan or schedule for the day.
3. Welcoming each student by name to class.
4. Doing an activity to create a sense of community
5. Modeling behaviors for students.
6. Permitting students to choose from a variety of activities.

Practices least essential/less essential characteristics of my teaching:
1. Talking about current events.
2. Using hand signals.
3. Using drill and recitation for factual information (math facts, etc.).
4. Using work sheets.
Individual Responses

Ava. Beliefs about Children: Most characteristic of my beliefs:

1. Students should feel as though they are “known” and “recognized” in the classroom.
2. Students learn best by being actively involved in lessons.
3. Students meet challenge best when they feel that their teachers care about them.
4. Students need to feel safe and secure in the classroom.

Characteristic of my beliefs:

1. Students need to be met where they are in terms of ability.
2. Students need some choice of activities within the classroom.
3. Students cannot be understood without knowing something about their families.
4. Students need opportunities to think in a quiet classroom environment.

Hardly characteristic of my beliefs:

1. Students learn best when they have good role models for their behavior.
2. Each one of my students teaches me something.
3. Almost all children in my class try their best.
4. Almost all students are equally likable and enjoyable.

Least characteristic of my beliefs:

1. Students seldom take care of their materials if they are not supervised.
2. Many of the students in my class try to get away with doing as little work as possible.
3. Some students show little desire to learn.
4. Students are more motivated by grades than they are by the acquisition of competence.

Beliefs about classroom practice: Most essential practices and/or characteristic of my teaching:

1. Having a morning routine.
2. Welcoming each student by name to class.
3. Permitting students to choose from a variety of activities.
4. Modeling behaviors for students.

Essential practices and/or characteristic of my teaching:

1. Doing an activity to create a sense of community.
2. Reflecting and talking about something, such as a social interaction, that “worked” or “didn’t work” in our class.
3. Reflecting on the content of an academic lesson and talking about what we learned.
4. Talking about our plan or schedule for the day.

Less essential and/or characteristic of my teaching:

1. Conducting the business of the classroom (e.g. collecting lunch or milk money) following
2. Talking about current events.
3. Using whole group instruction.
4. Working on group projects.

Least essential and/or characteristic of my teaching:
1. Using hand signals.
2. Using worksheets.
3. Using a theme-based approach to instruction.
4. Using drill and recitation for factual information (math facts, etc.)

Beliefs about discipline: Very characteristic of my approach:
1. A classroom runs smoothly when there are clear expectations for behavior.
2. Classroom rules should be discussed and posted.
3. Self-monitoring behaviors (or self-regulation) are important skills for students to develop.
4. If I treat students with respect, kindness, and concern, there are less behaviors problems.

Characteristic of my approach:
1. Students should try to solve conflicts on their own before going to the teacher.
2. Praise from me is an effective way to change students’ behavior.
3. Verbal punishment is an unacceptable means of controlling students’ behavior; I believe it is more important to use positive management techniques.
4. Extrinsic rewards for desirable behavior (e.g. stickers, candy bars, etc.) undermine students’ motivations; it is better not to give such rewards at all.

Less characteristic of my approach:

1. The primary goal in dealing with students’ behavior is to establish and maintain control.
2. Students must be kept busy doing activities or they soon get into trouble.
3. Monitoring students can prevent problematic situations.
4. The curriculum and class schedule need to be prioritized over students’ specific interests.

Least characteristic of my approach:

1. A noisy classroom is okay as long as all the students are being productive.
2. Proper control of a class is apparent when the students work productively while I am out of the room (either briefly or when a substitute is present).
3. Peer interactions are best left to recess and snack time.
4. Students learn best in primarily teacher-directed classrooms.

Beth. Beliefs about Children: Most characteristic of my beliefs:

1. Each one of my students teaches me something.
2. Students learn best by being actively involved in lessons.
3. Students meet challenge best when they feel that their teachers care about them.
4. Students need to feel safe and secure in the classroom.
Characteristic of my beliefs:

1. Students learn best when they have good role models for their behavior.
2. Students need some choice of activities within the classroom.
3. Students need to have their strengths recognized to promote learning.
4. Students need opportunities to be creative in the classroom.

Hardly characteristics of my beliefs:

1. Many of the students in my class try to get away with doing as little work as possible.
2. Students seldom take care of their materials if they are not supervised.
3. Most students respect teachers and authority.
4. Students need to work on skills at which they are not good, even if it means giving them fewer choices.

Least characteristic of my beliefs:

1. Students need to be met where they are in terms of ability.
2. Almost all students are equally likeable and enjoyable.
3. Students need opportunities to think in a quiet classroom environment.
4. Students are more motivated by grades than they are by the acquisition of competence.
Beliefs about classroom practice: Most essential and/or characteristic of my teaching practices:

1. Welcoming each student by name to class.
2. Modeling behaviors for students.
3. Introducing new objects or new activities in the room through demonstration.
4. Permitting students to choose from a variety of activities.

Essential and/or characteristic of my teaching practices:

1. Having a morning routine.
2. Talking about our plan or schedule for the day.
3. Doing an activity to create a sense of community.
4. Reflecting and talking about something, such as a social interaction, that “worked” or “didn’t work” in our class.

Less essential and/or characteristic of my teaching:

1. Having at least a few students share something that has happened to them.
2. Discussing a written announcement or message created by the teacher.
3. Using work sheets.
4. Working on group projects.

Least essential and/or characteristic of my teaching:

1. Talking about current events.
2. Using whole group instruction.
3. Using hand signals.

4. Using drill and recitation for factual information (math facts, etc.)

Beliefs about discipline: Very characteristic of my approach:

1. Classroom rules should be discussed and posted.
2. Students should try to solve conflicts on their own before going to the teacher.
3. Rules for the students’ classroom behavior need to be reinforced consistently.
4. If I treat students with respect, kindness, and concern, there are less behavior problems.

Characteristic of my approach:

1. A classroom runs smoothly when there are clear expectations for behavior.
2. Self-monitoring behaviors (or self-regulation) are important skills for students to develop.
3. Praise from me is an effective way to change students’ behavior.
4. It is important to respect students’ autonomy and expect them to act in a responsible manner.

Less characteristic of my approach:

1. Verbal punishment is an unacceptable means of controlling students’ behavior; I believe it is more important to use positive management techniques.
2. When students are engaged in interesting problems and challenging activities, they tend to have very few discipline problems.
3. The primary goal in dealing with students’ behavior is to establish and maintain control.

4. If I anticipate problems before they happen and discuss them with students, I have fewer discipline problems.

Least characteristic of my approach:

1. Extrinsic rewards for desirable behaviors (e.g. stickers, candy bars, etc.) undermine students’ motivation; it is better not to give such rewards at all.

2. Students learn best in primarily teacher-directed classrooms.

3. The curriculum and class schedule need to be prioritized over students’ specific interests.

4. Peer interactions are best left to recess and snack time.

*Cathy*. Beliefs about Children: Most characteristic of my beliefs:

1. Students should feel as though they are “known” and “recognized” in the classroom.

2. Students need to be met where they are in terms of ability.

3. Students meet challenge best when they feel that their teachers care about them.

4. Students need to feel safe and secure in the classroom.

Characteristic of my beliefs:

1. Students learn best when they have good role models.

2. Student learn best by being actively involved in lessons.
3. Students need opportunities to be creative in the classroom.

4. Each of my students teaches me something.

Hardly characteristics of my beliefs:

1. Students seldom take care of their materials if they are not supervised.

2. Students cannot be understood without knowing something about their families.

3. Some students show little desire to learn.

4. Students are more motivated by grades than they are by the acquisition of competence.

Least characteristic of my beliefs:

1. Many of the students in my class try to get away with doing as little as possible.

2. Most students respect teachers and authority.

3. Students need to work on skills at which they are not good, even if it means giving them fewer choices.

4. Students need opportunities to think in a quiet classroom environment.

Beliefs about classroom practice: Most essential and/or characteristic of my teaching practices:

1. Having a morning routine.

2. Welcoming each student by name to class.

3. Doing an activity to create a sense of community.

4. Modeling behaviors for students.

Essential and/or characteristic of my teaching practices:

1. Talking about our plan or schedule for the day.
2. Introducing new objects or new activities in the room through demonstration.

3. Permitting students to choose from a variety of activities.

4. Working on group projects.

Less and/or characteristic of my teaching essential:

1. Talking about current events.

2. Using hand signals.

3. Having at least a few students share something that has happened to them.

   4. Using drill and recitation for factual information (math facts, etc.)

Least and/or characteristic of my teaching essential:

1. Discussing a written announcement or message created by the teacher.

2. Conducting the business of the classroom (e.g. collecting lunch or milk money) following a set routine.

3. Using worksheets.

4. Using a theme-based approach to instruction.

Beliefs about discipline: Very characteristic of my approach:

1. The primary goal in dealing with students’ behavior is to establish and maintain control.

2. A noisy classroom is okay as long as all the students are being productive.

3. A classroom runs smoothly when there are clear expectations for behavior.

4. Classroom rules should be discussed and posted.
Characteristic of my approach:

1. Monitoring students can prevent problematic situations.
2. The curriculum and class schedule need to be prioritized over students’ specific interests.
3. Rules for the students’ classroom behavior need to be reinforced consistently.
4. Praise from me is an effective way to change students’ behavior.

Less characteristic of my approach:

1. When students are engaged in interesting problems and challenging activities, they tend to have very few discipline problems.
2. It is important to respect students’ autonomy and expect them to act in a responsible manner.
3. Students should try to solve conflicts on their own before going to the teacher.
4. If I treat students with respect, kindness, and concern there are less behavior problems.

Least characteristic of my approach:

1. Students must be kept busy doing activities or they soon get into trouble.
2. Peer interactions are best left to recess and snack time.
4. Extrinsic rewards for desirable behavior (e.g. stickers, candy bars, etc.) undermine students’ motivations; it is better not to give such rewards at all.
**Darla.** Beliefs about Children: Most characteristic of my beliefs:

1. Students should feel as though they are “known” and “recognized” in the classroom.
2. Students cannot be understood without knowing something about their families.
3. Students need to feel safe and secure in the classroom.
4. Students learn best when they have good role models for their behavior.

Characteristic of my beliefs:

1. Students need to have their strengths recognized to promote learning.
2. Students meet challenges best when they feel that their teachers care about them.
3. Student learn best by being actively involved in lessons.
4. Students need some choice of activities within the classroom.

Hardly characteristics of my beliefs:

1. Most students respect teachers and authority.
2. Students seldom take care of their materials if they are not supervised.
3. Almost all students are equally likeable and enjoyable.
4. Students need opportunities to think in a quiet classroom environment.

Least characteristic of my beliefs:

1. Students need to work on skills at which they are not good, even if it means giving them fewer choices.
2. Many of the students in my class try to get away with doing as little as possible.
3. Students are more motivated by grades than they are by the acquisition of competence.

4. Some students show little desire to learn.

Beliefs about classroom practice: Most essential and/or characteristic of my teaching:

1. Modeling behaviors for students.
2. Introducing new objects or new activities in the room through demonstration.
3. Permitting students to choose from a variety of activities.
4. Talking about our plan or schedule for the day.

Essential practices and/or characteristic of my teaching:

1. Having a morning routine.
2. Conducting the business of the classroom (e.g. collecting lunch or milk money) following a set routine.
3. Doing an activity to create a sense of community.
4. Welcoming each student by name to class.

Less essential and/or characteristic of my teaching:

1. Using whole group instruction.
2. Discussing a written announcement or message created by the teacher.
3. Using drill and recitation for factual information (math facts, etc.).
4. Encouraging students and giving feedback that focuses on the processes of students’ creations or thinking, not the outcomes or the solution.
Least essential and/or characteristic of my teaching:

1. Using worksheets.
2. Using a theme-based approach to instruction.
3. Using hand signals.
4. Talking about current events.

Beliefs about discipline: Very characteristic of my approach:

1. When students are engaged in interesting problems and challenging activities, they tend to have very few discipline problems.
2. Classroom rules should be discussed and posted.
3. Praise from me is an effective way to change students’ behavior.
4. Verbal punishment is an unacceptable means of controlling students’ behavior; I believe it is more important to use only positive management techniques.

Characteristic of my approach:

1. Students must be kept busy doing activities or they soon get into trouble.
2. A classroom runs smoothly when there are clear expectations for behaviors.
3. Rules for the students’ classroom behavior need to be reinforced consistently.
4. If I treat students with respect, kindness, and concern, there are less behavior problems.

Less characteristic of my approach:

1. A noisy classroom is okay as long as all the students are being productive.
2. Proper control of a class is apparent when the students work productively while I am out of the room (either briefly or when a substitute is present).
3. Monitoring students can prevent problematic situations.
4. Self-monitoring behaviors (or self-regulation) are important skills for students to develop.

Least characteristic of my approach:

1. Peer interactions are best left to recess and snack time.
2. The curriculum of the class schedule need to be prioritized over students’ specific interests.
4. If I anticipate problems before they happen and discuss them with students, I have fewer discipline problems.

**Constant Comparative Analysis**

Observations were organized into complete interactions between teachers and children which are defined in this study as a teacher or child initiated behavior and the corresponding response or responses. To meet the criteria for a complete interaction, there had to be one initiating behavior and one response. Interactions that included multiple exchanges between the participant and child were included. Interactions with multiple exchanges could also include multiple examples of secure base or discipline related interactions. Analysis of observations revealed 5 discipline related interactions and 9 secure base behaviors.

**Discipline related interactions.** Constant comparative analysis of observations showed that all four participants either used specific discipline related interactions, or purposefully avoided them. This section will identify each discipline related category and describe the criteria used for including an interaction in that category.
**Interaction one: Directives:** An interaction was considered a directive when the participant specifically told children what they were expected to do. Statements made by participants were considered a directive if they were very clear and left no room for children to make choices.

Example: A child runs out of the bathroom. Beth calls out to the child and says “Come back and walk. Use walking feet.”

**Interaction two: Punishments:** An interaction was considered a punishment if the resulting consequence was punitive. An example of a punishment would include using time-out as a method of discipline, using threats, or withholding affection.

Example: Children are making a special snack in Cathy’s room. One child approaches the table and Cathy says “Oh walk away. You don’t get to make it. You thought it was okay to hit your friends.”

**Interaction three: Natural consequences and follow through:** An interaction was considered a natural consequence if the participant reinforced a classroom expectation with a consequence that was immediate and relative to the situation.

Example: Two children are arguing on the carpet. One child, Sara, tells participant Darla that another child, Frannie, took her spot on the carpet and wiped boogers on her arm. Darla tells Frannie “You need to go get a wet towel and wash off her arm. You don’t do that. You need to go clean her arm.” Darla walks with Frannie to the sink and together they get a towel. Frannie washes off Sara’s arm and then independently she gets a dry towel and dries Sara’s arm.

**Interaction four: Non-responsive to behavior:** An interaction was considered to be non-responsive if the participant observed a child engaging in an unacceptable
behavior or requesting assistance and the participant did not verbally or physically intervene, offer assistance and/or follow through.

Example: Oscar is crying. Cathy is sitting on the couch writing. She looks up and asks “What happened?” Oscar is telling her and she returns to writing. While she is writing she says “She took your what? She took what? You are the only one playing over there. You are supposed to be cleaning up.” She goes back to writing and Oscar continues to cry.

Interaction five: Guidance: An interaction was considered guidance if the participant engaged in any of the following:

a) Used questions to review or clarify classroom expectation

Example: Beth calls a child to the table and she runs over. Beth asks the child “What kind of feet do we use?” The child responds “Walking.”

b) Clearly stated classroom expectations or referred to classroom rules.

Example: One of the children brings a stuffed animal to morning meeting. Cathy reminds the child “Toys cannot be at group. Your monkey can be on your cot or in your locker.”

c) Used materials with children

Example: Darla sits at the sensory table with one child and they pretend to build mountains in the sand.

d) Revisited a behavior after following through with a consequence.

Example: Meredith wants to play at the sensory table but there is only room for four children. Ava tells her there can only be four friends and she walks away. When a spot opens up Ava invites Meredith back to the table quietly telling her “There is space
for her now.” One of the children complains and Ava says “She can come. We can have four friends.”

Frequency of interactions. An analysis of frequency was conducted to determine how often teachers engaged in each of the different discipline related interactions in the three-hour period of observation. The following section will discuss the frequency of interactions.

Table 3: Number of Discipline related interactions: Total times discipline related interactions were observed over three hours.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Number of Discipline related interactions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ava</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beth</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cathy</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darla</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4
Use of Directives. This table represents the number of times directives were observed and the percentage of times directives were used in a discipline related interaction.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Ava</th>
<th>Beth</th>
<th>Cathy</th>
<th>Darla</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Exchanges</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of exchanges</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5

*Use of Punishment. This table represents the number of times punishment was observed and the percentage of times punishment was used in a discipline related interaction.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Ava</th>
<th>Beth</th>
<th>Cathy</th>
<th>Darla</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Exchanges</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of exchanges</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6

*Use of Consequences. This table represents the number of times consequences were observed and the percentage of times consequences were used in discipline related interactions.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Ava</th>
<th>Beth</th>
<th>Cathy</th>
<th>Darla</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Exchanges</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of exchanges</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7

*Being Non-responsive to Behavior.* This table represents the number of times non-responsive behavior was observed and the percentage of times non-responsive behavior was used in discipline related interactions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Ava</th>
<th>Beth</th>
<th>Cathy</th>
<th>Darla</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of Exchanges</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percentage of exchanges</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8

*Using Guidance.* This table represents the number of time guidance was observed and the percentage of times that guidance was used in discipline related interactions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Ava</th>
<th>Beth</th>
<th>Cathy</th>
<th>Darla</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of Exchanges</strong></td>
<td>29</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percentage of exchanges</strong></td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The number of discipline related interactions was negatively related to teacher perceptions of overall relationship quality meaning that the teachers who perceived relationships to be high or in the positive range for overall quality engaged in fewer discipline related interactions.

**Secure Base Behaviors.** Attachment theory is grounded in how a caregiver responds to the initiation of interaction (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978;
Bowlby, 1979). Complete interactions were analyzed by organizing types of teacher responses to initiating behaviors and the secure base behaviors observed during the subsequent exchanges between teacher and child. This section will describe criteria used when considering a response or behavior as one of the 9 secure base related themes. Analysis of observations showed that the four participants engaged in or specifically avoided using similar secure base related interactions.

**Theme One: Awareness of and/or responding to a signaling behavior:** An exchange was considered an example of awareness of a signaling behavior if a participant responded to an initiating behavior either verbally or non-verbally, approached the child, or noticed the behavior but ignored the signal.

Example: Ava was talking with a child and another child came up to her and gave her a hug. Ava responded “Another hug? You’re so kind today”. She embraced the child and then the child walked away.

**Theme Two: Maintaining proximity:** An exchange was considered an example of maintaining proximity if a participant:

a. Made physical contact with a child, and/or maintained physical closeness with a child but did not physically touch the child. An interaction was also considered an example of maintaining proximity if physical contact or closeness was initiated by either the participant or a child.

i. Example: Cathy joined a girl on a child sized couch and they read a book together.

b. Communicated changing proximity with the child or group of children
i. Example: Darla told a child she was working with “I’m going to set my cup down and I’ll be right back.”

Theme Three: Positive responsive behavior: An exchange was considered an example of positive responsive behavior if the participant engaged in any of the following:

a. Responded to an initiating behavior and engaged children positively by using a warm and/or sincere tone of voice.

Example: Beth was sitting on the floor playing a recorder with a child. She blew into the recorder and changed notes a few times. The child said something to her about her playing. Beth smiled and said “I’m still learning.”

b. Offered encouraging non-verbal cues like smiling or nodding.

Example: Ava was observing children as they worked to pull cotton balls out of containers with tweezers. One child was struggling and she showed him how to use his fingers. He followed her model. He looked at Ava and she smiled at him.

c. Responded to questions or comments respectfully

Example: Darla was sitting with a group of children in the book area. The children had blankets, pillows, baby dolls and books. One of the children asks “Can you snug me in, snug as a bug in a rug?” Darla replied “Snug as a bug!” and tucked the blanket tightly around the child.
d. Commented on the actions of children in a supportive way.

Example: Cathy was helping a child put on his shoes. He had attempted the task on his own for several minutes. Cathy said: “Put your foot in. Now pull that over. You can do it! Good job!”

Theme Four: Negative responsive behavior: An exchange was considered an example of negative responsive behavior if the participant engaged in any of the following:

a. Responded with frustration

Example: A group of children were banging on pots in the kitchen area. Cathy asked them to stop. One child continued to engage in the behavior. Cathy responded “I asked you to stop. Now you can leave.”

b. Used a negative tone of voice (yelling, raised voice, criticized)

Example: Darla addressed a child who was playing at the sink. She told the child that she was finished. The child walked away and Darla called her back to the sink to clean up the water. She said the child’s name and told her to come back but the child did not respond. Darla raised her voice and using a sterner tone of voice restated “Stacy come back. Stacy stop and come back.”

c. Denied a child’s feelings

Example: A child completed a drawing of her family and described it to Cathy. When she was finished writing the child’s words, Cathy asked the child if she could keep the drawing but the child rejected the idea and expressed that she
would like to take it home. Cathy responded “Can I save this? I want to hang it up.” The child denied the request and asked if Cathy was going to take it to her house. Cathy said “Oh no. I’m not going to take it to my home. I’m going to keep it here. Where do you want me to hand this picture of your family?” The child did not respond. Cathy said to herself “I’m actually going to save it.” She placed it on the teacher space.

d. Used threats

Example: Beth told a child “You need to help her or you can’t play tomorrow.”

e. Was inconsistent

Example: Cathy removed a child from an area to clean her nose. She asked the child to leave the toys she was using in the area while they took care of her nose. When the child returned another child was using the toys. The child was upset and asked Cathy for help. Cathy said “Well you can’t have all the cars. He can have some.”

f. Used disapproving facial expression.

Example: Beth implemented a punishment that a child could not play in the construction area. The child walked over to the construction area and watched other children who were working in the area. Beth was standing up, watching the child. He looked at her. She shook her head and gave him a stern look. He walked away.
g. Ignored a signaling behavior

Example: Darla was talking with a visitor. A child approached her and she told the child that it was group time and that she could go play with some of the other children. The child walked away and sat down at a table alone.

Theme Five: Calling out: An exchange was considered an example of calling out if the participant was in one area of the room and used a loud voice to gain the attention of specific children.

Example: Beth was sitting in the construction area but noticed blocks out in another area. She called across the room “I need Martin to pick up the magnet blocks.”

Theme Six: Addressing Privately: An exchange was considered an example of addressing privately if the participant was in one area of the classroom and moved to a child or group of children to gain their attention, speaking in a low voice when other people were present.

Example: A child ran to the block area and knocked over a structure that other children had constructed. He screamed and yelled toward Ava in frustration. Ava got up from the table where she was working with other children and approached the child. She bent down, looked him in the face and said something quietly to him. She redirected him to the back of the classroom by saying “There is more to measure back here.”

Theme Seven: Drawing attention: An exchange was considered an example of drawing attention if a participant used a voice loud enough for the entire class to hear; made it a point to draw attention to a behavior or action of a particular child or group of children, and/or shamed a child, either purposefully or without intention.
Example: From the bathroom, Cathy noticed a child standing at the easel using the bingo markers. Cathy walked across room saying “This is not lipstick.” She approached the child and laughed, shook her head. She took the child by the hand and turned him around. He used the bingo marker like chapstick and had marker on and around his lips. Cathy walked the child to the teacher space and took a picture of him with her cell phone. She took his hand and walked him over to the room divider that separated her classroom from the one next door. Cathy called out to the teacher in the other classroom and had her come to the door. She showed the teacher the child and explained what happened as she laughed about the incident:

Cathy to other teacher: “I was in the bathroom. I took a picture before I even washed his hands.”

Cathy to child: “Yeah that’s not chapstick.” The child’s response was inaudible. She walked the child to the bathroom and helped him wash the marker off his face.

*Theme Eight: Praise or Feedback:* This theme includes sub-themes because teachers provided praise for different types of behaviors.

*Eight A: Praise or Feedback for behavior* - An exchange was considered an example of praise or feedback for behavior if the participant verbally or non-verbally communicated to a specific child about that child’s actions.

Example: After brushing teeth, a child walked to the carpet to join the morning meeting. Ava smiled at the child without interrupting the song and as the other children sang Ava commented: “Thank you for walking.”

*Eight B: Praise or Feedback for process* - An exchange was considered an example of praise or feedback for process if the participant verbally communicated to
a specific child about how the child came to conclusion regarding a problem, event, or social situation.

Example: Beth observes a child building with blocks at a table next to her. He describes his structure to her. She comments “Is that what you are trying to make? You used the green rectangle. You’re using a lot of colors.”

_Eight C: Praise or Feedback for product or outcome_ - An exchange was considered an example of praise or feedback for product or outcomes if the participant verbally or non-verbally communicated to a specific child about the end result of completed work that represented a pre-determined goal.

Example: Cathy is sitting with a group of children who are making two and three dimensional snowmen on paper. She comments to a child “Are you done with your snowman? I love your snowman.”

*Frequency of interactions*. An analysis of frequency was conducted to determine how often teachers engaged in each secure base related behaviors in the three-hour period of observation. The following section discusses the frequency of interactions.

Table 9

_**Number of Secure base related behaviors. Represents the number of interactions that involved one or more secure base related behaviors.**_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Number of Interactions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ava</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beth</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cathy</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darla</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 10

Awareness of signaling behavior. Table ten represents the number of times awareness of signaling behavior was observed and the percentage of times awareness of signaling behavior was present during a secure base related interaction.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Ava</th>
<th>Beth</th>
<th>Cathy</th>
<th>Darla</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Exchanges</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of exchanges</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11

Maintaining proximity. Table 11 represents the number of times maintain proximity was observed and the percentage of times maintaining proximity was present during a secure base related interaction.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Ava</th>
<th>Beth</th>
<th>Cathy</th>
<th>Darla</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Exchanges</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of exchanges</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 12
*Positive Responsive Behavior.* Represents the number of times positive responsive behavior was observed and the percentage of times positive responsive behavior was present during a secure base related interaction.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Ava</th>
<th>Beth</th>
<th>Cathy</th>
<th>Darla</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Exchanges</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of exchanges</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 13
*Negative Responsive Behavior.* Represents the number of times negative responsive behavior was observed and the percentage of times negative responsive behavior was present during a secure base related interaction.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Ava</th>
<th>Beth</th>
<th>Cathy</th>
<th>Darla</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Exchanges</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of exchanges</td>
<td>.75%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 14
*Calling Out.* Represents the number of times calling out was observed and the percentage of times calling out was present during a secure base related interaction.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Ava</th>
<th>Beth</th>
<th>Cathy</th>
<th>Darla</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Exchanges</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of exchanges</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 15
*Addresses Privately.* Represents the number of times a addressing privately was observed and the percentage of times addressing privately was present during a secure base related interaction.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Ava</th>
<th>Beth</th>
<th>Cathy</th>
<th>Darla</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Exchanges</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of exchanges</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>.5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 16
*Drawing Attention.* Represents the number of times drawing attention to a child or behavior was observed and the percentage of times that drawing attention was present in a secure base related interaction.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Ava</th>
<th>Beth</th>
<th>Cathy</th>
<th>Darla</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Exchanges</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of exchanges</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 17
*Praise or Feedback for Behavior.* Represents the number of times praise for behavior was observed and the percentage of times that praise for behavior was present in a secure base related interaction.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Ava</th>
<th>Beth</th>
<th>Cathy</th>
<th>Darla</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Exchanges</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of exchanges</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 18
*Praise or Feedback for Process. Represents the number of times praise for process was observed and the percentage of times that praise for process was present in a secure base related interaction.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Ava</th>
<th>Beth</th>
<th>Cathy</th>
<th>Darla</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Exchanges</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of exchanges</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>.9%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 19
*Praise or Feedback for Product. Represents the number of times praise for product was observed and the percentage of times that praise for product was present in a secure base related interaction.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Ava</th>
<th>Beth</th>
<th>Cathy</th>
<th>Darla</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Exchanges</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of exchanges</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Student Teacher Relationship Scale Results**

**Overall Relationship Quality.** Ava, Becky, and Darla perceived the relationships with the majority of their class to be in the high or positive range for overall relationship quality. Cathy perceived the majority of relationships to be in the low range of overall quality. All four participants perceived having more relationships in the high or positive range for overall relationship quality with female children. Two of the participants perceived having more relationships low in overall quality with male children.
Ava perceived the overall quality of relationships to be high with 12% of the children. Of those children 50% were female, 50% were male, 50% were African-American and 50% were Bi-racial. Ava also perceived having positive overall relationship quality with 71% of the children. Of those children 75% were female, 25% were male, 42% of the children were Hispanic, 33% of the children were white, and 16% of the children were African-American and 8% of the children were Bi-racial. Ava perceived having low overall quality relationships with 17% of her class. Of those children 67% were male and Bi-racial, 33% were white.

Beth perceived having relationships high in overall relationship quality with 13% of the children in her class. Of those children 50% were female, 50% were African-American. Beth perceived the overall relationship quality in the positive range for 53% of the children. Of those children 75% were female, 63% were African-American, 25% were Bi-racial, and 12% where white. Beth perceived 33% of relationships to be low in overall relationship quality. Of those relationships 60% of the children were male, 80% of the children were African-American, and 20% of the children were Hispanic.

Cathy did not perceive having any relationships in the high range for overall quality. She perceived having relationships in the positive range with 33% of the children. Of those children, 67% were female and 67% were white. Cathy perceived having a relationship low in overall quality with 67% percent of the children in her class. Of those children, gender was equally distributed, 67% of the children were white and 33% were African-American.

Darla did not perceive having any relationships in the high range for overall quality. She perceived having a positive overall relationship quality with 63% of the
children. Of those children 80% were female, 20% were male, 90% were white and a single child with an ethnicity other than white was also in this category. Darla perceived having low overall relationship quality with 37% of the children in her class. Of those children, 67% were female, 33% were male and 100% were white.

Chart 1
*Examining Overall Relationship Quality.* Chart 1 illustrates the percentage of relationships that each participant perceived to be in the high, positive or low range for overall relationship quality.

![Overall Relationship Quality Chart](chart.jpg)

Table 20
*Overall Relationship Quality.* Table 20 represents the percentage of relationships that teachers perceived to be in the high, positive and low range for relationship quality.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall Quality</th>
<th>Ava</th>
<th>Beth</th>
<th>Cathy</th>
<th>Darla</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conflict

The majority of relationships were perceived by teachers to be in the positive range for conflict. Ava perceived 12% percent of relationships to be high in conflict. Of those children, it was evenly distributed between genders, 50% were white and 50% were biracial. Ava perceived 82% of her relationships to be in the positive range for conflict. Of those children 64% were female, 36% were male, 36% were Hispanic, 29% were white, 21% were African-American, and 14% were Bi-racial. She only perceived her relationship with one bi-racial female child to be in the low range of conflict.

Beth perceived 27% of relationships to be high in conflict. Of those children, 100% were African-American and they were evenly distributed between genders. Beth perceived 73% of relationships to be in the positive range for conflict. Of those children, 64% were female and 36% were male. Of those children, one child was identified as white, one child was identified as Hispanic leaving 18% of children identified as bi-racial and 64% were African-American. Beth did not perceive any of the relationships to be low in conflict.

Cathy perceived 44% of relationships to be high in conflict. Of those children, 75% were male and 50% were African-American and 50% were white. Cathy perceived 56% of relationships to be in the positive range. Of those children, 80% were female, 20% were male, 80% were white, and 20% were African-American. Cathy did not perceive any of the relationships to be low in conflict.

Darla perceived 31% of relationships to be high in conflict. Of those children, 60% were female and 40% were male. Darla perceived 69% of the relationships to be within the positive range for conflict. Of those children, 82% were female and 18% were
male. Darla’s class has only one child who was identified as an ethnicity other than white, and she perceived her relationship with that child as being in the positive range for conflict. Darla did not perceive having any relationships in the low range for conflict.

Chart 2
Examining Conflict. Chart 2 illustrates the percentage of relationships that teachers perceived to be in the high, positive or low range for conflict. Relationships in the high range of conflict were perceived by teachers to have a level of discord or struggle that indicated the need for support or intervention. Relationships in the positive or low range of conflict indicated relationships that were perceived to have a manageable level of discord or struggle.
Table 21
*Conflict. Table 21 represents the percentage of relationships that teachers perceived to be in the high, positive or low range for conflict.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ava</th>
<th>Beth</th>
<th>Cathy</th>
<th>Darla</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Closeness**

Perceptions of closeness presented surprising results. All of the participants perceived a relatively high percentage of relationships in the low range for closeness. The results from the closeness sub-scale also supports the literature in that all four of the participants perceived more relationships being in the positive range for closeness with female children than male.

Ava reported no children with whom she perceived having a relationship high in closeness. She perceived having relationships with 24% of the children in a positive range for closeness. Of those children 75% were female, 25% were male, 25% were white, 25% were African-American, 25% were Bi-racial and 25% were Hispanic. Ava perceived 76% of relationships as low in closeness. Of those children 62% were female, 38% were male, 31% were white, 31% were Hispanic, 23% were Bi-racial, and 15% were African-American.

Beth perceived having relationships high in closeness with 20% of children and of those children 67% were female, 33% were male, 67% were African-American and 33% were Bi-racial. Beth perceived having a relationship with 33% of the children that fell within the positive range for closeness, of those children 100% were female, 60% were African-American and 40% were Bi-racial. Beth perceived having relationships low in
closeness with 47% of the children in her class. Of those children 71% were male, 29% were female, 71% were African-American, 14% were white and 14% were Hispanic.

Cathy reported having no children with whom she perceived having a relationship high in closeness. She perceived 22% of the relationships to be in the positive range for closeness. Of those children 100% were female, 50% were white and 50% were African-American. Cathy perceived 78% of relationships with children to be low in closeness. Of those children, 57% were male, 43% were female, 71% were white, and 29% were African-American.

Darla perceived having a relationship high in closeness with one white male child. She perceived having a relationship in the positive range of closeness for 63% of the children. Of those children 80% were female and 20% were male. All of those children were white except one who is identified as an ethnicity other than white. Darla perceived 31% of the relationships to be low in closeness. Of those children, 80% were female, 20% were male and 100% were white.
Chart 3

*Examining Closeness. Chart 3 illustrates the percentage of relationships that teachers perceived to be in the high, positive or low range for closeness.*

![Chart 3](chart.png)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Closeness</th>
<th>Ava</th>
<th>Beth</th>
<th>Cathy</th>
<th>Darla</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>High</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Positive</strong></td>
<td>24</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Low</strong></td>
<td>76</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 22

*Closeness. Table 22 represents the percentage of relationships that teachers perceived to be in the high, positive or low range for closeness.*

Conclusions

Several themes emerged from the data. First, all four participants had seven or more years of experience but level of experience did not seem to have any impact on teacher-child relationship quality nor did it connect to teacher-child interaction quality or
classroom practices. On the contrary, Cathy, who worked with three year olds, had 19 years of experience and perceived having the fewest relationships in the positive range for overall relationship quality, perceived having the most relationships in the high range for conflict, and perceived having the most relationships in the low range for closeness. This would indicate that age of the children and not her level of experience was a factor in relationship quality.

Age was a factor in the perception of closeness. Teachers working with children younger than 4 years old perceived their relationships to be lower in closeness. Teachers working with children 4 to 5 perceived relationships to either be high in closeness or within the positive range. Additionally, teacher ratings from the STRS did not always match teacher’s descriptions of the relationships in their classrooms. For example, Ava said that she felt like she had a good relationship with the kids in her class but scores from the STRS would indicate that she perceived 76% of relationships to be low in closeness. Observational data would support that she interacted with children in ways that indicate high quality close relationships.

Another theme that emerged was a negative relationship between participants’ perceptions of overall relationship quality and the number of discipline related interactions observed. The higher the percentage of relationships in the high or positive range for overall relationship quality resulted in fewer discipline related interactions. As the perceptions of overall quality went down the number of discipline related interactions increased.

The literature suggests that race and gender may also impact teacher perceptions of relationship quality. The results from this study do not support or detract from the
hypothesis that race impacts teachers’ perceptions of relationship quality. Further analysis of the data would be needed to determine the impact of race.

The results do support gender as a factor in teacher perceptions of relationship quality. All four participants reported having a higher number of relationships in the high or positive range for closeness with girls. Three out of the four teachers perceived a majority of relationships with female children to be in the positive range for conflict. All four also perceived more relationships with girls to be in the positive range for overall relationship quality.

Finally, the data supports the literature that says on-going professional development is important to relationship quality and teacher practice. Participants who had the opportunity to participate in on-going professional development perceived more relationships to be higher in overall relationship quality and perceived more relationships to be in the positive range for conflict. This is significant because conflict in the teacher-child relationship is more indicative of future behavior patterns than closeness (Jerome, et. al, 2009). Additionally, the level of on-going professional development was an indicator of positive responsive behavior. Participants who engaged in regular professional development opportunities responded more often to children in a positive way, used little or no forms of punishment, responded to signaling behaviors more often, and seldom, if ever, drew attention to children’s action or behaviors as a method of classroom management.
Chapter Five

Discussion and Interpretations

This study examined teacher beliefs about discipline, children and classroom practices and how those beliefs contributed to teacher-child interactions. Using the theoretical framework of attachment, which is based on adult response to child-initiated behaviors, the study also sought to determine if teacher beliefs and interactions are related to teacher perceptions of relationship quality. In this chapter I present interpretations, implications and recommendations for subsequent research and action that may contribute to the development of high quality teacher-child relationships.

Teacher Beliefs

Common Beliefs. Participants had common beliefs regarding discipline, children and classroom practice. Those common beliefs were related to teacher dispositions toward emotionally secure environments, consistency, flexibility and engaging children. In accordance with the research, participants came to their classrooms with different experiences and backgrounds that informed their decisions about classroom practices. Their backgrounds included preconceived ideas that influenced perceptions about children’s potential for academic achievements or social development (Coplan, et.al. 2015; Parks & Kennedy, 2007). Although participants prioritized common statements as characteristic or not characteristic of their practice, participants’ approaches toward each variable were unique.

Emotionally secure environments. Emotional security refers to a consistent and general sense of well-being and warmth in the classroom. Teachers who are emotionally supportive engage in specific behaviors that create a climate that has physiological,
emotional, and developmental consequences. Emotionally supportive teachers are described as warm, kind, sensitive and attentive (Merritt, et.al, 2012). Teachers who are emotionally supportive also use a positive affect when engaging with children, choose guidance rather than punishments as the main method of classroom management. Additionally, these teachers are aware of children’s social and emotional needs and engage children in exchanges that continue to strengthen their emotional knowledge (Curby, Brock & Hamre, 2013). Most importantly, emotionally supportive teachers respond thoughtfully to social situations and consider them opportunities for teaching and learning (Hamre & Pianta, 2005).

Each participant prioritized belief statements regarding discipline, children and classroom practice that are related to emotional security. They each believed that praise was an effective method of classroom management and that giving children attention for desired behaviors worked more effectively than behavior modification methods. All four participants prioritized the importance of welcoming students by name, knowing children and their families, and doing activities that created a sense of community in the classroom.

What participants were adamant about, and believed was a foundation for their work, was making sure students felt cared about. They each prioritized the statement that students need to feel safe and secure in the classroom as most characteristic of their beliefs. When they were asked to define a safe and secure classroom environment they described emotional safety first, placing emotional security and overt acts of caring such as hugging or holding children as foundational to their teaching practices.
Ava: “…when the kids come in that they feel comfortable, that they can come to you and talk to you. You want to create that atmosphere where kids, even their feelings aren’t being hurt, but where we can talk about it and kind of move on. I think a safe classroom is a place where kids feel open to express themselves in a positive way. You know, through conscience discipline we’re supposed to be able to help kids who express themselves in a negative way to kind of calm themselves down and deal with that so they can express it in a more positive way because you want all the kids to be safe and nobody to be hurt. We talk a lot about that about being safe at school. To the kids we say ‘we want everyone to be safe, we don’t want anyone to get hurt. We want to talk to the kids is another way to create a safe atmosphere.’

Talking about emotional security Ava continues: “I think that’s huge. I think the kids have to feel comfortable and safe and knowing that they can come to you. You want them to because that makes a difference in their learning. If they can receive your comfort. You know, if they weren’t comfortable with me I don’t think they would be, I don’t think they would learn as fast. If they felt like I was threatening to them or… if they knew they were going to get punished for something. Then they might not feel safe because they are going to make mistakes and I’m going to have to say things over and over to them cause they’re still just learning. Because they come to you all the time, you know, they have lots of issues and they don’t know how to deal with the stuff they have and
they deal with it the best they can. But if they come to you emotionally, you know and I can comfort them and then we can move on to maybe learn something.”

Beth: “Um long pause) I mean of course materials need to be safe for them, but the most thing I think of is how do children feel? That’s my thing. Of course materials need to be safe and things that could cut them should be put up but more so with safe and secure, is feeling safe inside. Feeling like um… like you go to school and the teacher is not going to hurt you or that your feelings matter you know. I feel like the children feel secure. Whereas they don’t come here and feel like ‘Oh goodness. Miss B is going to yell at us all day. She’s not going to have any fun with us and we are going to sit there and be bored.’ That is not secure if you ask me. Secure is more like coming in and being like ‘Okay Miss B is so happy.’ And of course if they are making a poor choice they’re going to get talked to but for the most part I think they should feel happy to come to school and not feel like they are going to get criticized all day. That’s what I think of when I think of that. That’s lots of guidance for sure. Making the children feel safe. Making sure they feel happy about themselves. Like if they have an accident you aren’t going to criticize them. If they have three you might have to talk to them. If they have three you might have to talk to them about that but you know kids have accidents. Like some teachers would be like ‘Oh my goodness now I’ve got to change you.’(Says this in a nasty irritated tone) Then they (child)
are like ‘Oh my goodness.’ and they feel this big (indicated small with her fingers).”

Cathy: “I always make sure it’s welcoming to all the children. That they are in a safe place with their teacher and when mommies and daddies drop you off this is where mommy and daddy want you because they picked a safe place for you. I’m a very huggy teacher. I pick them up a lot and I always use the words “I love you.” Doing things like that because some kids might not hear those words. Yes. And I always tell the parents, um when they are with me they are my babies just like if they were my own children at home. And that’s what I would want for my own children is they are some place safe when I’m not around. You have to have emotional security or you’re not going to have a safe classroom.”

Darla: “I think that’s pretty big especially working with Head Start children. That’s not necessarily something they are getting at home. So I think they need to know that Cindy and I are here for them no matter what kind of choice they make that day. That we are here to help them in that. We have one little girl who says I’m not bad, I’m not bad. I’m assuming maybe that’s what she hears a lot at home and we always reassure her that “No. There are no bad children in this classroom.” We are still learning and sometimes we might not make the best choice but we are going to learn through that choice. Um, so I think that that is very important. You know a lot of hugs, a lot of children climbing up in our lap you know reassuring them. You know, we have a safe spot in the classroom that if
you know, maybe when they get up from nap they are not ready to get up so that is a place they can go and lay. It’s not a place of punishment or anything like that.”

Additionally, each participant believed their most important job as a teacher was to cultivate an emotionally safe environment.

Ava: “Making them feel safe and loved. I think…you have to have that like, foundation before you can move on to the academic side of it. There is other people who worry about the data and that they are ready for kindergarten. But they also have to be emotionally ready because when they get to even older grades if they can’t control their emotions it effects their learning. So creating that atmosphere, hopefully a positive atmosphere, you know that they’ll want to control their behaviors.”

Beth: “I think it is to be there emotionally for the children. I think, uh, to teach the children too. But you can’t teach them unless they feel comfortable with you so building a positive relationship with them, even the hard ones. And that’s hard sometimes, you know. Actually one of the hardest kids in my class just bonded to me. I thought he was going to be a kid not so good yesterday because he accidentally got me in the face, on accident but he was just so, his face turned red and he was like “Why did you do this?” Like over time my patience with him, my being consistent with him, and my lovingness to him and hugging him and telling him ‘I do love you but your choices right now are sad, we need to make better choices’ have worked somehow and we have bonded you know. And he’s
a tough kid sometimes but I think loving children and making them feel safe and teaching them. I think those are the most valuable things.”

   Cathy: “Is to keep the children safe and happy. And excited to come to school. And there are going to be those children that is, they’re going to cry every morning when they get dropped off it’s just, and as I tell parents that they usually do it for two minutes and then they are done. They are making you feel guilty when you go to work. I said I had my own baby do it and was two doors down. (Laughing) And they are like “You did.” I said “Yeah” and she was there from 6 weeks old until she was 5 years old. To make children feel happy and safe and excited to be at school.”

   Darla: “Oh gosh. Probably the overall well-being of the classroom. Making sure that they are safe. That we are learning through play and most importantly that I’ve given them the love of play. The love of learning so when they go into school next year, it’s a much different environment. From what I’m hearing the divide between preschool and kindergarten keeps growing and just giving them the sense of self-pride that you know I can get through this and I can do this just as well as the child sitting next to me.”

   Praise. All four participants also prioritized that praise from them was an effective way to change children’s behavior as very characteristic or characteristic of their approach. Observation data determined that praising children for product was the most common form of praise used by Ava, Beth, and Cathy. Darla did not engage in
praise for product, and rarely used praise for behavior or process as part of a quality assessment program she is required to implement in her classroom. Twice a year she is evaluated based on a checklist and observation of her interactions with children. She explained that even though praise is part of her belief system, and she does use it because the population of children she serves craved praise and positive feedback, she isn’t supposed to use it in accordance with the assessment program.

“You can’t use any praise. When they bring you a picture you can’t say ‘Oh that’s a great picture. I like that picture.’ You have to say ‘Oh I see that you used blue and yellow in that picture. Can you tell me about that?’ So it’s a little bit dry on that aspect. I feel like sometimes they {children} are looking for the love and praise maybe they’re not getting at home.”

Chart 4
Using Praise. Chart 4 illustrates the frequency for which participants used praise for behavior, process and product.

**Individual Beliefs and Interactions.** Overall, the participants engaged in positive methods of discipline and guidance. Each participant used directives to clarify expectations for children, followed through with consequences, and used guidance as
their main method of reinforcing classroom expectations. Notable was the use of punishments and non-responsive behaviors in two of the classrooms. Although there were only a few isolated examples, their presence indicates interactions consistent with emotionally insecure environments and should be discussed (McEachern, et.al, 2008; King & Jansen, 2011).

*Discipline Related Interactions.* In the following section I will discuss how each participant described her beliefs about discipline, how they aligned with discipline related interactions and provide examples of practice to illustrate how they align.

**Chart 5**

*Discipline Related Interactions. Chart 5 illustrates the percentage of times a discipline related category was present during a discipline related interaction among all participants.*

*Ava.* When asked to prioritize her beliefs about discipline and guidance Ava felt that a classroom runs smoothly when there are clear expectations for behavior and that
class rules should be posted. She felt that if she treated children with respect and kindness there would be fewer behavior problems. Characteristic of her belief system was children should try to solve conflicts on their own before going to the teacher. Ava describes her method of waiting and assessing a situation before she jumps in to help children:

“I want to see if they work it out on their own. We do a lot of modeling in the beginning and you hope that eventually they can solve the problem themselves without needing you all the time because they call my name all-the-time. I have a little girl in the morning class who always now says things like, “I don’t like it when you do that.” Because we’ve been saying that for so long but to see her finally doing and then looking to us like “am I saying this right?” You know, like, ‘I’m telling her what you’re telling me to tell her.’ So, I like to see that. I’m like “I’m so glad you used your words. That’s great. I hope your friend is listening. Remember that’s our job is to listen when we are at school. To our friends and our teachers.”

Ava also prioritized using positive attention to reinforce class expectations. She felt that verbal punishment is an unacceptable way to control behavior and that it is important to implement positive techniques. She believed that praise is the most effective way to change children’s behavior and that techniques like extrinsic rewards or punishments undermine children’s motivation.

“Oh praise. I don’t do rewards. That’s the one thing that was really easy when I saw that I was like “Yeah, no” that goes all the way to the end of the q-sort. Because I’ve tried it out of frustration years ago but it was just terrible. The kids who didn’t get the reward, it would be even more of a
melt-down and it was just, I don’t think is effective at all for kids. I know there’s always people that try to push that, “Can we try stickers for the kid?” and I have said I just don’t know. I guess it depends but I don’t find it effective to reward them.

Because I want them to behave because they want to, because it feels right to do the right thing and because we are keeping everybody safe. I don’t want them to be looking for the stickers, because when the sticker’s not there are you going to behave? So I don’t ever do prize boxes (shakes her head). But then I feel bad because my kids’ schools, they’ve done that where they’ve had those prize boxes and my kids have been fortunate enough to get that but there are other kids who never get to reach into the box. How does that make you, you know, cause I think if the adults are like “You’ll want to do this. You’ll want to do right so you can get this” but they can’t make sense of that, so I don’t think that it, you know, works.”

Her beliefs closely align with her practice. Ava never used punishment or ignored a behavior. Guidance was her most used type of discipline related interaction with 56% of her discipline related interactions classified as guidance. One of the ways that Ava’s practice reflected her beliefs was her use of choice. Providing children with multiple opportunities to make choices also supported her beliefs that self-monitoring behaviors are important skills for children to develop. Ava described her thoughts on using choice in the classroom:
“That’s just what we do. We let them choose. And sometimes it’s just simple choices because too many choices can be overwhelming. You know, choose the paper they want to use, choose the utensil they want to use, choose the color they want to use, choose the areas they want to go to. They own that then. It’s more meaningful to them. They are the ones that chose to do it. They pick it you know and if it’s something they want to do then they are more likely to learn through that.”

Ava also used directives which clarified expectations frequently with 29% of discipline related interactions including a directive. She reminded children of the expectations and rules often and followed through with natural consequences. For example, Ava reminds one of the children, “Um, Fred, you have a lot of stuff on the table. You have a lot of stuff out. Before you take anything else out you have to clean up. Before you take out play dough you have to clean up the table.”
Ava and Discipline related interactions. Chart 6 illustrates the percentage of times the five specific discipline related categories were present during discipline related interactions between Ava and children in her classroom.

Beth. When asked to prioritize her beliefs about discipline and guidance, Beth identified statements most related to following rules as very characteristic of her approach. She believes that communicating about the rules is very important and that rules should be discussed and posted as well as reinforced consistently. Additionally, she felt like a classroom runs more smoothly when there are clear expectations of behavior as characteristic of her beliefs. Observations of her practice are consistent with these beliefs. She explained her thoughts about rules when she stated:

“Well being consistent is hugely important. Like making sure that rules are being followed consistently, not where one kid can do something and one kid can’t because that will cause problems. Making sure all the rules
are being followed by consistency and reminding the children of the rules.”

She also believed that children should try to solve conflicts on their own before getting help from a teacher.

“Well we have a boy in our class, and his mom really does a lot for him. She comes in and takes off his coat, hangs it up for him and everything. I’ve talked to her about it and she has ignored every time I’ve talked to her about it. So when it’s time to go outside he’ll put his coat on, which it took about a week for him to put it on himself. But he wouldn’t zip it. He would just sit in his cubby and cry. He’d fiddle with it, drop it and he wouldn’t try, he would just cry and cry. Mom came in and said ‘Well you need to make sure his coat is zipped’ but I made him try and try. We started doing it at choices time for five minutes every day, just me and him. And today he was at his cubby and came to me and said “Miss Beth. Look at what I did!” I could have easily been like okay fine and zipped it every day. But being independent is very important and so he was so happy, smiling for like a whole half hour he kept going ‘Can you believe I did it?!”

Beth prioritized that the primary goal of managing children’s behavior is to establish and maintain control as less characteristic of her practice. Least characteristic was using verbal punishment or extrinsic rewards as a way of controlling or changing children’s behavior.
Her prioritized beliefs are mostly consistent with her practice. Of the discipline related interactions Beth engaged, she used directives the most. For instance, Beth scanned the classroom and noticed that a group of children were playing in the library. She told them “Mark, Stephanie, Joey, and Jesse, that is not where we rough play. You can pick a book or puzzle in there.”

Guidance was her next most frequently used discipline related interaction. Beth used questioning as a way to guide behavior. For example, Beth heard a child screaming at other children. She said “What did we talk about at circle? Not to scream. Are you guys playing nicely with her?” Beth also stated classroom expectations or referred to classroom rules often and consistently enforced rules like the number of children allowed in an area at one time. For instance, Beth noticed that four children were playing in the science center. She called out to the fourth child “Betty, there are already three friends over here.” Betty left the area.

Some inconsistencies between Beth’s prioritized beliefs and her practice were also observed. Beth’s choice of consequences and her prioritized beliefs were identified because she used rewards and punishments even though she prioritized extrinsic rewards as least characteristic of her approach. She expressed conflicting feelings about using teaching methods that she knows are not recommended but align with her beliefs regarding discipline. For example, she used extrinsic rewards but not consistently explaining that:

“I love to give them praise whenever, you know, even the smallest thing they accomplish. I’m very encouraging with my words and then once in a while I’ll surprise them with a sticker or prizes. I do have a prize box. I
try to more so have them rely on their inner happiness then just giving them stuff because again next year in kindergarten they’re not just going to get stickers or prizes for doing good stuff. So I try to just praise them and tell them you know, make sure that they know I’m proud of them.”

Another example of inconsistent beliefs and practice included the punitive punishment of isolation. Beth employed isolation as a method to change behavior. She used the library as a ‘reflection spot’ but hesitated to call it time out saying “I don’t like to say time out. I don’t like time out. More so reflecting on what you did and do better the next time. And then I go over to them and I’ll talk to them and say ‘Well I understand you got upset but how can we talk to your friend next time.’” One of the ways she used the reflection spot is illustrated in the following example.

A child walked into the kitchen. Beth watched the interaction between the child and a group of other children. She muttered “Ummmm” and then got up and walked back to the area. She took one of the children by the hand and walked her out of the kitchen into the library area/reflection spot. She had a very stern look on her face. She got down on her knees and the child was facing her.

Beth: Why am I looking at you? Was that nice to say? Could you have told her that?

Beth continued to talk to the child quietly. She kept the stern look on her face. She stood up and left the library area. As she was leaving one of the other children started to enter the library.

Beth: Stacy, I want you to leave here. She needs to be by herself.
Several minutes later Beth returned to the library and spoke with the child. The child left the area and returned to the kitchen area. Later Beth explained her response to me by stating:

“We have clique problem. There is three of them that have names for each of them. They are different from their own. They’re like a little clique and we’ve been having a lot of problems with them being mean to the other kids, with the other girls especially. And that’s what happened. She was telling the girl but not to the girl that her breath stunk like garlic but she was saying it in a mean way to another child, to one of the other clique members. So I had to address it quickly.”

Additionally, Beth prioritized the use of punishment as least characteristic of her approach to discipline but she did use punitive punishment six times. One example of punitive punishment was taking something away from a child because of a previous behavior.

Martin: Can I go to the construction blocks?
Beth: No. You are not allowed in construction and blocks today.

Martin: Can I go to the library?
Beth: You can read or do puzzles.

Martin walks to the construction and blocks. He watches the other boys who are playing in the area. Beth is standing close by watching Martin. He looks up and notices she is watching. Beth shakes her head at him and says “You lost construction and blocks today.”
Giving and taking away love and affection was another tool Beth used for motivation.

During free play, one of the children had been moving from center to center without really engaging. He had sought Beth’s attention several times without response. Beth noticed that he was using materials in the sensory table inappropriately.

She tells him: You don’t take people’s rice.

She moved the child away from the sensory table saying: “I’ve given you too many warnings. When you are done throwing the rice you can try again. You are done.”

The child began having a tantrum. He is asking her to pick him up. She ignored him and moved away from him.

While she talks with another group of children, the tantrum stops. She looked at the child and says:

“Are you done Charles? I will give you a hug now.”

Although the majority of Beth’s discipline related interactions were consistent with emotionally secure environments, the use of punishments, isolation and denying children’s feelings are significant because those interactions detract from her overall goal of creating an emotionally secure environment.
Chart 7
*Beth and Discipline related interactions. Chart 7 illustrates the percentage of times the five specific discipline related categories were present during discipline related interactions between Beth and children in her classroom.*

*Cathy. Cathy demonstrated more inconsistency than consistency with discipline related interactions and her prioritized beliefs did not align closely with her practice. She was consistent with using rules as a way to control behavior. She prioritized the primary goal of dealing with a student’s behavior is to establish and maintain control as most characteristic of her approach to discipline. She also prioritized that a classroom runs smoothing when there are clear expectations and that posting and discussing classroom rules was most characteristic of her practice. She explains:*

“Since they are so young, threes, it’s going over the rules and talking to them on a daily basis like at group time, like what, how do we use our voices in here? What kind of feet do we use in here? And it takes time. If I feel like they need a break, they go to the chill zone. I get down at their
level and talk to them. “And what do you think you could have done?”

Sometimes I say ‘use gentle hands’ because a lot of times it {the child’s behavior} is like hitting and biting. “What are our teeth used for?” We might talk about eating food. We have a book in the room and they {teeth} are for eating food or talking. If they are hitting I make sure that they check on their friend like ‘Make sure your friend is okay’ because you can’t tell a kid to say sorry because they might not be sorry.”

Observational data supported those beliefs. Of the discipline related interactions, Cathy used directives and guidance most frequently which aligned with her beliefs. In the following example Cathy observed girls in the bathroom playing and approached to clarify rules and follow through.

She walked into the bathroom and told the girls, “Dry your hands please. I got it for you. Dry your hands. Pick it up please. Pick it up please and put it in the garbage.”

In another example of guidance, Cathy is approached by a child, Maggie. Maggie tells Cathy “He pushed me! He pushed me!” and identified Greg as the person who pushed her.

Cathy: Where is Greg?

Maggie: (Points) There he is.

Greg was hiding behind a child sized couch in another area of the classroom. Cathy walked over to him and said “Greg, gentle touches.”

Inconsistencies emerged with other prioritized beliefs. Cathy prioritized that respecting students’ autonomy as important and expecting students to act responsibly as
less characteristic of her beliefs but she used responsibility as a lesson on keeping the
classroom neat. Instead of having children consistently clean up materials, Cathy would
do it sometimes and then other times expect children to complete the task. For example,
during the first observation she and a small group of children were playing with a doll
house and accessories. When the children finished playing they moved on to another
area, leaving the doll house and accessories on the floor. Cathy also moved to another
area. Minutes later she re-entered the area and cleaned up the doll house toys. However,
on another occasion Cathy tells two girls who are playing in the kitchen:

“Amihan and Nala, back to the kitchen. Back to the kitchen. It’s a mess
over there. I can see it from over here. I would hate to see your bedrooms
at homes girls. You are only here two days a week but you take the toys
all over the classroom.”

Later, she described her attempts at getting the children to play a more active role
in cleaning up by focusing on responsibility as a concept.

“We have just been talking about the word being responsible and taking
care of, picking up what you do. And so when they do it I’ll say ‘okay
let’s be responsible’ and then I’ll say their name “Okay Amihan is being a
responsible friend today. Or, yay, Roger is being responsible” so they feel
proud of themselves and giving them more ownership. It’s their
classroom and a lot of times I will be like “Emily I need you to go help me
do this” so they feel proud that they are helping me do that.”
Least characteristic of her beliefs about discipline included using extrinsic rewards like stickers or candy to reinforce desired behaviors. Rather she believes that children are motivated by making the adults in their lives happy.

“Well I think they always want to please the adult in the classroom and they want to make their parents happy. Like at the end of the day when their parents pick up and they always want to say ‘Mommy I had a great day’ and they always want to reinforce that because usually a lot of time Moms and Dads will say ‘Have a great day! I can’t wait to see you after school.’ And then they want to be able to tell their mom and dad ‘I had a great day. I listened to Miss Cathy. I didn’t run. Or I didn’t sass back.’ One of my little girls will say sass.”

Although Cathy did not believe in extrinsic rewards, she did use punishment on six occasions although she was hesitant to think of the practices as punishments. For example, Cathy used the chill zone as a form of time-out, but she did not want to refer to it as time out. She explained by saying “you can say time out but I use the words ‘chill zone’ because then it has a different meaning. It’s a two or three-minute break.” She described the chill zone as:

“…just sometimes the place they need to go to take a break away from the group of what they are doing, you know, if they keep taking cars from other children or throwing cars then I’ll say you need to go sit in the chill spot and be by yourself for a few minutes and then we will talk about it. It’s not like it’s awful. There are books there. There is a mirror for them
to look at. Sometimes I’ll put squishy toys for them to squeeze. Sometimes it’s okay for children to take a break away from the group.”

When asked to describe what she is most satisfied with in regards to her approach to discipline, Cathy again talked about the chill zone.

“I think my children have come a long way with using the chill zone. They know let’s go there, I need a break. And it’s okay for children to need a break away from the group. And it helps them to maybe think about what’s going on and when I go over and talk to them and they are like ‘okay’. I had a child at the beginning of the year, she would go around hitting every child. Like I don’t have that problem anymore. Cause every time she would hit I would put her in that chill zone and I mean it was like up to ten times a day and now we don’t have it anymore.

Punishments were also connected to making the adults happy in the classroom. An example of this happened during the final observation as Cathy was sitting at a table with a variety of food items and a small group of children. She and the children were putting different foods into sandwich bags and mixing them together to create trail mix. She asked Roger if he wanted to make some trail mix for his family. While she was talking with Roger, Nancy approaches the table. Cathy responded to her:

“Oh walk away. You don’t get to make it. You thought it was okay to hit your friends. I’m going to make it for your brother though.” Nancy walked away and began playing on the carpet. Cathy noticed the assistant talking to her and asked “Is she not listening to you? That’s why she hasn’t made any trail mix today because she hasn’t been listening to her teachers. I’m going to make a trail mix for her brother.” Cathy began to list aloud all

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of the children who are taking trail mix to siblings. Minutes later Cathy approached Nancy and retracted the punishment, but threatened another by saying “We are going to make your trail mix. But if you don’t have a good day we are throwing it out.”

Cathy described asking parents to help reinforce consequences by using the threat of punishment when she says: “I think talking to the parents too {is important for following through with consequences} and being on the same page as the parents. Like on Friday, this Friday is fun pj day. And I’m having trouble with a little girl not being very kind and sassing back to me. And so the mom said that if you don’t listen this week you will not wear your pjs. So every day she’s like “I’m having a good day today. I get to wear my pjs.” And I’m like “You are having a great day. I’m so happy because I want you to be in your pjs just like me.”

Also inconsistent with Cathy’s prioritized beliefs was her use of nonresponsiveness. She prioritized the statement that monitoring students can prevent problematic situations as characteristic of her practice but of the discipline related interactions observed, Cathy used ignoring behaviors or did not respond to children’s conflicts 14% of time.

For example, four boys were in the construction area building with blocks and playing with a garage and car track. One of the boys started hitting one of the others. They both started to scream. The child who was hitting was a child that Cathy had identified as one who needs extra support but Cathy did not intervene. The child who was hitting ran from the area without any intervention. In another example, while Cathy was placing cots around the room Roger cried out. She asked him what was wrong. He
responded “Charlie hit me.” Cathy did not respond to Roger or speak with Charlie. She continued to put out cots.

Chart 8
*Cathy and Discipline related interactions. Chart 8 illustrates the percentage of times the five specific discipline related categories were present during discipline related interactions between Cathy and children in her classroom.*

![Chart 8: Discipline related interactions](chart.png)

**Darla.** Observation data aligned closely with Darla’s prioritized beliefs regarding discipline. When Darla was asked to prioritize her beliefs about discipline she prioritized the following statements as most characteristic of her approach: when students are engaged in interesting problems and challenging activities, they tend to have very few discipline problems, and verbal punishment is an unacceptable means of controlling students’ behavior; I believe it is more important to use only positive management techniques. This was especially important to Darla given the population of children with whom she works.
“I think my clientele here is, um, they’re just looking for that praise and that love. They are looking for that attention. They are just looking for you to have a conversation and notice them so I think that’s what motivates them here. They want you to say “Hey great job!” because they don’t hear that at home. Maybe they want to spend just 10 minutes playing in the sensory table with you just having dialogue with you, conversations back and forth because maybe that’s something they don’t get at home. It’s more of go sit in front of the tv, or you know parents work late at night so they are at home with maybe other older siblings so it’s just a lot of tv and screen time.”

Observation data supported that her beliefs were consistent with her practice. In one way, Darla had only 59 discipline related interactions during the three-hour observation period. Observations of free-play found that the environment was designed to encourage children to engage in a wide range of child-directed activities. I noted several times that children did not engaged in conflict regularly and that “children were talking and laughing but completely engaged with materials in different areas.” I also observed children engaged in activities for extended periods of time. During one observation, a group of girls pretended with dolls, using blankets and other accessories for the entire one-hour observation.

Another way Darla’s beliefs were consistent with her practice was that 43% of the discipline related interactions were forms of guidance. For example:

Darla was sitting with Autumn at the sand table. Autumn was chattering to her about her mountains and how she is making one with the sand.
Darla was actively listening to Autumn by looking at her and commenting conversationally. One of the boys from the building area joined them.

Boy: “I’ll get a scoop and help you guys.”

Darla: “Do you know what she is doing?”

Boy: “Making a beach.”

Darla explained that Autumn had a different idea and encouraged him to talk to her about it.

Darla: “Well ask Autumn what she is doing.” He did. Autumn told him they were making a mountain. He began to help them.

Darla also prioritized that classrooms run smoothly when there are clear expectations for behavior and that rules for behavior are reinforced consistently as characteristic of her beliefs. Again, these beliefs were supported in her practice. Of the discipline related interactions, 46% of the interactions were directives telling children exactly what to do, or guidance that clarified classroom expectations. For example, Darla noticed that one of the children has put some of the plastic food from the dramatic play area in her mouth. She says “Oh that doesn’t go in your mouth. Go put it in the sink.” In another instance a child was running in the classroom. Darla walked over to the child, bent down and looked her in the face. She said “What kind of feet should we have? Walking feet in the classroom.”

Darla prioritized that if I treat students with respect, kindness, and concern, there are fewer behavior problems as characteristic to her approach to discipline. Again this is supported by observation data. Darla did not engage in any form of punishment and she was never non-responsive to the needs of children. Darla discussed the importance
of mutual respect with children when she described the overall relationship quality in her classroom.

“I’d say probably like a friendship respect kind of thing. Everyone is having fun and they are interacting and stuff but I think that they know I’m the one who follows through. I’m the one who kind of makes the rules and keeps the routine in flow, and that they are not afraid to come up and play and interact. But I definitely feel like there is a sense of respect towards one another in the classroom. That I respect your words and interactions and vice versa. So I think there’s a feeling of, it sounds harsh and I don’t know how to put it but a feeling of mutual respect.”

Additionally, the consequences that she followed through with were natural in nature, took into consideration the context of the child’s behavior, and mostly involved stopping unsafe behaviors.

For example, two girls were playing a game in the classroom. Darla noticed their game and visually monitored the game without intervening until one of the girls, Becky, ran through the classroom. Darla told her “walk your feet, Becky.” Becky stopped running. She and the other child continued to play their game. They mostly walked, but occasionally, ran around the room. At one point, Becky and the other girl ran by Darla who was sitting with a small group of children in the construction area. Darla stopped them and said: “Erin and Becky, what are we doing?”

Becky: We are playing find the hobbler?

Darla: That sounds like an outside game because I see you running. If you can’t turn that into a walking game, we will have to wait to play it outside.
Chart 9

Darla and Discipline related interactions. Chart 9 illustrates the percentage of times the five specific discipline related categories were present during discipline related interactions between Darla and children in her classroom.

Secure Base Related Interactions. The impact of secure base related interactions rests in how caregivers respond to children. In this study, I examined responses that are similar to caregiver responses to infant signals. In infancy the quality of response from caregivers is most important because it helps the infant know what can be expected from adults (Bowlby, 1969; Ainsworth, 1989). As secondary caregivers, the quality of teacher responses to children’s signals can continue to help children determine a level of trust with, and sense of reliability on, the adults to give them what they need.

Analysis of secure base related interactions determined that teachers were aware of signaling behaviors of children. It is important to note that in many instances teachers were aware of signaling behavior but were faced with responding to multiple signals.
Because the criteria for awareness included a response from the participant, only the signaling behaviors that were acknowledged are included. In all likelihood, teachers were aware of far more signals but had to choose which ones to address. Teachers also maintained proximity with children frequently sitting close to children or holding them as they engaged in play. More of their responses were positive than negative and many of the responses were needed which is represented in the discipline related interaction section. Responses like calling out, drawing attention to behavior, and addressing children privately are included because their presence, or lack of presence, indicated responses that contribute to the emotional security of classroom environments and should be discussed (McEachern, et.al, 2008; King & Jansen, 2011).

Praise was the common theme where inconsistency between teacher belief and practice emerged. All participants considered praise to be important in their practice, especially when reinforcing or changing behavior, but observations determined that the majority of praise was offered to children for outcomes and not behavior or process.

In the following section I discuss how each participant described her beliefs, how they aligned with their responses to children’s signals and provide examples of practice to illustrate how they align.
Ava. Observations of Ava’s practice determined that of the secure base related interactions, half of them were responding to signaling behavior. Additionally, 60% of her responses to children were positive in nature. Ava’s awareness of signaling behaviors and positive responses align with her beliefs. She believed that students should feel known and recognized in the classroom and that they meet challenges best when they feel that teachers care about them. An example of how her beliefs align with her practice was evident in how Ava was aware of how children felt and responded to verbal and non-verbal ques.

An example of this is illustrated in her response to a child who was looking for her picture on the family tree. Ava said “Are you looking at the family wall? Is there a picture of you up there?” Ava realized that the child, who was new to the class, had not
had a photo added yet. She and the child talked about either taking a photo when she was picked up or asking her family to bring in a photo. In this instance, Ava responded to the child’s non-verbal signal and made it a point to acknowledge the child’s feeling, letting her know that she was also concerned that she had not yet been included.

Additionally, of the secure base related interactions, 33% were related to maintaining proximity. Ava made it a point to spend time with all the children. She moved around the room sitting with groups of children and engaging in activities with them for extended periods of time. During those times she listened to children and had conversations with them. She also regularly communicated with groups when she was going to spend time with other children. For example, she told a group of children that she had been sitting with that “I’m going to visit my other friends over here.”

Behaviors that were not present also reinforced that Ava’s beliefs align with her practice. She only responded negatively one time, never called out across the classroom or drew attention to children’s behavior. On the contrary, Ava was consistent about addressing children privately and of the secure base related interactions, 15% were considered addressing children privately. She always used a calm and quiet voice with children, even when they engaged in behaviors that went against her expectations. She would approach children, get down on their level and look them in the face to have a conversation or guide behavior. She deliberately spoke quietly to children so as not to draw attention to their actions. She consciously engaged in these practices because she finds them most effective.

“If there is something going on we try to talk about it. I guess most of the time we try to figure out what is going on. What you need to say. Because
if you are always just removing them then they are not learning what to do
the next time this happens. And it’s going to happen again. Someone is
going to take your marker from you and your going to have to say ‘can I
have that back?’ So you know. To have them talk about it is good and not
just say you need to say sorry. Because there needs to be a conversation
but it just depends on every situation…I like to get down to their level and
talk to them. But it’s better because there are some that just shout all the
time. You know it’s important to help them be able to talk quietly to their
friend. To be able to just talk without shouting.”

Ava prioritized that students need opportunities to think in a quiet classroom as
described characteristic of her beliefs and the way in which she modeled that behavior aligned with
that belief. However, she was reflective about the practice and describes her choice to
prioritize a quiet classroom and her practice of talking quietly:

“I was thinking that sounds really bad if I put that in the front as I believe
that but I’m not saying the kids should be quiet all day. I’m saying if it’s
too loud some kids can’t deal with that. I think that if I’m yelling across
the room then they’re going to start yelling across the room. So I try not
to do it. I think too much is stimulating so that’s why I like to talk in a
lower voice because then they talk in a lower voice. There are some
children who are, naturally talk loud. But it makes a difference what I
sound like, I think, when they receive it. If I sound loud, and I have said
‘If I have to use my outside voice inside something’s really wrong’
because I feel bad if I have to use that voice. I don’t think I should have to do that. I think that just going over and talking to them is effective.”

Chart 11
Ava and Secure base related behaviors. Chart 11 illustrates the percentage of times specific secure base behaviors were present during secure base related interactions between Ava and children in her classroom.

![Secure-base Related Behaviors](chart11.png)

Beth. Of the secure base related interactions, 37% were awareness to signaling behaviors, 21% were maintaining proximity and 26% were positive responses. This observation data aligned with one of Beth’s prioritized beliefs, that children meet challenges best when they feel that their teachers care about them. The following example illustrates how Beth engaged in these secure base related interactions:

Beth joined a group of boys in the construction area. The boys were building with a variety of materials but primarily wooden snap blocks. Beth sat with them for a few minutes, watching them and listening to their descriptions. She paused in her attention to
redirect another group of children and then returned her attention to the boys when one indicated he wanted to show her the new structure they had constructed.

Beth: Do you know what that looks like?

Boy: A fire truck! It has a water shooter.

Beth: That’s what I was going to say.

The boy continued to describe the structure, all of its parts and how they work. He described how firefighters use the tools and put out fires.

Beth: You must know a lot about fire trucks and firemen. Did your dad tell you about firefighters?

Boy continued to talk about firefighters. He told her that firefighters save animals.

Beth: They save animals?! Yep they do. They are heroes.

Beth’s practice of maintaining proximity and playing with children aligned with her belief that children learn best when they are actively involved in lessons. Beth described why she maintained proximity and engaged with children when she talked about how she keeps children engaged in activities:

“I participate in the activities with them. I like to get down on the floor. And if I’m at the table I definitely try to make it fun and not just like “What’s this color? (She says this in a funny cartoonish voice). I like to get them involved in it. Like yesterday we made play dough. Some of our kids don’t play with play dough but they helped make it. So they were engaged the whole time.”

Beth also prioritized that students need to feel safe and secure in the classroom. There is some inconsistency in her practice and her belief regarding safe and secure
classroom environments. When asked to describe a safe and secure environment, Beth focused on emotional safety saying “…the most thing I think of is how do children feel?” Although she positively responded to children and engaged in secure base related interactions that are found to create a warm environment, she also engaged in interactions that are consistent with emotionally insecure environments.

Beth used a negative response 11 times, which is not in itself a significant amount but a closer look at those 11 interactions show that Beth used negative responses with the same child 9 out of the 11 times. In their article focusing on being aware of emotional maltreatment, King and Jansen (2011) discuss the seven ways teachers inadvertently mistreat children by using inappropriate or damaging methods of classroom management. They discuss ignoring and a lack of response as two of those ways. Of the times Beth responded to the same child in a negative way, five of the exchanges involved ignoring or not responding to the child’s signal for guidance or direction. Whether intentionally or unintentionally, Beth denied the child’s feelings and in one instance withheld affection as a method of behavior modification.

To illustrate, the child was playing at the sensory table and put rice in another child’s hair. Beth walked over to him and moved him away from the sensory table saying “I’ve given you too many warnings. When you are done throwing rice you can try again. You are done.” The child had a tantrum. He asked her to pick him up but she refused. She left him on his own and when he stopped crying she said “Are you done? I will give you a hug now.”

At other times, she denied his feelings by being inflexible with the class rules and in an effort to maintain consistency. This was observed when the child was wandering
around the room and started to enter several play areas but was told they had the limit of children in them so he could not play. He approached Beth who was sitting at the sensory table. He leaned against her and started to play in the sensory table. Beth told him “No you have to go back and play. Make another choice. There are already three friends here. Go back and play.”

During one of the interviews Beth provides insight into her rationale behind using these methods. She was asked to describe her most important job as a teacher and in her response there is evidence that her beliefs regarding consistency influence the way she responded to children.

“Actually one of the hardest kids in my class just bonded to me. Like over time my patience with him, my being consistent with him, and my lovingness to him and hugging him and telling him ‘I do love you but your choices right now are sad, we need to make better choices’ have worked somehow and we have bonded you know.”

The majority of Beth’s interactions with children were positive and responsive. However, the few negative responses are significant because they support the literature that says certain groups of children are more likely to develop relationships lower in quality. In Beth’s case the child she interacted with negatively was included in the at-risk populations. He was an African-American male with less self-regulatory skills. He was also the child with which Beth perceived having the highest level of conflict. The concern for even a few of these interactions is that, in this case, they indicate a pattern of interaction that is condoned and supported (Sylvester, 2010). The negative quality of the interactions were masked as an effective way to motivate and guide behavior, as well as
appropriate disciplinary responses or good classroom management when unfortunately
they include characteristics of emotionally insecure environments (McKenzie, 2009;
Riley, Lewis, and Brew, 2010; Sylvester, 2010).

Additionally, of the secure base related interactions, 20% of Beth’s interactions
involved calling out to children from across the room and 10% were drawing attention to
children for their behavior which is inconsistent with some of Beth’s beliefs. There were
only 8 instances in which Beth addressed children privately. Of the 37 instances in which
Beth called out to children, fifteen of them were to point out children who needed to
follow rules and/or clean up areas. For example, Beth was sitting in the construction area
with one group of children. She scanned the room and noticed that children had left
magnet blocks out. She called out across the classroom “I need Alice, Sam, and Marcia
to pick up the magnet blocks.” Sam responded “I didn’t do that.” Beth responded by
calling out to Sam “You were helping.” To Alice and Marcia, Beth said “Girls leave
some for Sam. He needs to help.” This example is representative of Beth’s practice and
is significant because even though it was used as a way to maintain consistent rules and
expectations, shaming as a motivator is present.
**Chart 12**

*Beth and Secure-Base Related Behaviors.* Chart 12 illustrates the percentage of times specific secure base behaviors were present during secure base related interactions between Beth and children in her classroom.

![Graph](chart12.png)

*Cathy.* Cathy’s awareness of signaling behaviors and maintaining proximity along with her interactions with children indicates an inconsistency between her beliefs and practice. Observation data determined that of the secure base behaviors 27% of Cathy’s interactions were awareness of signaling behaviors and 13% were maintaining proximity. Cathy prioritized that students should feel as though they are known and recognized, and that children meet challenges best when they feel that their teacher cared about them as most characteristic of her beliefs regarding children. The following example illustrates an inconsistency between belief and practice as Cathy ignores the words of the child and does not acknowledge or recognize the child’s desire to keep her work.
A child was working at the easel and called out to Cathy who walked over to see what the child wanted. The child immediately began to describe the picture she had been working on and Cathy got a pen to label the child’s marks.

Cathy: You made your family? Oh who is in your family? Grandpa.

Who else is in your family?

Child: Mommy

Cathy: Grandpa. Mommy. Daddy. Brother. Who else is in your family?

Child: Samantha

Cathy: S for Samantha. Who else is in your family?

The child finished describing her drawing and Cathy finished writing the labels. She asked the child if she could save the drawing. The child hesitated and had a concerned look on her face. She rejected the request and expressed that she wanted to take it home with her.

Cathy did not acknowledge what the child said and asked again.

Cathy: Can I have this? I want to hang it up. Your family is beautiful.

The child was very concerned about her drawing. Her face was looking down as she asked Cathy a question very softly.

Cathy: Oh no. I’m not going to take it to my home. I’m going to keep it here. Where do you want me to hang this picture of your family?

The child didn’t answer. She walked away.

Cathy talked to herself saying: I’m actually going to save it.

Cathy placed the picture on the teacher space.
Some of Cathy’s practices were inconsistent because she faced a significant challenge that the other participants did not. She was alone in the classroom without a permanent assistant or additional adult for most of the time. Additionally, Cathy worked with the youngest children many of whom were still learning to use the toilet with proficiency, leaving a large portion of Cathy’s time engaging children in basic care like changing diapers or cleaning up toileting accidents. Without a second adult in the classroom, the routine was regularly interrupted and Cathy was less able to engage in interactions with children that established positive relationships like maintaining proximity for long periods of time or responding quickly or appropriately to signaling behaviors.

The following example illustrates the challenge of being alone in the classroom. In this example, Cathy had to make a choice to shout out to the children or ignore the interaction until she could physically move closer to the group of children. Both choices were not aligned with good practice and could have been avoided with an additional adult in the classroom.

Cathy was sitting in the bathroom door in view of the classroom but she was changing a child’s diaper. Three children began fighting at the easel which was several feet from the bathroom. One child was reaching over a shelf and around the easel trying to touch the other two children with a bingo marker. He looked like he was trying to engage them but needed support in initiating play appropriately. He was laughing at their reaction but didn’t seem to understand, realize, or care that they were not happy with the play. He seemed to consider it a game. They did
not. The two girls repeatedly told him to stop. They began to pop their heads up and around the easel and shout at him. This only made the boy try harder to touch and dot them with the bingo marker. The conflict escalated quickly.

Cathy heard the conflict from the bathroom door and she watched the conflict escalate. She shouted at them to stop fighting because she had a dirty diaper in her hands. She was unable to leave the child in the bathroom but the conflict with the three children had escalated to a critical point. I decided to step in at this point for the safety of the children. I walked over and reminded the boy that the markers are for the paper. I told the girls that he was using the marker on the paper and they could keep playing with their dolls. I stood close to the children for a moment until Cathy finished in the bathroom. Cathy finished changing the diaper. Still needing to put the child’s clothes on, she walked over to the easel and talked to the children about using the markers on paper and not on each other. She reminded them to use their words with the other child and then redirected their attention to the dolls. She then squatted down near the group of children and helped redress the child who had a diaper change.

When Cathy was free to engage with children her practice was still inconsistent with her beliefs. Her interactions were short, and she did not spend extended periods of time engaging in activities with children. Rather she moved from area to area cleaning up and engaged in unfocused conversations with children. Related to this, Cathy kept up a constant stream of teacher talk that included singing songs, asking children questions,
making comments about what they were doing, or giving children directives. Her constant stream of teacher talk was loud enough for everyone in the classroom to hear. Interestingly enough this practice is consistent with prioritizing the need for children to think in quiet classrooms as least characteristic of her beliefs. Although talking to children frequently is generally a recommended practice, Cathy’s constant teacher talk interfered with her ability to listen to children and really hear what they were saying to her. For example:

Cathy noticed that one of the children had been busy working with jewels. She asked the child “Did you make another pattern?” The child doesn’t answer. Cathy used her phone to take a picture. The child requested to see the photo. Cathy showed the child the photo and immediately other children wanted to look as well. Cathy stood up and held the phone down for the children to look at. She described the photos as she move through them. After showing them several photos she sat down at the table with the child who was working with the jewels saying “You made some muffins.” Without waiting for a response Cathy began to sing ‘Do you know the muffin man?’ but only sings one line. Then she repeats to the child “Did you make a pattern?” Again and immediately without waiting for the child to respond, Cathy responded to a child who asked if she would show them the pictures again by pulling out her phone and scrolling through photos. While she was showing the children the pictures she sang a line from ‘Do you know the muffin man?’
Cathy’s constant teacher talk prevented her from engaging in reciprocal conversations and was representative of her interactions with children. Her constant, loud teacher talk is also notable because it demonstrated a pattern of non-responsiveness to children and an important component of emotional support is how consistent a teacher is in his or her responsiveness to children (Curby, et. al., 2013).

Of the secure base related behaviors, 23% were positive responsive behaviors, 17% were negative responsive behaviors, 19% were calling out and 24% were drawing attention to children. In Cathy’s case the number of positive responsive interactions and negative responsive interactions were only separated by 13 instances which suggests that Cathy was inconsistent with the type of response she gave to children’s signals. This means that she was just as likely to respond with a warm tone of voice as she was to respond in frustration.

This inconsistency in responsiveness also translated to an inconsistency between belief and practice. Cathy prioritized a safe and secure classroom as most characteristic of her beliefs and stated that “that you have to have emotional security to have a safe classroom”. However, because she provided inconsistent responses and research suggests that children are more attuned to those inconsistencies, the emotional environment in the classroom was potentially less comfortable and safe for the children (Curby, et.al. 2013).

For example, observation data determined that during free play Cathy was extremely flexible and allowed children to use any of the materials in the classroom. They could rearrange or move things from place to place and she supported the use of materials in non-traditional ways, which is generally a positive teaching practice. The challenge with this approach was that Cathy’s responses were unpredictable. Her
expectations for compliance were in conflict with her disposition toward flexibility and resulted in inconsistent and negative responsive behavior. To demonstrate, in the following example Cathy is flexible until she is ready for the children to stop the activity and then she uses punishment to gain compliance.

While Cathy was posting children’s art work on a bulletin board a group of children playing in the kitchen area began tapping and banging silverware on pots and pans. The volume of the activity got very loud. One of the children, Oscar, started to cry. After a few moments Cathy walked over to the area and tried to talk to the children. Cathy: “Oh friends, it looks like Oscar is pretty upset and I didn’t know he was crying. Ok you can do this very quietly.” The children continued to tap and bang without stopping to listen to Cathy. Cathy repeated: “I thought someone was hurt.”

None of the children responded. Cathy stood next to the area to monitor the activity. She noticed that one of the other children, Charlie, had laid down on the couch. He was staring off into space. Cathy commented to a student employee that “Charlie is going into shut down mode on us.”

Cathy returned to the bulletin board and continued to post artwork. After several minutes she finished and she walked back to the kitchen where the children had continued banging loudly on the pans.

Cathy: “Shhh. Softly. How do you guys play in here? You have food all over the floor. I know my kitchen doesn’t look like this.” She
picked up all the materials and returned them to their place in the kitchen. The children kept banging.

Cathy then said: “All right a few more minutes {referring to banging on the pots}.” Immediately after saying that she said “Ok you guys have one more minute and then you will be done banging.”

Cathy picked up a few more toys and then she told the children it was time to stop banging. One of the girls continued to bang. Cathy told her again, “I asked you to stop. Now you can leave.” The child laid down on the floor. Cathy picked her up suddenly and said: “Now you can sit in the alone spot.” Cathy placed the child at a table and offered her a container of books. “You don’t say no to the teacher. You know your mommy doesn’t like that.”

Another behavior in which Cathy regularly engaged in that was inconsistent with her beliefs was drawing attention to children. According to King and Janson (2011) drawing attention to children is a common component of spurning. They define spurning as “the act of belittling, shaming, ridiculing, singling out, or humiliating children verbally or nonverbally, and it is the most common form of emotional maltreatment that occurs in the classroom” (pg. 20). For Cathy, part of drawing attention to children was related to being alone in the classroom. She would be forced to shout out or talk loudly to a child or group of children as she attended to something else. However, her practice of using loud constant teacher talk also drew attention to children. For instance, Cathy had a habit of announcing that one of the children had a bowel movement and needed a diaper change. She would then walk around the room talking about what
she found as she checked children’s diapers. Of the 52 times she drew attention to children 13 of them were related to a diaper change or a toilet related accident. Even though that is a small number, for some children, especially as they are becoming more aware of their bodily functions, this kind of public proclamation regarding their diapers can be embarrassing or humiliating.

Although Cathy was not intentionally hurtful, she did single children out and shame them in an effort to modify their behavior or motivate choices more in line with her expectations. For example:

Cathy was sitting at a table with a group of children making individual baggies of trail mix. She noticed one of the children in an area away from her ignoring a student visitor’s words. She called out to both of them “Is she not listening to you Miss Martha? That’s why she hasn’t made any trail mix today. Because she hasn’t been listening to her teachers. I’m going to make a trail mix for her brother.” Cathy loudly states all of the children who are taking trail mix to siblings.

This is significant because shaming children, either inadvertently or on purpose, is in direct opposition of an emotionally supportive teacher. Emotionally supportive teachers are sensitive and respond thoughtfully to social situations and consider them opportunities for teaching and learning (Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Merritt, et. al., 2012). Of the 52 times Cathy drew attention to children, 31 of them were related to a child’s behavior or actions. In the following example, rather than use the moment as a teaching opportunity Cathy inadvertently shames a child for exploring the sensory properties of a marker.
Cathy was in the bathroom with a child and when she came out she noticed Oscar standing at the easel using bingo markers. She realized that Oscar had used the bingo marker like make-up and had outlined his mouth. As she walked across the room from the bathroom to the easel, she said loudly “This is not lipstick.”

She approached the child and laughed, shaking her head. She took the child by the hand and turned him around so that the student worker and I could see how he has used the marker. Cathy, still smiling, walked the child to the teacher space and took his picture with her cell phone. She held his hand and walked him over to the folding divider that separated her classroom from the preschool next door. There is a small gap between the divider and the wall which allowed her to get the attention of a teacher next door. She showed the child to the teacher next door and explained what happened as she laughed about the incident saying: “I was in the bathroom. I took a picture before I even washed his hands.”

To the child Cathy repeated two times: “Yeah that’s not chapstick.” The child’s response was inaudible. She took him to the bathroom and helped him wash the marker off of his face. Later, when another teacher popped into her room, Cathy described the event again.
Darla. Observations of Darla’s practice determined that of the secure base related interactions, 37% of them were responding to signaling behavior and 66% of her responses to children were positive in nature. Darla’s awareness of signaling behaviors and positive responses align with her beliefs. She prioritized that children should feel safe and secure in the classroom, as well as known and recognized in the classroom as most characteristic of her beliefs. She prioritized that students meet challenges best when they feel that their teachers care about them as characteristic of her beliefs. An example of how her beliefs align with her practice was evident in how Darla listened to children.

Darla sat down in the construction area where a group of children were building with different materials. She asked them what they were working on and they described their work. She looked at them as they described...
their work and made comments like “You’re pretending to go to the beach? All right. Is this the beach over here?” As she sat with the builders, a child walked up to her and handed her a doll. The child told Darla all about the doll. Darla continued to sit with the builders but engaged the child with the doll in quiet conversation saying things like “Does your baby eat a lot? Your baby is a boy?” The child with the doll returned to the dramatic play area. Darla turned her attention back to the builders. She noticed a boy pushing a car across the classroom and stood up and approached him.

Darla: “What is the plan with the cars Chase?”

Chase returned the car to the carpet and tells her “We are making a play set.”

Darla: “What are you making? Ramps? You are making something for the cars.”

She sat back down with the group and continued to have quiet conversations with them as they worked.

What became evident with Darla is that she spent a considerable amount of time with groups of children which is reflected in the percentage of interactions that included maintaining proximity. The data would suggest that Darla spent limited time with children because only 13% of interactions involved maintaining proximity but in fact it was because she spent long periods of time with children that the instances were so few. During those interactions she would model language, behavior, appropriate use of
materials and classroom expectations which is consistent with her prioritizing modeling behavior as an essential part of her practice.

In the following example, Darla demonstrated how engaging with children in child-led open-ended play can be an effective way to model appropriate behavior and is representative of how she engaged with children for long periods of time. Early in this chapter I described a play situation in which a group of children had brought blankets and doll accessories to the library. Darla approached this same group and asked:

Darla: “What is going on over here?” She sat down and listened to the children as they explained what they were doing.

Darla: “Oh her name is Kate? She did name the baby after you! Baby Sarah and Baby Kate. All right. We are all sleeping.” Darla pretended to snore. “Another blanket. What do you need another blanket for? For you? Pillows?”

Darla sat with the group of children for over ten minutes chatting about their babies. She helped them put clothes on or take them off, read the babies books, and listened to the children tell her stories. She made comments like:

Darla: “Kyle (the baby doll) is five! Is today his birthday? Wow! Can he walk too?”

Child: “Yes!” Pretended to make doll walk.

Darla: “Great job Kyle!”

Annie: “My baby is only one.”

Darla: “Only one. Maybe in a couple of months she will learn to walk. It’s a big responsibility to take care of babies.”

Darla to child: “Oh no you have a naked baby. What’s happening?”

Darla to child: “The baby has a boo-boo.”
Child: “I have to hold her.”

The child asked Darla for help redressing the doll.

Darla: “That’s a good idea. You can try. You took them off so you can try a little bit.”

Child: “I have magic.”

Darla: “Oh magic.”

During this extended interaction, children from other areas approached Darla to see what she was doing or ask her questions. She responded to each child all the while maintain proximity with the core small group. She also communicated to the group when she was going to move and play with other children. Darla’s practice is an example of what Carlina Rinaldi (1998) described as a pedagogy of listening in which Darla gave value to the ideas and thoughts of children by taking the time to legitimize their point of view. Darla explained this approach when she discussed how she engaged children:

“To have us there in the activity. This room this year seems to be big into dramatic play, and big into blocks and art so if my assistant and I are in those areas the children are there and seem to be more engaged in their conversations. I think that just knowing that I take their lead, that I don’t direct the play, keeps them engaged. That I’m not giving orders or no we have to use it this way, giving them the freedom to have that creativity. I think they know that my assistant and I are their safety nets. That if things go awry or issues arise that they can come to us and we will kind of give them the words to solve it but I think just being there for them to bounce ideas off of and us being silly with them seems to keep them engaged.”
When Darla described her ideas about a safe and secure classroom she said that her classroom was not a place of punishment or anything like that and that she is there for them (the children) “no matter what kind of choice they make that day.” The absence, or limited use, of some of the secure base related behaviors is evidence that Darla’s practice aligns with her beliefs regarding a safe and secure classroom. Of the secure base related behaviors, there were only 11 instances in which Darla called out to children. Of those 11, 6 happened during a single circle time where children were not engaging in a song they were practicing. Of the remaining five, two were related to a child’s behavior, two were positive in nature as Darla called to a child to go with an itinerant teacher and then welcomed her back into the classroom and the final one was to gain the attention of a small group of children. Darla drew attention to a child’s behavior one time and in that example she had given the child multiple warnings to stop running and had spoken to her quietly about using walking feet in the classroom. She noticed her running again with a small group of children and made the stop sign in sign language saying “All right. Alice is all done. I’ve asked Alice too many times to stop running. What is your choice? Playing zoo is not a choice because you keep running.”
Variables outside Teacher Control.

Every teacher comes into a classroom with different backgrounds, experiences and their own set of beliefs which they can reflect on and develop over time. But there are other variables outside of a teacher’s control that influence the quality of relationships and the construction of emotionally supportive environments. Throughout the course of the study I observed two variables that impacted the decisions teachers made regarding their practice that are outside of their control: program organization and kindergarten readiness. Some program variables impacted teachers individually and others impacted all of the participants.
Program variables.

*Impacting individual participants.* In three of the four classrooms, teachers worked with an assistant. In those three classrooms the teachers perceived the majority of their relationships with children to be in the high or positive range for overall relationship quality and had the lowest perceived levels of conflict. In Cathy’s classroom, which functioned primarily with only one teacher and 10 children which is the state recommended teacher-child ratio, Cathy perceived 66% of her relationships to be in the low range for overall quality, and 44% of relationships to be in the high range for conflict. Additionally, Cathy had an unpredictable schedule that created confusion and disorganization, two variables that the literature repeatedly demonstrates as detrimental to a high quality environment. The schedule is unpredictable because she is often asked to combine with another classroom to insure teacher-child ratios. As she explains:

> “Sometimes the afternoon schedule gets messed up because it depends on the day and what’s going on with our numbers. And so that’s where sometimes it’s a little sketchy. And that gets them {the children} confused. Sometimes I don’t even know. We just kind of have to go with the flow of it. Like yesterday I kind of knew so at lunch I was talking about ‘after nap we are going to have snack and then we get to go play in the other preschool room’. So I can kind of prepare them for it. So that at afternoon snack we were talking about it and I’m like ‘Okay we are going to eat our snack and we get to read a couple books and then we’re going to the other preschool.’ So they kind of knew but sometimes I might not know until 10 minutes before hand what’s going on.”

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Excessive paperwork and accountability measures was another program variable that teachers felt impacted the amount of time they had to spend with children or spend planning for children. When I asked Darla to explain to me something she learned from children she mentioned to put the paperwork away and just spend time with children. I asked her if she felt like the paperwork took away from what she was able to do with children. She answered: “Oh yes I do. It’s the first time that I have ever worked for a government agency so yeah I was really not aware of how much paperwork there was going to be for me.”

A program variable that Ava experienced was having two half-day classes which only left her with 3 ½ hours with each group of children. The limited amount of time was a challenge because there were daily activities, like brushing teeth after meals, which are mandated to be included in her daily schedule. The activities are valuable and important, especially for the population of children Ava worked with, but they took away from the already limited time she had with the children.

*Impacting all participants.* The program variable that impacted practice, and may have influenced beliefs, for all four teachers was the frequency of in-services and regular meetings with other professionals. Ava and Darla had embedded professional development as part of the program. The program schedule left Fridays free of children and was used to provide teachers time for planning and paperwork, trainings, staff meetings and regularly scheduled opportunities for professional development in different forms. The ability and opportunity to get together with colleagues and trainers on a regular basis was not built into the schedule for Beth and Cathy. Beth had more opportunities for professional development in the form of in-service, trainings and
occasional staff meetings than Cathy. Additionally, Ava, Darla, and Beth were given the financial support to attend statewide early childhood education conferences once a year. Cathy was encouraged to attend but not given financial support or time off to attend. Observations of practice indicated that the involvement in professional development was related to interactions that contribute to emotionally supportive environments. This means that the more frequent professional development a participant was involved in translated into fewer discipline related behaviors and more emotionally supportive secure base related behaviors.

Of the discipline related interactions Ava engaged in 52, Darla 59, Beth 88 and Cathy 114. Neither Ava nor Darla used any form of punishment in their class or were observed being non-responsive to children. Beth and Cathy both used forms of punishment 6 times. Beth was non-responsive to children 2 times and Cathy was non-responsive 16 times. Ava and Darla both had the highest percentage of interactions that involved guidance at 56% and 43% respectively. Beth and Cathy had similar percentage of guidance interactions at 30% and 34% respectively.

Professional development opportunities and involvement were also associated with secure base related interactions. Of the number of secure base related interactions, Ava had 133, Darla 142, Beth 187, and Cathy 221. Ava had the highest percentage of interactions that involved awareness to signaling behaviors, Beth and Darla had the same percentage of interactions that involved awareness to signaling with 37%, and Cathy had the lowest percentage at 27%.

The most striking connections between embedded professional development and participant practice was evident in the positive and negative responsive behaviors, calling
out, and drawing attention to children vs. addressing them privately. Of the positive responsive behaviors, Darla had the highest number of instances with 94 interactions involving a positive response, Ava 80, Beth 50 and Cathy 51. Conversely, of the negative responsive behaviors Cathy had the highest number of instances with 38, Beth 11, Darla 3, and Ava 1. Of the instances in which participants called out to children Cathy had 42, Beth 27, Darla 11, and Ava had 0. Comparing the times participants drew attention to the behavior or actions of children vs. the times they addressed behavior privately: Ava drew attention to children 0 times and addressed behavior privately 20 times; Darla drew attention to a child 1 time and addressed children privately 5 times; Beth drew attention to children 19 times and addressed them privately 8 times; and Cathy drew attention to children 52 times and addressed a child privately one time.

The second variable outside of teacher control was the pressure on teachers to get children ready for the next year whether it was preschool or kindergarten. Three of the four teachers mentioned kindergarten readiness as something they think about when they plan for children. Even Cathy who worked with mainly three year olds was thinking about kindergarten readiness. Darla admitted that she engaged in some teaching practices that she does not agree with but knows are necessary to prepare the children for expectations in kindergarten.

Beth believed that supporting children’s independence, even if it was not in line with family expectations, was important for preparing children for the next step. One of the main reasons Beth focused on independence, even with three year olds was kindergarten readiness. She explained in the following interview excerpt:

Researcher: What is it about independence that is so important to you?
Beth: Being independent is also giving them self-esteem. Because you can do things for yourself and that’s important for kids too. And especially these days because moms are in such a hurry to do everything for you that kids do not want to do stuff for themselves. It gives them self-esteem... It’s just really important. I don’t know, I can’t put my finger on the exact reason but that’s one of the reasons. Um but it makes them feel good.

Researcher: It kind of sounds like it is a foundation for you, independence.

Beth: Hmm-mmm. It’s my biggest thing. It’s very important you know, because a lot of parents don’t want their children to be independent especially the younger ones because some of my parents have older children and this is their last one and they want to keep them babies and I have to talk to them and I’m like you know but next year a lot of my kids are going to kindergarten, and that’s another big thing with independence because I know next year I don’t want to send my kids to fail and I know those teachers are not going to be there to help them button their pants, they’re not going to be there to help them zip up their coats because they are going to have 25 kids you know. So that’s another reason big reason I, to just get them ready for that next step.

Cathy discussed preparing children for next steps and thought about what they will experience or need to know in kindergarten as she plans for children. For example she discussed group time as a way to prepare children:
“I think you need choice time during periods of time but then when it comes to group time this is your time to start sitting at group and getting ready and listening to the story just because we are preparing them. I don’t expect them to sit there like 15 minutes but I don’t do group time that long because it’s not appropriate for their age. Now when they get to be, go to kindergarten or older preschool then yeah they need to sit there for 15 to 20 minutes. They’re getting a little bit older.”

She also thought about kindergarten when she discussed the type of curriculum she used in the classroom.

“We use creative curriculum. Basically we go on children’s needs. Of course we still have to work on certain state standards. Certain things that they need to know, like recognizing their numbers and letters. Like not at this age but we kind of expose them to it. We were working on shapes last week. I don’t expect them to know their shapes but I’m exposing them to it so then by the time they are four or get ready to go off to kindergarten they are like ‘Oh I heard that when I was three’. Then hopefully they hear it when they go to the next room. So we just keep exposing them to it.”

Darla expressed the most concern about what her children would experience in kindergarten and hoped that they gained a sense of self-esteem to face the pressures they would soon face. Darla talked about working with children to be quiet, implementing rules that children will have in kindergarten to prepare them and using group instruction to “really focusing in on skills that are pretty important to take to kindergarten with
them”. She also admits that she used worksheets, even though she does not see their value, as a method of preparing children for kindergarten.

When asked to describe any benefits she sees to worksheets she explains her choice:

Darla: Well I think those getting prepared to go to kindergarten it {using worksheets} is a realistic thing. It has to happen. They have to know how to write their name at least, even though it takes up half the top of a piece of paper. They need to know that this is a perimeter of a piece of paper and we need to keep it on the paper and not on the table. So I don’t think, I think that if worksheets are used in the right way with young children, not every day, not on a daily basis, um that it can be…We did leprechaun pudding so I gave each of them a science worksheet up there today (points to it) and so kind of touched on the science aspect of it. Not so much a ditto and I want them to write their names. But I think it’s kind of important for them to follow dittos a little bit because I know it’s going to happen next year for them.

Researcher: So if it wasn’t going to happen next year in kindergarten, would you use dittos?

Darla: Probably not. I probably would have done something on the smart board or used a big piece of paper and you know everybody would have had a turn to come up and color or do something that way.

Methodological Reflections

The research was primarily conducted to tell the story of how different teachers navigate the complicated process of constructing relationships with young children. The
research was meant to demonstrate that every teacher has a different experience and that they need support within their own unique context. I was concerned that my beliefs, experience and training would impact my data and the way in which I interpreted it. I was cognizant of that as I began to write and I monitored any emerging subjectivity by reviewing the literature and insuring that my interpretations were based on the findings of others as well as the present data.

It was my intent that the study would give early childhood educators a way to reflect on their beliefs and to carefully consider how those beliefs impact the relationships they construct with children. I have attempted to construct a true and credible account of the teachers’ experience using information from prolonged engagement with participants, observations, and member checks. After all observations and individual interviews were complete, I conducted an informal focus group interview where all four participants were invited to come and discuss the study. During the group interview participants were able to revisit their thoughts about the study and provide additional information. Results from the Student Teacher Relationship Scale were also provided to each participant and they were able to ask any questions they had about the results. As a final member check, I presented the data findings and individual discussion sections to participants for review.

Implications

There are two main implications of this study. The first supports the argument that formal education in early childhood education, and to a lesser degree on-going professional development, is associated with quality of care, particularly teacher-child interactions and relationship quality. The second implication is the need to re-evaluate
state recommended standards for teacher-child ratios and how they impact teacher-child relationships and interactions.

The argument regarding the necessity of a degree in early childhood education has support on both sides. For example, Willer, Lutton and Ginsberg (2011) say that completion of a degree does not guarantee a quality program but that research supporting the national standards of the profession has found “teachers in model programs demonstrating long-term benefits for children have all held baccalaureate or higher degrees” (pg. 81). In his essay about whether or not a bachelor degree in early childhood education lifts child development, Fuller (2011) roundly argued that a four year degree did not improve children’s growth. Other researchers think that a combination of specialized education and on-going professional development guarantee quality (Burchinal, Hyson, & Zaslow, 2001; Pianta, 2011). Although this study did not compare relationship quality and teacher-child interactions to academic or social outcomes of children, the results indicate that teacher preparation is related to components of high quality care with particular emphasis on teacher-child relationships and interactions.

To illustrate, Ava and Darla had bachelor degrees in early childhood development. They also had professional development and regular training as part of their regular weekly schedule. Each method of data collection and corresponding analysis indicated that they had relationships with children that were more positive in nature. They perceived more relationships to be in the high or positive range for overall relationship quality and in the positive range for conflict. They both engaged in discipline related interactions that focused on guidance, clear expectations and natural consequences all of which are nationally recognized methods of developmentally
appropriate practice (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). They also engaged in secure base related behaviors that were positive and are known to contribute to a warm and supportive environment (Downer et.al., 2010).

In comparison, Beth, who had an associate degree in early childhood technology but less consistent training, perceived a majority of relationships to be in the high or positive range for overall relationship quality, and in the positive range for closeness and conflict. However, she engaged in more discipline related interactions and secure base related behaviors that are considered negative like using punishment and drawing attention to children’s behavior (Downer et.al., 2010). Cathy, who had a bachelor degree in individualized studies with some emphasis on child development but not specifically on early childhood development, and had the least consistent professional development of the four participants, perceived the fewest relationships to be in the positive range for overall relationship quality, and the biggest percentage of relationships to be the low range for closeness and the high range for conflict. The study raised more questions about the impact teacher preparation and on-going training has on teacher practice but lent support to the argument that a formal degree in early childhood development was related to higher quality teacher-child relationships and interactions.

The second implication is related to teacher-child ratios and staffing patterns. The results of this study indicated that three of the four participant who had assistants in their classrooms used fewer discipline related interactions and more positive secure base related behaviors than the participant who taught alone. Cathy, who taught without an assistant, was within the state recommended adult-child ratio but because she was alone with children she was frequently forced to engage in practices that are identified as in
contrast to developmentally appropriate practice. The most prevalent example is calling out or drawing attention to children’s behavior. Additionally, the staffing patterns of the facility did not allow for Cathy to be consistent with routines. She was regularly asked to combine with other classrooms in an effort to stay within the required staff-child ratios but that is a practice that contrasts developmentally appropriate practice (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). The results of the study indicated that although Cathy prioritized beliefs about children, discipline and classroom practices that aligned with developmentally appropriate practice, being alone with children impacted her fidelity to those beliefs and guidelines.

**Recommendations**

This study did not intend to address the question of which is more important, formal education or on-going development but the results would indicate that they are both important for teacher-child relationship quality and interactions, and deserve more attention. The most noteworthy finding of the study was the difference formal education combined with regular in-services, trainings, and staff meetings made to teacher practice. The teachers in this study who had earned bachelor degrees in early childhood development, and who were connected to others in the field of early childhood education either through regular meetings or by structured in-services, perceived their relationships with children to be better in overall relationship quality and less conflict, engaged in fewer discipline related interactions and interacted with children in more emotionally supportive ways reiterating a connection between formal training and quality of care. Early childhood care centers, privately or publicly funded, should consider how to recruit early childhood professionals with formal degrees in early childhood education and then
develop a way to support embedded professional development in the regular teaching schedule.

Teacher beliefs were consistent with some practices but inconsistent with others. Teacher educators, new teachers and continuing teachers could benefit from more research looking at how beliefs impact teaching practices no matter their education or years of experience. Future research examining how teacher beliefs are influenced, or changed by a formal teacher preparation program, would be important in determining if a degree in early childhood education is connected to quality care. Further research on the impact of on-going professional development for early childhood teachers with less formal education or a degree in a related field is also necessary to address the debate.

The final recommendation is for policy makers to rethink current teacher-child ratios. Cathy faced challenges that the other teachers did not because she was alone in a classroom with ten children. Even though she was technically within the recommended ratio, unique circumstances contributed to teaching practices that are nationally considered inappropriate and could have been avoided with an additional adult in the classroom. Sometimes the teacher-child ratio recommendation does not address all the needs of the children and/or teachers, and does not automatically make an environment physically or emotionally safe.

Based on the findings of this study I would make four recommendations for future early childhood policy and research:

1) Examine the impact a formal four year degree in early childhood education has on practice and children’s social and academic outcomes.
2) Examine the impact on-going professional development has on practice and children’s social and academic outcomes.

3) Continue to research teacher beliefs or dispositions- when they are established, what influences them, do they change with formal education and how they impact teacher-child interactions. Studying teaching dispositions toward consistency, flexibility, listening and engaging in extended periods of play with children could also be beneficial for generating on-going professional development opportunities for teachers at all levels.

4) Reconsider the criteria for determining teacher-child ratios and staffing patterns. Examine how states can better support early childhood programs so that all classrooms are staffed for best practice.
References


