

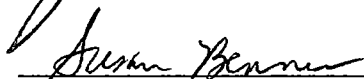
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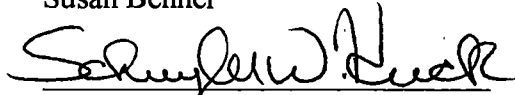
I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Christy Isbell Gamble entitled "The Heart and Voice of a Playful Early Childhood Teacher." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Human Ecology.


Deborah Tegano, Major Professor

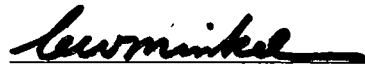
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The Heart and Voice of a Playful Early Childhood Teacher

A Dissertation Presented for the Doctor of Philosophy Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Christy Isbell Gamble

August 1999

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Acknowledgments and Dedication

I feel very blessed to have spent my entire life surrounded by so many wonderful teachers. Firstly, I want to thank my committee members at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville: Dr. Schuyler Huck, Dr. Susan Benner, and Dr. Jim Moran for their guidance through this entire research process. I want to give special thanks to my committee chair, Dr. Deborah Tegano, who has consistently shared her understanding of child development, play, and creativity with me. Thank you for allowing me to construct my own knowledge, while giving me the support and friendship that I need to grow and develop as a professional.

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Abstract

A qualitative case study that revealed the heart and voice of a playful early childhood teacher was completed. The purpose of this study was to understand how one Title I teacher implemented a play-based curriculum with young children with special needs. Special needs included low socioeconomic status or developmental delay. Data collection included observation, interview, and document review. Qualitative analysis was utilized to identify consistent themes from the data.

The classroom environment was child directed and included traditional learning centers as well as a sociodramatic center that was frequently changed. The play-based curriculum was primarily guided by theories of Piaget and Vygotsky. The teacher integrated several traditional principles into her constructivist practice.

The teacher viewed children as capable, and she respected their desire to learn. The teacher listened to the children and then scaffolded their learning. She took on a parental role with the children. The teacher's playfulness, perfectionism, autonomous learning style, and spirituality were applied to her practice. She struggled to find her voice and to receive validation. The three identified themes were interrelated. These themes combined to form an almost seamless practice that this teacher demonstrated within the boundaries of Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) for early childhood programs.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

As an occupational therapist, I have spent the majority of my professional life working with young children who have special needs due to biological and environmental influences. Occupational therapists frequently use play as a therapeutic technique to achieve function in areas such as fine motor development, social-emotional development, and self-care skills. From an occupational behavior framework, play is thought to be the primary activity of childhood. Play is a prerequisite to competence in occupational function later in life (Reilly, 1974).

My work with young children in preschool programs in school systems, churches, and federally-funded Head Start programs has allowed me to observe a variety of teachers. These experiences have inspired me to study the impact of the play on children's development. Education literature has suggested that a teacher's use of a play-based approach is effective with young children who have special needs (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997), but these methods appear to be conceptually different from traditional Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) practice. In my observation I have seen very few teachers actually utilizing a play-based approach with children who have special needs. One early childhood special educator stated, "we learn how to do that stuff in school, but it just doesn't work in real life" (D. Garland, personal communication, February, 1998). Observations such as this have led me to question how teachers could use a play-based approach to teach young children with special needs.

The benefits of play have been well-established in the occupational behavior literature (Ayres, 1981; Ellis, 1973; Erikson, 1963; Vandenberg & Kielhofner, 1982). During play, children explore their world, receive information from their senses, gain knowledge about objects, and develop an understanding of rules. Play provides an arena for young children to experiment with objects, to make decisions, to develop problem-solving skills, to learn, to persist, and to understand consequences. Play also encourages creativity and allows a child to develop social skills while interacting with peers. The skills that children develop during play permit them to engage with and respond to the environment (Anderson, Hinojosa, & Strauch, 1987). This interaction leads to enhanced cognitive, perceptual, and language development (Levitt, 1975; Weininger, 1988; Weininger & Fitzgerald, 1988).

Cultural differences may cause variations in play behavior. Christie (1982) suggested that sociodramatic play, which fosters children's cognitive, social, and language development, is not a universal phenomenon among all children. Hallmark research revealed that children from low socioeconomic statuses rarely engage in sociodramatic play during preschool years (Smilansky, 1968). This initial finding laid the ground work for research on the impact of play tutoring on children's cognitive and social skills (Christie, 1982).

Children with developmental delays may also have significant difficulty exploring, interacting with, and mastering the environment in play (Mogford, 1977). The child who is unable to participate in normal childhood play may encounter secondary social, emotional, and psychological disabilities (Missiuna & Pollock, 1991). Increased dependence on

others, decreased motivation, poor social skills, and low self-esteem may be experienced by children with disabilities (Clarke, Riach, & Cheyne, 1982; Levitt & Cohen, 1977; Mogford, 1977; Philip & Duckworth, 1982). These types of secondary disabilities have an impact on later functioning at home, in school, and in the community.

In this paper "children with special needs" refers to those who have been diagnosed with developmental delays and those who live in low socioeconomic environments. The term developmental delay was used in special education legislation in 1986, when the legislation for infants and toddlers with disabilities (PL 99-457) was passed. This program required states to develop procedures for determining the presence of a developmental delay in five developmental domains. The developmental domains that must be assessed for delays include the following: physical development, cognitive development, communication development, social or emotional development, and adaptive development. The criteria for developmental delay varies from state to state. In the state of Tennessee, developmental delay is defined as a 25 percent delay experienced in two areas or a 40 percent delay in one area.

"At risk" is a term that refers to children who are in danger of having developmental delays if intervention is not provided. Children may demonstrate no abnormalities, but have biological or environmental factors that increase their risk of delay in the future. The category, "environmentally at risk," includes children whose histories of care involve risk factors that suggest a greater probability of delay. Children who live in low socioeconomic environments have a risk factor that often leads to their characterization as environmentally at risk. The environment fails to provide adequately

for the child's needs and the children are at risk for developmental problems. Children who live in low socioeconomic environments may or may not meet the criteria to be considered developmentally delayed (Brown, Thurman, & Pearl, 1993).

An increasingly popular approach to improving schools for economically disadvantaged children is the Title I program. Title I is a formula-grant program that awards funds to states, which in turn provide funds to school districts based on poverty (U.S. Department of Education, 1993). Students targeted by Title I include those who live in school areas where at least 35% of the children are from low-income families. Eligible students must be identified by the school as failing or most at risk of failing to meet the state's student performance standards on objective criteria established by the school district. Students with developmental delays share many of the same characteristics as children who are eligible for Title I services, including low test scores and poor classroom performance. These two populations and the services planned to meet their needs often overlap (Carlson & O'Reilly, 1996).

Purpose of the Study

Bricker and Cripe (1992) suggested that there is a high incidence of teacher-directed instruction in classrooms that include both children with developmental delays and children who are economically disadvantaged. In many of these classrooms, play appears to receive little attention. However, researchers such as Hanline and Fox (1993) have suggested that a play-based setting is the most appropriate for young children with disabilities. Effective instruction of young children with disabilities requires the consistent use of best practice in the fields of early childhood education (ECE) and early childhood

special education (ECSE). Guidelines for best practice state that play must be considered a natural environment in which all young children can learn (Fox & Hanline, 1993).

A play-based approach to instructing young children from economically disadvantaged homes and young children with developmental delays appears to be conceptually different from existing practices within ECSE classrooms. More research that assesses the function and effectiveness of this approach is needed. An initial step, such as defining specific features of intervention, will assist in the analysis of the curricular and interactional components of this play-based model. Research on the application of child-directed approaches to the teaching of young children is beginning to surface in early childhood professional publications. More research is warranted to clarify the outcomes of different styles of interactions between adults and children within teaching contexts. There is a paucity of research on the relationship of play behavior to other skills and areas of development for children with special needs. Finally, further research can help suggest the most effective approaches for addressing the diversity of children's skills and backgrounds.

This study was designed to provide an in-depth look at one teacher's approach to using a play-based curriculum with young children who have special needs. One early childhood educator who teaches in a Title I preschool program in a small Southeastern town was selected for inclusion in this case study. The teacher's personal characteristics, her interactions with the children, and the culture of the classroom were described and interpreted.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Developmentally Appropriate Practice

In 1987 the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) published guidelines for developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) to clarify activities that the association felt appropriate for children between the ages of birth and eight years. These guidelines were developed in response to identified needs within a historical context. One of the main purposes was to provide guidance for programs seeking accreditation by NAEYC's National Academy of Early Childhood Programs (Bredekamp, 1987). Secondly, the document was constructed in reaction to the pressure for early childhood programs to conform to an academic model of instruction (New & Mallory, 1994).

In the years since the first guidelines for DAP were published, early childhood programs have experienced some important changes. One of those changes included the tenets of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which require that all early childhood programs make reasonable accommodations to provide access for children with disabilities or developmental delays (DEC/CEC & NAEYC, 1993). These legal rights reflect the consensus that young children with disabilities are best served in the same settings where their typically developing peers are located (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997).

The trend toward inclusion of children with special needs should be reflected in the descriptions of recommended practices (Carta, 1995). Many authors have attempted to merge the perspectives of early childhood and early childhood special education (Carta,

Schwartz, Atwater, & McConnell, 1991; Mallory, 1992; and Mallory & New, 1994)

With the revised guidelines for DAP, Bredekamp and Copple (1997) have recently attempted to further integrate the guidelines of these two professions.

There has been some agreement between the fields of early childhood education (ECE) and early childhood special education (ECSE) regarding best practice. However, the usefulness of DAP as a model for intervention with young children with special needs has been a topic of discussion among early childhood special educators for the past several years (Burton, Hains, Hanline, McLean, & McCormick, 1992; Carta et al., 1991; Mohoney, Robinson, & Powell, 1992; Wolery, Strain, & Bailey, 1992). Several researchers have been reluctant to endorse the use of the guidelines for DAP with children who have disabilities or are at risk. Carta et al. (1991) described DAP as placing unnecessary restrictions on the teaching of young children with disabilities. Wolery et al. (1992) noted that an early childhood program that is based only on the guidelines for DAP would be insufficient for many children with special needs.

Other researchers have documented that DAP is appropriate for young children with special needs. Bredekamp and Rosegrant (1992) indicated that "DAP is for all children" (p. 4). Researchers have stated that DAP provides an adequate framework for early intervention (Burton et al., 1992; Johnson & Johnson, 1992). DAP does not reject intervention strategies for children with special needs. Mahoney et al. (1992) suggested that the application of DAP to early childhood special education may encourage the development of exciting and productive programs, as well as expand opportunities for young children with disabilities to attend inclusive programs.

The persistent debate about the usefulness of DAP for young children with special needs appears to be the result of differences in the philosophies of the fields of ECE and ECSE. The field of ECSE is based on behavioral and educational psychology theories of learning. Early childhood special education is guided by research that supports the opinion that direct instruction is directly related to a child's developmental progress. ECSE programs focus on the remediation of skills, are more directive, and emphasize developing individualized goals for children with activities to reach these goals (Odom & McEvoy, 1990).

A final consideration is the concept of developmental appropriateness and its relation to practice in ECSE. The concept of developmental appropriateness includes dimensions of age appropriateness and individual appropriateness. The manner in which these two principles converge in the implementation of DAP for young children with diverse abilities is still evolving. Many researchers have interpreted the guidelines to mean that development in all children should be facilitated in the same manner, such as self-initiated activity and activities that support children's play (Carta et al., 1991). In 1995, Carta stated that these interpretations are incorrect, but understandable. Although the DAP guidelines give specific information regarding age appropriateness, few specifics on the development of individual appropriateness are given. This is a pertinent issue to address for teachers who are educating young children with diverse needs (Carta, 1995).

Curriculum

In developmentally appropriate programs decisions about curriculum content consider the age and the experience of the young children. NAEYC does not endorse

specific curricula, but the DAP guidelines should be considered when selecting a curricular model (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). A curriculum that is developmentally appropriate focuses on every area of development through an integrated approach (Bredekamp, 1991). Learning experiences are designed to facilitate the development of many skills from diverse domains rather than teaching skills in isolation (Fox, Hanline, Vail, & Galant, 1994).

A developmentally appropriate curriculum is based on three premises. First, the process of development and learning is as or more important than the end product. Curriculum should include meaningful content and interactive child-centered learning activities. Process-focused versus product-focused and child-initiated versus teacher-directed activities are continuous principles that are dependent on the child and context. Teachers may use a wide variety of strategies from directive to non-directive based on the needs of the child (Bredekamp & Rosegrant, 1992; Kostelnick, 1992).

The second principle is that children learn through play and activities and materials that are meaningful to them. The opportunity to play with real objects in interaction with others in a purposeful context provides the foundation for understanding. Curricula that is dominated by drill activities and worksheets are not appropriate for young children (Bredekamp & Rosegrant, 1992). Curricular areas should be integrated by planning around themes, learning experiences, and daily routines.

The third principle of developmentally appropriate curricula includes the idea of heterogeneous grouping and promotion of content that meets a wide range of interests and abilities. This curriculum is flexible and allows adaptation for individuals. Children may

work at different levels on various activities. Within this principle, multicultural diversity is reflected in content that is non-stereotypical and free from bias (Fox et al., 1994).

Curriculum for young children with special needs is guided by individual goals and objectives identified on individual educational programs (IEPs) or individualized family service plans (IFSPs). The emphasis on the curriculum is on skills with present and future utility. Although ECSE curriculum focuses more on skills and DAP focuses on the learning process, this difference does not make the two approaches incompatible.

For instance, specific skills can be targeted in developmentally appropriate environments through embedding objectives in routines, child-directed activities, and planned activities (Bricker & Cripe, 1992; Fox & Hanline, 1993). In developmentally appropriate programs skills are developed in the context of activities that are meaningful for the child rather than through isolated drill. This practice is also found in the ECSE literature. Teaching through routines and natural contexts is a functional approach to instruction that will encourage generalized responses. A developmentally appropriate curriculum provides opportunity for child-directed play with peers and objects. Specific skills may be targeted for young children with disabilities during these opportunities (Hanline & Fox, 1993). Instructional strategies are embedded within child-directed play activities to promote skill development and generalization (Fox et al., 1994).

Knapp and Shields (1990) reviewed research on the apparent success of direct instruction versus more cognitively-based instruction with poor and minority young children. These researchers concluded that this population of children have been deprived of constructivist-based instruction, and instead, have received drill-based instruction.

Knapp and Shields (1990) emphasized that all children need to be taught using an integrated approach. Madden, Slavin, Karweit, Dolan, & Wasik (1993) revealed the value of combining both drill-based and a constructivist-based approaches in teaching students who have educational disadvantage. In 1994, Harris and Graham called for an "integrative approach" (p. 245) with poor and minority young children.

Environment

In a developmentally appropriate program, the environment is seen as a pertinent influence on the development of young children. The environment embodies the curriculum of early childhood education. The environment signals to children what they can or may do. The environment tells whether or not we think the child is capable of succeeding. As a result one of the primary roles of the teacher is to arrange the physical, social, and temporal aspects of the environment (Dempsey & Frost, 1993).

An ECSE instructional procedure that is congruent with DAP guidelines is the arrangement of the classroom environment to set the stage for specific behaviors. Teachers organize a learning environment that encourages children's initiative, exploration of materials, and social interaction with other children and adults. Teachers consider children's developmental levels and the cultural context when choosing materials and equipment for the classroom (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). Research has shown that children are more likely to engage in social interactions when peers are available, specific toys are provided, and certain types of activities are utilized (Quilitch & Risley, 1973; Spiegel-McGill, Bambara, Shores, & Fox, 1984; and Sainato & Carta, 1992).

One of the environmental variables that has been studied is the amount of space in the classroom. Less space in play areas and centers has been shown to result in greater amounts of group play, aggression, and anger (Loo & Kennelly, 1979). Increased space in these classroom areas encourages rough-and-tumble play and running (Smith & Connolly, 1976; Henninger, 1985; Peck & Goldman, 1978). De Long, Tegano, Moran, Brickey, Morrow, and Houser (1993) suggested that spatial size may influence the children's perception of time and their cognitive play behaviors. These researchers discovered that children entered complex play sooner and stayed longer when they were engaged in smaller versus larger spaces.

Another environmental factor is the spatial arrangement of the classroom. Yawkey, Melizzi, and Jones (1982) noted that the major consideration is not quantity of space but delineation and flexibility of space. A fundamental practice in ECSE and ECE is the use of learning centers for different types of activities. Research has consistently shown that children play differently in different areas in the classroom. Pellegrini (1985) revealed that significant differences exist in the types and quality of play predominating in construction versus dramatic-play centers. Children engage in constructive and solitary play in the block and art areas, and dramatic and interactive play in the dramatic area. Rubin (1977) also documented differences in play types in manipulative centers versus house centers. Vandenberg (1981b) reported differences in play types in gross-motor versus manipulative areas.

The teacher's organization of the classroom time schedule is an important, but often forgotten, environmental factor. Tegano and Burdette (1991) documented the

influence of time on the quality of children's play activities. These researchers noted that periods of extended time in play enable children to shift from exploratory and functional play into more advanced constructive and dramatic play.

The types of materials available in the classroom affect the play demonstrated by young children. Children will use materials as pivots to aid their mental transformation from action to meaning. Materials provide children with possibilities for simulation and creativity (Reifel, 1991). Younger children tend to need more realistic play props to encourage and sustain play (Fein & Robertson, 1975). Less realistic props are needed to stimulate the play of older preschoolers (Olszewski & Fuson, 1982). The novelty of play props must also be considered. Several researchers have suggested that the introduction of novel props to the dramatic play area stimulates new role play (Dodge & Frost, 1986; Griffing, 1983).

Environmental prompts are often used in ECSE programs to promote children's independence. Labels and logos may be used on a continual or temporary basis to assist children with remembering steps for completion of activities, or expected behaviors in the classroom. For example, posters with pictures of appropriate behaviors during free play may be used to encourage effective social interaction. It is important that teachers consistently reassess the effectiveness of the environment, so that changes may be made to encourage children's development and learning (Carta, 1995).

A final aspect of the environment is group size. Russel (1990) suggested that small increases in adult/child ratio in preschool settings lead to more verbal exchange among peers, less verbal exchange with teachers, and less involvement in play activity. Fantasy

play is more likely to occur in a small class of preschoolers versus a large class (Smith & Connolly, 1980). It appears that there are intricate interactions between group size and type of play. In settings that provide a range of groups sizes, more occasions are available for children to achieve a sense of privacy and intimacy (Dempsey & Frost, 1993).

Adult-child Interaction

An important aspect of play-based instruction is the interaction that occurs between the teacher and child. The work of Smilansky has contributed to an understanding of the importance of adult influence on young children from low income families and children with developmental delays. In 1985, Christie presented a historical overview of adult involvement in children's play. This review revealed that adult encouragement of play in young children has not always been valued. Before 1960, adult direction in children's play was described as non-beneficial. Smilansky's (1968) seminal work gave evidence that adult-child interactions not only had an impact on the quality of children's play, but also promoted development in other areas.

In developmentally appropriate programs adult-child interactions are characterized by adults: a) responding quickly, directly, and warmly to children; b) providing a variety of opportunities for children to participate in reciprocal communication; and c) identifying and elaborating on the emotions, perceptions, interests, and actions of the children. In a play-based setting, many of adult-child interactions are one-on-one (Bredekamp, 1991). These interactions demonstrate the teacher's respect for increasing independence and facilitate the child's development of self-esteem and self-control (Fox et al., 1994).

In developmentally appropriate programs teachers of young children should be responsive and facilitators of learning. Responsive teaching includes elaborating on the child's behavior and following the child's interest. A responsive teacher does not consistently utilize prompting and cueing when the child is otherwise engaged (Jones & Warren, 1991; McWilliam & Bailey, 1992). Instead, the teacher prepares the environment, materials, and activities so that the children are challenged and stimulated. Teachers should observe to note how children are understanding and learning, so that they might scaffold their development further (Bredekamp, 1991). Through scaffolding, teachers provide children the necessary assistance for mastery and encourage children to take greater responsibility in learning. Responsive teachers promote child engagement and guide learning. Although more directive measures may be needed with children who have special needs, the least intrusive and responsive methods should be tried first (McWilliam & Bailey, 1992).

Early childhood special education programs may include adult-child interactions that are different than those used in ECE settings. Interactions in ECSE are typically guided by the utilization of systematic instruction to enhance children's learning. This practice may be translated into teacher-directed instruction using memorization and drill by children and focusing on isolated skill development (Bricker & Cripe, 1992; Elkind, 1989; Mahoney et al., 1992; Richarz, 1993). It has been noted that adult-child interactions in ECSE programs are more teacher-directed and focused on teacher-chosen topics rather than on child interests (Fox et al., 1994).

Although ECSE has typically used more teacher-directed models of instruction than suggested as best practice by NAEYC, DAP guidelines do not discourage the use of systematic instruction when needed to address the needs of the individual child (Bredekamp & Rosegrant, 1992; Kostelnik, 1992). One method of systematic instruction, incidental teaching, appears to fit into the DAP framework. Incidental teaching refers to a group of naturalistic intervention procedures where the instructional sequence begins when a child initiates an interaction by demonstrating interest in an activity, another child, or an adult. The teacher scaffolds on this interest and uses some type of strategy to elicit a more sophisticated response from the child (Tomasello & Ferrar, 1986; Yoder & Davies, 1990). Naturalistic intervention occurs in the natural environment, is brief and spaced over hours and days, and uses natural consequences (Hanline & Fox, 1993; Kaiser, Yoder, & Keetz, 1992). Naturalistic intervention has been used to teach young children with disabilities in communication skills, social skills, self-help skill, cognitive skills, play, and motor skills (Fox & Hanline, 1993).

Responsive teaching, incorporated in a play-based curriculum, may be an effective method of teaching children who have special needs. Although play is a pertinent part of child development, many children with special needs can not participate in autonomous learning through play (Fu, Stremmel, & Stone, 1991). Responsive teaching involves guided participation in the zone of proximal development. Guided participation refers to the context in which a child and teacher collaborate in negotiating and constructing a desired learning activity through responsive interactions. In guided participation, the child and adult work in cooperation to structure the learning situation. The method of guided

participation is observable in natural teaching contexts and in settings where each partner has a different level of expertise (Rogoff, 1986; Stone, 1985; Tharp, 1989).

Mutually-directed activities provide significant contexts for collaborative learning. Responsive teaching should receive emphasis in all developmentally appropriate programs, especially those serving children with special needs. It has been suggested that the best way to ensure sensitivity to the diverse learning patterns of children is through responsive teaching in various contexts that are consistent with children's developmental needs (Linney & Seidman, 1989; Tharp, 1989).

Responsive teaching relies on the construction of shared meanings (Stone, 1985). Several theorists have used the term intersubjectivity to define the concept of sharing of purpose or focus in the coordination of perspectives (Rommetveit, 1985; Trevarthen, 1980). During a cooperative activity such as those that occur during play tutoring, and some forms of sociodramatic play, it is crucial for partners to determine a common ground for communication. Partners must attempt to understand the goals, interests, and skills of each other so as to play.

Responsive teaching involves a balance of teaching strategies in formal and informal learning settings. In order for this approach to be effective, the child must be intrinsically motivated and interested in the activity. It requires the teacher to possess some understanding of the child's current level of functioning. The teacher must also develop a sense of when to intervene and when to step back. This understanding will allow children to develop knowledge and skill when they are able, but will also give the children cues when they are not on target (Fu, Stremmel, & Stone, 1991).

In the areas of curriculum and adult-child interaction, the practices that are pertinent to ECSE fit within the breadth of what is considered developmentally appropriate for ECE. There appears to be a trend in the promotion of interventions that reflect the DAP described by NAEYC. Literature is beginning to cite the significance of a change in ECSE practice from a narrow, remedial approach to intervention, to practices that are in cooperation with DAP. It is suggested that none of these types of adult-child interactions will be a panacea for eliminating the difficulties of educating young children with special needs.

Play

Both researchers and practitioners in the field of early childhood education consider play to be a foundation for learning. Many researchers have suggested that early childhood curriculum should be based on play (Brewer, 1992; Hendrick, 1990; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1991). There is consistent research-based support of the relationship between play and cognition and play and social development. With play firmly established as developmentally appropriate practice, it is important to look for new ways of understanding children's play (Reifel & Yeatman, 1993). Sutton-Smith (1992) suggested that play may even need its own frame or rhetoric.

Play is a difficult concept to define, but researchers have identified several factors that distinguish play from other behavior. Play is spontaneous, intrinsically motivated, free from externally imposed rules, and process-oriented. Play requires the active engagement of the player (Rubin, Fein, & Vandenberg, 1983).

Reifel and Yeatman (1993) revealed the importance of describing the classroom play of children in its entirety rather than trying to fit pieces of a play episode into one existing category. The course of play will include transitions between exploration, creation, social exchange, and pretense. The transformations during play will reflect a) the influences of the materials, b) the social relations in the class, c) experience with real-world objects and events, and d) decisions made about how to handle the context. Play reflects the presence of an alternative world that is created as children deal with the task, participate in social relations, and engage in simulation. Play takes shape as children move through time (Reifel & Yeatman, 1993). Following the progress of play should help observers understand how all the pieces relate (Almy, Monighan, Scales, & Van Hoorn, 1985).

Studies have indicated that early childhood educators typically view play and instructions as different activities (Bailey & Wolery, 1992; Bricker & Cripe, 1992; and Hanson & Lynch, 1989). Special educators have typically relied on teacher-directed activities that focus on specific skill development (Mahoney, Robinson, & Powell, 1992; Odom & McEvoy, 1990) rather than on a play-based curriculum. In an early study of preschool classrooms, special education classrooms were rated lower on furnishings for relaxation, gross motor space and time, art, blocks, sand and water, dramatic play, and room arrangement (Bailey, Clifford, & Harms, 1982). ECE curricula are typically centered around play activities such as house corner, blocks, art, sand and water, and outdoors. ECSE curricula are more often organized around developmental domains: cognition, communication, social, fine motor, and gross motor (Hanline & Fox, 1993).

The primary method of promoting learning in developmentally appropriate programs in ECE is child-initiated, child-directed, teacher-supported play. This does not mean that children are just left alone to play. Instead, teachers plan for learning and use a wide variety of strategies from directive to non-directive depending on the needs of the individual child and the focus of the experience (Bredekamp & Rosegrant, 1992; Johnson & Johnson, 1992; Kostelnik, 1992). In a developmentally appropriate program the teacher may use a play-based curriculum to offer children a variety of activities that support the development of skills within play sequences. The teacher is more interested in the engagement of the child, the skills used in the play activity, and the cognitive process being used by the child, than the resultant product (Johnson & Johnson, 1992).

Research has focused on the impact of play on a variety of performance areas for children from low socioeconomic environments (Fein, 1981; Poidevant & Spruill, 1993). Several researchers found that play has a positive effect on the cognitive development of young children (Cheyne & Rubin, 1983; Dansky, 1980; Vandenberg, 1981). Training in sociodramatic play results in changes in the social domain of development such as increased group cooperation (Smith & Sydall, 1978), social participation (Smith, Daglish, & Herzmark, 1981), and perspective taking (Matthews, Beebe, & Boop, 1980). In addition, young children who participate in sociodramatic play are more socially active and socially competent (Connolly & Doyle, 1984).

The possibility that play tutoring may enhance the quality of economically disadvantaged children's make-believe play has led to a significant number of studies. A variety of intervention strategies from indirect suggestions to direct modeling of desired

play behaviors have been utilized by researchers. Results have shown that play tutoring improves the quality of economically disadvantaged children's pretend play (Anita, 1985) and leads to gains in verbal intelligence (Saltz, Dixon, & Johnson, 1977), creativity (Dansky, 1980; Feitelson & Ross, 1973), group problem solving ability (Christie, 1983; Rosen, 1974), and social interactions (Goldstein & Cisar, 1992).

Theoretical Perspective

The constructivist approach to learning and teaching provides an appropriate framework for understanding how a teacher uses a play-based curriculum with young children who have special needs. The DAP guidelines published by NAEYC are strongly based on constructivist theory. In addition, the constructivist approach emphasizes child-initiated learning and exploratory play activities, which are hallmarks of a play-based curriculum. The constructivist perspective has been most strongly influenced by Piaget and Vygotsky (Bredekamp, 1993).

Piaget's influence on ECE and ECSE practices has been profound. One of Piaget's greatest contributions to the understanding of children's cognitive development, is the view of the child as an active learner who is capable of constructing his or her own knowledge. Piaget's theory included a hypothesis that the emergence of cognitive development and intellectual activity are primarily intrapersonal. Piaget insisted that children act on their environment to construct an understanding of how the world operates (Piaget, 1952). Social interactions between children of equal cognitive function may encourage development by exposing them to other perspectives that may promote children's cognitive development (Piaget, 1932).

Interpretations of Piagetian theory have provided a basis for the play-based approach to ECE. Piagetian theory stresses the importance of children's active involvement in constructing a knowledge of their physical environment. Children need to explore, experience, and expand their actions on objects so as to move from the sensorimotor stage to formal operations (Piaget, 1952).

Piaget's writings have expanded educators' appreciation for the development of cognitive functions in children. A significant aspect of children's cognitive development is the feedback they receive from their environment. Many professionals understand the need for young children to act on their environment in meaningful ways. Yet, they do not assist in expanding the thoughts of young children who benefit from the feedback in the context of relevant activities. Piaget's writings describe the critical nature of children's active involvement with their environment. From these operations children derive concrete meaning that eventually evolves into abstract structures (Piaget, 1967). Piaget's theory suggests that the nature of the environmental feedback and the children's active participation are important for meaningful learning to occur (Bricker & Cripe, 1992).

The influence of Vygotsky's writing has been the basis for many other theorists' and researchers' attention to the influence of the social-cultural environment on the developing child (John-Steiner & Soubberman, 1978). Vygotsky's work has extended Piaget's view of children to include the emphasis on social interaction involving more capable others, which provides the context for a shared construction of knowledge and understanding (Wertsche, 1985). Vygotsky stated that an interaction occurs between man

and the social environment that affects the development of the individual, and may also affect man's larger social context.

Departing from Piaget, Vygotsky suggested that social interaction with more skilled partners is the means by which children become enculturated in the use of the cognitive tools of society (Vygotsky, 1978). This social interactive position notes the bi-directional effect between children and their immediate social environment (Bricker & Cripe, 1992). Vygotsky (1978) discussed the importance of the range between what children can do independently and what they can achieve with assistance. Vygotsky called this range the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Teachers that work within this "zone" assist children in the acquisition of skills that allows them to assume increasing responsibility for their own learning. The theories of Piaget and Vygotsky appear to cooperate in the assumption that development is in the context of social interaction when the participants work toward a mutual understanding of a problem and a collaboration on the solution. However, Vygotsky placed more emphasis on social interaction in children's learning than did Piaget (Rogoff, 1990).

Another guiding theoretical perspective for the qualitative study of teachers' work with young children is that of social constructionism. Whereby constructivism identifies reality as a product of individually unique human processing. Social constructionism is anchored in a philosophy of community processing. Reality is viewed as a group process, and the existence of an essential self is questioned (Mills & Sprenkle, 1995).

Social psychologist and philosopher Kenneth Gergen (1985) popularized the term social constructionism. Gergen suggested that the focus on reality should be shifted from

the individual mind as a reaction to the world to a product of our relationships with others (Hoffman, 1990). This view is a useful platform for collaborative researchers. It provides the researchers a rich framework for conceptualizing and describing the power of the community to transform individuals. This approach will be used as a guiding theory for this research study.

For this research study I followed the principles of constructivism and social constructionism. My understanding of the culture of the classroom was co-constructed with the teacher. We shared in our construction of knowledge through our interactions during interviews and written feedback. In addition, I acknowledged the influence of the research process on the teacher, the children, and myself through memos that I kept throughout.

Chapter 3: Method

Research Goals

The goal of this research study was to develop a greater understanding of how teachers, who are working in Title I classrooms, use play to educate children with special needs. The techniques and skills identified as helping these children to learn will be useful for other teachers who are working under similar conditions. Quantitative research often does not promote change in practice because its focus is on the definition of problems of practice in their own terms, rather than the terms of the practitioners (Bolster, 1983). The focus of qualitative research can be on developing an understanding of the meaning of action to the participants. Qualitative research can offer improved arguments for changes in practice. To improve the practice of early childhood educators and early childhood special educators, researchers should emphasize the context within which the activities studied occur. Research must also examine the meanings of studied activities for the participants. Qualitative research methods met these needs (Maxwell, 1996).

Research Problem

The purpose of this study was to understand how one teacher uses a play-based curriculum to educate young children who have special needs in a Title I preschool classroom. The culture of the classroom was studied. This included the environment of the classroom and the curriculum utilized. In addition, the ways in which this teacher interacted with her students, aides, and principal were described and interpreted.

Research Questions

The initial research question addressed through this study was as follows: 1) How does a teacher utilize a play-based curriculum in a Title I preschool classroom?

Subquestions included the following: a) How does this teacher interact with preschool children who have special needs? b) How does this teacher organize the classroom environment to meet the needs of children who have special needs? As anticipated, further questions emerged through the research process.

Research Design

Qualitative research methods were chosen for this study so as to generate data rich in detail and embedded in context. Qualitative methods are supported by the interpretivist paradigm, which reveals a world in which reality is socially constructed and continually changing (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Jacob (1988) listed these attributes of interpretive research: the research is conducted in a natural setting; emphasis is placed on the importance of understanding the participants' perspectives; and questions and methods emerge in the process of fieldwork. Qualitative researchers make sense of the world through thick description and narrative. The goal of this research study was to gain an understanding of how a teacher and her class construct the world around them. Meaning of the teacher's actions within the context of the classroom evolved throughout the research process (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

Qualitative research is of great benefit to the field of early childhood education and early childhood special education. Walsh, Tobin, and Graue (1993) noted that many important questions have been unanswered through the use of quantitative methods. One

pertinent question that has been ignored concerns the search for meaning in “the ordinary conduct of life” (Bruner, 1990, p. 19). At the core of interpretive research is a yearning to understand the meaning that people are constructing in their everyday actions (Walsh, Tobin, & Graue, 1993).

Qualitative research is useful for the field of early childhood education because it is accessible to the practitioner. Interpretive research does not view teachers as subjects, instead, it privileges teachers’ interpretations. Qualitative researchers make sense of children and classrooms by systematically using the same sensibilities and sensitivities that make for good teachers: listening, conversing, interpreting, reflecting, and describing. Hymes (1982) stated that the qualitative approach is “least likely to produce a world in which experts control knowledge at the expense of those who are studied” (p. 57).

A case study research design was utilized in this study. A case study is defined as “a detailed examination of one setting, or a single subject depository of documents, or one particular event,” (Merriam, 1988). Case study is often the preferred method of use when “how” and “why” questions are the focus of a study. This method is also appropriate when the researcher has little control of the study (Yin, 1994).

This study began in a broad sense with the researcher acting as an observer. The focus became more narrow as the research progressed through interviewing and observations. Information that was received through the participants, settings, and documents, guided the researcher in what to study further. Data collection continued in the setting, until a saturation point was reached (Yin, 1994).

Donmoyer (1990) suggested that case studies are interpersonally meaningful.

Readers may find narratives more interesting and applicable than statistically-based studies. The case study in early childhood education combines the ordered observation of the medical case study with the power of the mythic tale. In the past decade, the teacher as the focus of case studies has emerged as a valued method for understanding the education of children (Walsh, Tobin, & Graue, 1993).

Research Relationship

The success of the case study depends on the researcher's ability to develop a clear understanding of the knowledge which participants use to make sense of their world. In this study, the participants were the teacher, classroom aides, students, the school principal, and this observer. Teachers are important because they have the power to influence classroom activity that is not typically given to other participants. Developing a harmonious relationship with all participants, especially the teacher, was critical so that the study reflects naturally occurring activity (Hatch & Bondy, 1986).

There are several characteristics of the researcher-teacher relationship that were considered when designing the research study: 1) Teachers who perceive the researcher as possessing special knowledge or status may be threatened or intimidated. 2) Teachers are "key informants" and are the focus of much research. Some teachers may feel uncomfortable with the continual attention of the researcher. 3) Teachers typically practice their profession in private and may be reluctant to expose the intimate details of their worlds. 4) Teachers are criticized from many sides and may feel particularly threatened by an educational researcher (Hatch & Bondy, 1986).

The teacher was informed of the objectives of the study prior to beginning the research process. The purpose of this study was to develop an understanding, rather than to evaluate the teacher's skills. I described my background in occupational therapy and child development. My unique perspective on the classroom context seemed to ease tensions of the teacher. I became a member of the classroom, as a participant observer. With time, the teacher appeared to become more accustomed to my position in the classroom.

It was important that a positive rapport be developed with the teacher, aides, principal, and children. It was especially important that the teacher-researcher relationship be collaborative in nature. Interaction with the teacher was immediate, direct, and ongoing. A plan for establishing and maintaining the relationship with the teacher was agreed upon at the onset of the process. These roles were consistently monitored and modified with the teacher (Hatch & Bondy, 1986).

Sampling

The teacher and classroom for study were chosen using a criterion-based selection. This type of sampling procedure assists in achieving representativeness of the setting or individuals being selected (Maxwell, 1996). The purpose of the study was to discover how a teacher uses a play-based curriculum in a Title I preschool classroom. Therefore, a Title I federally-funded classroom that included four- and five-year-olds was chosen. The children were considered environmentally at-risk secondary to their low socioeconomic status, and several also had developmental delays. The teacher, children, and aides in the classroom had informed consent to participate in the study.

Because the focus of this research study was on the work of the teacher, the selection of the teacher should be described in full. I began by briefly interviewing three professors in the Department of Human Development and Learning at East Tennessee State University. This department includes faculty members from the fields of ECE and ECSE. The faculty members were asked to identify several graduates from their Masters' program who met the following criteria: 1) The teacher has a minimum of three years of experience in ECE or ECSE. 2) The teacher is certified in ECSE and/or ECE (pre K-3). 3) While a graduate student, the teacher demonstrated an understanding of the theory and practice of play-based classroom education. 4) The teacher consistently and skillfully utilizes a play-based curriculum with young children who have special needs (i.e. economically disadvantaged children and children with mild disabilities). From discussion with the professors, four different teachers were recommended.

Classroom observations were scheduled with all four of these teachers. All four teachers consistently utilized a play-based curriculum. However, one teacher's classroom environment, adult-child interaction, and playfulness were exemplary. This teacher had also been recommended by all three professors. Therefore, a follow-up observation of this classroom and interview with this teacher were scheduled.

The interview and observations revealed that this teacher works in a Title I preschool classroom that includes economically disadvantaged children and several children who also have developmental delays. The teacher is certified to teach ECSE and ECE (pre K-3). She has experience teaching in a variety of settings. The teacher considers herself to be a playful person, and she utilizes a play-based curriculum with all children.

She is well-educated in the use of play and reported that this approach was emphasized in her Masters' degree courses. The teacher is a reflective practitioner. In the past she has kept a journal and then made changes in her curriculum and environment based on her observations. This teacher is a consumer of research. She reads research, and she has presented at state and regional early childhood meetings on creative classroom environments. Lastly, this teacher is considered outstanding by her peers. She received the award for "Teacher of the Year" for her school system in 1997.

The final step in the selection of a teacher was an interview with the principal at this teacher's elementary school. The principal noted that this teacher is "just a kid herself" and "she loves to play." She stated that this teacher has used a play-based curriculum with her students for many years. The teacher has been in this Title I classroom since the school opened three years ago. The principal clearly identified the teacher as a "researcher" and "learner." She suggested that this teacher would be an excellent collaborator in the research process. After this interview, the principal and the research coordinator for the school system reviewed my proposal and gave written consent to complete this study in their elementary school.

Data Collection

The purpose of this study was explained to all adult participants and the parents or legal guardians of the child participants. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before beginning the research process (see Appendix A). After obtaining informed consent from the teacher, school principal, and classroom aide, informed consent forms with an attached letter were sent home with the parents. The letter informed the

parents and guardians that their child's participation in the study was voluntary. All participants, including the children, may withdraw at any point. There will be no penalty for withdrawal. The teacher explained to the children that I was going to observe in the classroom so as to learn about the use of play with young children. The teacher explained the children's choice to participate or not participate in the process. Full cooperation of all parents and children within the selected classroom was received. No children or guardians withdrew from the study. If a child had withdrawn, the actions of that child would not have been documented. The identity of all participants is confidential. I selected and consistently used pseudonyms for names and locations throughout the study.

Observation. Observation was the initial method of data collection for this case study. This method allowed me to see how the actions of the participants corresponded to their words and to develop an understanding of patterns of behavior. In addition, being an observer in the classroom assisted me in developing a rapport with the teacher, aides, and children.

I began the research process on the first day of September, 1998. I attended the class daily for the first week. After that point, I participated in the class three days a week for four months. This frequency continued until I was comfortable with the classroom process. I visited the class until consistent themes and meaning emerged from the data. I slowly removed myself from the classroom and completed the observational process by the middle of January, 1999.

I assumed the role of observer as participant. I requested entrance into the classroom on each visit. I primarily took notes from the back of the classroom. I used a

field notebook to record my notes on the setting, participants, and events. The field notes were hand written in a notebook and transcribed as quickly as possible. My field notes were descriptive and analytic. Adult participants were given the opportunity to read and make changes in the transcripts (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

You record carefully what your attention has allowed you to see, knowing that you will not see everything and that others will see differently, but recording whatever you can so it will be part of the cumulative picture (Bateson, 1984, p. 164).

I attempted to with the children, teachers, and aides in a friendly, but unobtrusive manner. I did not teach, assist or give advice to the teacher, aides, or children. I interacted with the teacher, aides, and children, in an ethically appropriate manner and as required as a participant in the classroom (Maxwell, 1996).

Interviewing. The teacher was interviewed once a week, since she was the focus of this study. Other participants who have an influence on the use of a play-based curriculum in her classroom were also interviewed. This included the principal of the school and the classroom aide. Each interview lasted from 45 to 90 minutes and occurred at a time and place agreed upon by participants and researcher.

Interviews were tape recorded. Interviews were transcribed as quickly as possible. Participants were given the opportunity to review the typed transcripts. They made any changes in the transcripts that they felt necessary. A copy of the results of the research study was also made available to all participants.

Interview questions emerged through participant observations. Questions were connected to known behavior, which assisted in the interpretation process. I developed a

beginning list of questions for the teacher, aides, and school principal (see Appendix B).

Further questions arose as the study developed (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

Collection of documents. The teacher's organizational plan for the classroom was discussed with the teacher during interviews. These interview notes were used in combination with field notes to describe the setting and activities utilized by the teacher. In addition, the teacher kept a reflective journal on her feelings about her experiences in the classroom. She chose to do this by tape recording, which was then transcribed by the researcher. This helped the researcher gain an understanding of the teacher's meaning of the process. These types of documents were used to plan interview questions that helped to further explain the process. The interviews and teacher's reflective journal corroborated observations in the classroom so as to make findings more valid. The use of these two methods of data collection were useful as descriptors and interpreters of the culture of the classroom (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

Data Analysis

Data analysis was ongoing. Field notes were handwritten and interviews were tape recorded. I transcribed all field notes and interviews. I used a microcassette transcriber for the transcription of all interviews. The transcription assisted me in becoming more familiar with the text. It also enabled me to begin the process of organizing the data and finding themes.

Analysis of field notes, transcribed interviews, and documents were coded during data collection. Codes were developed using Glaser's (1965) "grounded approach." Codes were developed in interaction with the particular data being analyzed. Codes emerged

from the participants' actions and interpretations. Interviews and transcripts were reread for codes that emerged as data collection evolved. Patterns and themes were identified and given a code for the properties of each theme. Analytic memos were used by the researcher to facilitate thoughts and insights about the data. The memos were linked to the data through cross-referencing. This prevented specific thoughts from being stripped from their context (Maxwell, 1996).

Matrices were constructed from the data. These matrices were used to identify patterns and trends. Interview questions were developed to answer the questions that emerged from the matrices. Review of all the collected data and analytic memos was done on a regular basis (Maxwell, 1996). I met with my committee chair from The University of Tennessee, Knoxville to discuss the research process, emerging themes, and explanations. We worked together to develop a diagram that revealed the interrelationships between themes. I also reviewed the research process and themes with two faculty members from East Tennessee State University, thus creating the opportunity for unbiased interpretations of the data.

This study reflected the words and actions of the participants, but it was filtered through my own perceptions. I wrote in the first person, which indicates my presence in the research process. The words of the participants were used to reflect the themes and ideas they represented. I used the narrative style to present the research in an interesting and informative manner, so that it will be of value to practitioners and researchers.

Validity Issues

Informed subjectivity is seen as a source of increased validity in qualitative research. Bruyn (1966) documented six indexes of “subjective adequacy” that strengthen qualitative studies: 1) Amount of time spent with participants. 2) Proximity of the researcher to the participants. 3) Variety of interactions with participants. 4) Familiarity with the language of the participants. 5) Degree of intimacy with the participants, and 6) Extent of consensus the researcher can obtain in confirming the meanings with the participants. Each of the adult participants was given the transcripts to review and change. The teacher also read and made changes to the text of this dissertation. Through this collaboration I was able to co-construct my understanding of the process with the teacher and her principal and assistant.

Peshkin (1988) noted that the points of view and belief systems of all researchers influence their decisions and research acts. Since no researcher, whether using qualitative or quantitative methods is free from a point of view, then no research is value free. The responsibility of the researcher is to document the effects of the beliefs and opinions that influence our actions as researchers. This was completed through analytic memos.

Validation of data was achieved through triangulation of methods. Triangulation is the collection of information from a diverse range of individuals and settings with a variety of methods (Denzin, 1970). Using several different methods of data collection reduced the risk that conclusions reflect only the biases or limitations of a specific method. Maxwell (1996) noted that the use of several sources of data gives conclusions more credibility. In this study, teacher’s perspectives, participant observer’s perspectives, and

the perspectives of related individuals such as classroom aides and the principal were obtained through participant observation, interviewing, and collection of classroom artifacts.

The perspectives of the parents were not collected for this study. The narrow and in-depth focus on the teacher did not allow for this addition. It is noted that the parents are an important part of the children's environment and, thereby influence the culture of the classroom. This is a limitation of the findings.

Theoretical validation was achieved by discussion of emerging conclusions with two faculty members from East Tennessee State University, Human Development and Learning Department. I reviewed my transcripts and developing matrices with them. The professors, who are skilled in qualitative research, asked questions to help me focus my themes. They both suggested that I limit the number of major themes, and expand my subthemes. These discussions led to my final three themes.

Theoretical validation was also promoted through collaboration with the chair of my doctoral committee from The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Child and Family Studies Department. We met on several occasions to review my transcripts and emerging themes. My chair recommended that I develop a diagram to assist in the organization of my findings. We also brain stormed and selected what we felt to be the most appropriate titles for the emerging themes.

Additional validity was gained through discussion of interpretations and conclusions with the teacher (Maxwell, 1996). The teacher read the transcripts for all the field notes, her interviews, and her reflective journal. She made comments throughout the

text. The teacher also reviewed and made comments on the fourth and fifth chapters of this dissertation. We discussed her suggestions or changes, and I made the final decisions concerning the text.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

This is an account of a preschool teacher who works in a Title I federally-funded program in a rural southern town. Denise uses what she describes as a play-based approach with the four-year-old children who are in her classroom. All of the children in her classroom have some type of special need. The majority of the children meet the criteria for early intervention services due to their socio-cultural needs. A minimum of 85% of the children in Denise's classroom come from low socioeconomic environments. Also, several children have been identified as having delays in language development.

After spending five months as a participant observer in Denise's classroom, I learned about Denise as a teacher, a spiritual being, a mentor, and a person. Three major themes emerged from the data. To reduce the possibility of misinterpretation, triangulation of data collection and interpretation procedures were utilized. Data were collected through participant observation, interview, and document reviews.

I received both written and verbal feedback from the teacher, the teacher's assistant, and the principal on transcripts of the interviews. The teacher also edited the final written product. She primarily changed words so that they would better reflect her meaning. She did not ask me to delete any contextual information or thematic findings, and she was pleased with the final text.

To assist with the identification of themes, I formulated several matrices. These matrices were in outline format with headings as primary themes and subheadings as secondary themes. Through the fabrication of the matrices, I was able to shift the position

of the primary and secondary themes until I was satisfied with the arrangement. The matrices helped me to reveal the interrelationship between themes, which I ultimately developed into a diagram.

I then presented the themes to two other qualitative researchers who reviewed them for consistency and accuracy of interpretation. Both researchers asked questions and re-framed the themes so as to spawn my interpretations. In the final stage of analysis, I met with the chair of my committee. We discussed the context for the study, the themes, and my interpretations. She assisted with the diagram that illustrates the interrelationship among the themes and context.

Before a discussion of the three major themes that emerged from the data can have meaning, they must be grounded in context. I will frame Denise's Title I preschool classroom. This will include a thorough description of the setting, the children who are members of the classroom, and other adults who influenced the process. I will also present the learning environment in the classroom and the curriculum, which is primarily based on the principles of social constructivist theory. Specific demographic information is omitted from the study to protect the identities of the participants and all names have been changed.

The following summaries of the themes are brief descriptions of my perceptions as influenced by Denise's words and behaviors. In the text I will provide a thorough description of each theme with illustrative passages from observations, interviews, and Denise's reflective journal.

Thematic Analysis of Teacher: Heart, Soul, and Voice of a Preschool Teacher:

(1) *Teacher's view of child:* Denise views the children as capable. She believes that children are innately good. She has a great respect for children and she trusts them. She listens to the children and adjusts the environment based on their interests.

(2) *Teacher as nurturing parent:* This theme focused on Denise's use of warmth, love, and generosity in her work with the children.

(3) *The struggle to weave personal characteristics into a pedagogical tapestry:* Many of Denise's personal characteristics influence the manner in which she teaches children. Denise is a risk taker who is breaking the boundary of traditional Title I practice. She is an autonomous learner who has an internal conflict over which approaches she should utilize in her classroom. Denise is a playful person who values playing with the children. Denise is a spiritual being. She considers herself to be a perfectionist and this personality trait is connected to her role as a reflective practitioner. Lastly, Denise is in constant struggle to find validation and to use her voice.

Context

This is a story of a teacher. One, very sensitive, loving, and motivated teacher named Denise. In order to appreciate this teacher's understanding of play-based curriculum, one must comprehend the context that surrounds her. In the next several paragraphs I will illustrate the community where Denise lives, school where she teaches, and the children who are in her class. I will also provide a biographical sketch of Denise. Finally, I will illustrate Denise's classroom including the learning environment, principles of guidance, and the play-based curriculum.

Community Culture. Denise teaches in a Title I preschool classroom in new elementary school that is at the edge of a small city in a Southeastern state. The name of the city is Brownsboro. Brownsboro is a college town, not unlike many others in this region of the country. There are shopping malls, movie theaters, grocery stores, churches, and schools. There are several lakes and mountains nearby, that are prime locations for leisure activities.

The city's cultural landscape is not very diverse. The population of this city is just over 55,000. Ninety-three percent of the city's residents are Caucasian. Seven percent of the population are minorities, and the greatest percentage of those minorities are black. The median household income for residents of Brownsboro is approximately \$23,000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 1990).

Brownsboro Elementary is a new school, in a low income section of this town. It is located near several government housing developments. The school's immediate surroundings, however are breathtaking. Brownsboro Elementary sits atop a large hill on the very edge of town. From the front steps of the school, you can see roof tops and miles of tree covered mountains.

The inside of Brownsboro Elementary is also architecturally beautiful. It is only four years old and the modern architecture reflects it's age. It is a two-story building with many large windows, from which children can view the mountainous landscape. The entrance to the school is spacious. The light shines from the two-stories of windows and falls onto plants that sit outside the school office. From the foyer visitors can see the rows of self-contained classrooms where children spend their days.

The principal of Brownsboro Elementary is Dr. Carol Barnes. This school district received Title I funding from the government before Brownsboro Elementary was built. Dr. Barnes stated that "the idea for the (Title I) program rose from an obvious need for preschool experiences for many of the children who lived in the projects." She stated that the preschool program was actually "up and running probably 3 or 4 years before I arrived." Brownsboro Elementary is one of five Title I federally funded schools in town.

The majority of the Title I funds support "the teacher and the assistant," said Dr. Barnes. "The program is basically driven by salary. Should we ever lose our Title I funding, then the program would be canceled," she emphasized. However, Dr. Barnes suggested that this possibility was improbable. She said:

Under the federal regulations, a school can be considered a Title I school project by having at least 50% or more of its students on free or reduced lunch. We basically are at 85%, so it's very unlikely that we will ever drop to that ratio.

Not all children who attend Brownsboro Elementary's preschool program live in a low socioeconomic environment. In the spring each year, children from all five Title I schools take home a flyer that announces the program and instructs the parents in qualifications and procedures for the preschool program. Dr. Barnes revealed, "the children must live in one out of five Title I school districts. If they do not, then they're not eligible." To qualify for the preschool program, a screening is completed by a certified teacher at the school. Dr. Barnes reported that the Title I preschool program in her school "is not an academic program, therefore, we are not screening for academic needs." "The results are tabulated and the program is basically available to the lowest scored children

first," stated Dr. Barnes. "We have much more of a demand than we have space," she concluded. There are three Title I preschool programs in the city and 60 young children are served in Brownsboro city each year.

Twenty children attend Brownsboro Elementary School's preschool program this year. All of the children are between the ages of four and five years old. Of the 20 children, 12 are girls and eight are boys. Seventeen children are white and three are black. One of these children has been diagnosed with speech and language delays and receives speech therapy services. One child has been referred for evaluation, but has not received any services to date. The children's names are as follows: August, Callie, Courtney, John, Rebecca, Allie, Kerry, Bradley, Ethan, Sara, Marcus, Grace, Luke, Robert, Dedra, Elizabeth, Bobby, Danielle, Jamie, and Marty.

Miss Denise is a preschool teacher at Brownsboro Elementary. There are several other adults who participate in the Title I preschool classroom. Miss Mary is the teacher's assistant. Miss Cathy and Miss Karen are early childhood education students who are a part of the local university's professional development program. The university students are in the preschool classroom two to three days a week.

One of Dr. Barnes' objectives for the Title I preschool program is to provide the children with experiences. "We find that by having these children here, it is a much better environment than being home in front of the television set all morning and afternoon. We know that from 8:00 until 1:30 they are in a very quality, structured, child-centered environment." In reference to effectiveness of the Title I preschool classroom, Dr. Barnes noted that "we've seen a strong correlation between children who had a preschool

experience, not just in our program, but in others, as being just a real strong determinant of the transition into kindergarten.”

Biography of Teacher. The following paragraphs will provide background information on Denise’s education and teaching experiences. I will outline the series of events that led to Denise’s shift from ECSE to ECE. I will also present Denise’s family history, which reveals how she decided to become a teacher. Lastly, I will give a physical description of Denise.

Dr. Barnes described how Denise came to be the Title I preschool teacher at Brownsboro Elementary soon after she took the position as principal:

The former teacher did not hold the credentials to be certified as a preschool teacher because she did not have the course work. Miss Denise was very interested and was starting her Masters at the local university in Early Childhood. The Title I director and I agreed that Miss Denise would be an excellent addition to the Title I preschool program, and we were willing to write a waiver to the state. She (Denise) had great experience in early childhood in that she had worked with very young special education children. So, she had a broad background. But, she was ready for a change in her teaching, uh, to make a shift in her educational career. So, she approached me about being interested in the program and I was very interested in pursuing.

Dr. Barnes clearly represents her opinion that Denise is an exceptional teacher. “I have a great deal of respect for her,” she said. Denise concurs with the best practices for early childhood education and is “current with research.” “I consider her to be a very

good friend and a wonderful, professional teacher. She models everyday that children are why she's here," said Dr. Barnes.

Denise has been a teacher for the past 15 years. The most recent four have been at Brownsboro Elementary in the Title I preschool. But, the first 11 of those years were spent in early childhood special education. She taught in a gifted program in a parochial school "making practically nothing" for several years. Then she taught in a early childhood special education classroom with children between the ages of 5 and 8 who had physical and cognitive disabilities. Denise said of that experience:

This was my foot in the door and if I didn't take it, I would never be out of the private Catholic school. The private school didn't offer career ladder. You had very little retirement. I knew that if I didn't take it, I wouldn't get another chance. So I took it.

After spending many years in special education, she made the decision to go back to school to earn a Master's in Early Childhood Education for several reasons. Denise reasoned:

It (special education) physically takes its toll. It emotionally takes its toll. And then it really came down to a logistical thing. It came up that year that we only enrolled 11 and that was enough for one teacher. I had seniority. They came to me and said, "What do you want to do because you've been here the longest?" I said, "Go ahead and transfer me." Then they put me in resource for one year. Then Dr. Barnes said she heard through the grapevine that I was interested in preschool. I said, "Oh, Yes, I would love to teach preschool."

Dr. Barnes received a waiver from the state for the required early childhood degree so that Denise could begin teaching preschool as she attended graduate school. Denise worked diligently to achieve her master's degree in early childhood education so that she could continue to teach in the Title I preschool classroom. Denise revealed, "I said, 'One way or another I'll do it.' I was very busy, but I went through it and, Bingo! I graduated in December, 1996." She has been teaching in the preschool program ever since.

The Brownsboro community has acknowledged Denise for her excellence in teaching in several ways. Denise recently received the Teacher of the Year Award for Brownsboro School System. She is an adjunct professor at the local university and each semester she teaches a creativity course to undergraduate early childhood education majors. The school system paid for her to take the National Board Early Childhood Education Certification Exam. Only two early childhood educators in her state have passed the exam to date, and neither teacher taught preschool. Lastly, her current principal, Dr. Barnes, has noted that Denise is "what most would consider just a top merit teacher."

Denise's appearance is somewhat stereotypical of a preschool teacher in that she often dresses in clothing that is adorned with children's characters, and she is always in something that can be easily washed. She is small in stature and average in weight, with brown hair and dark eyes. She is physically attractive. Her voice is melodic and her smile and laughter are contagious. Denise said of her physical appearance, "I've never looked right when I looked in the mirror, but the inside always overcame that."

Denise is in her late 30's and is married to Fred, a salesman. They live in a city not too far from Brownsboro. It is the city where she was born. Her parents also live in this city. Denise and Fred do not have children.

She was raised in a working-class family. Her mother is in charge of personnel at a clothing store, and her father is retired from a large manufacturing plant. She has one, younger brother. Before his death, her grandfather was a minister at a local church, where her family still attends, and she sings, regularly. Denise had a very special early childhood at home with her family. She said about her home:

It was the coolest place. There was always music in my house. Somebody was singing all the time or the radio was going all the time or my mom was playing the piano. We could do things! We could turn our room into anything we wanted to. I turned my room into a doctor's office and constructed my own scale out of a ruler and a catalog. My room also became a school, and I created my own overhead from a gooseneck lamp. I made mud pies on my kitchen set in the basement complete with 'real' shell macaroni. I would roll my grandfather's hair on rollers and he would actually wear them around until I told him he was 'done.' My mother would give me cloth and needles and thread and I could make doll clothes. I can remember being fairly young when she would let me attempt to sew on the sewing machine... I don't have any of my toys now, except one doll and my Barbie set. I played with things until there was nothing left, often taking it apart... I didn't realize how cool my childhood was. This loving, supportive, authoritative way of life was natural to my mother and dad. It is the only thing that saved me.

Denise's life at home was nurturing and supportive, but her school experiences were not. Denise talked about the daycare she attended, "It was a real hard experience. I didn't like being away from mom. I don't ever remember drawing. I don't ever remember painting. They spanked a lot of people for a lot of different reasons." Denise revealed that her early elementary school years were also bad:

I hated it so bad because I could read when I got there and I didn't understand why I couldn't have the real books. I'm sure I was a behavioral problem. I would lock myself in the bathroom and she (teacher) would be so glad to get rid of me, she would put my work under the door and I would do it and slide it back out.

Denise is unable to name one teacher who was a strong, positive influence and encouraged her to pursue a teaching career. Even her grandfather, who was a major influence in her life, felt that teaching was not the best job for her. Yet, that is the career she chose. Denise said of deciding to become a teacher, "It was just in me. I just had to do it. I couldn't think of anything else I wanted to do."

I observed Denise to be a very intelligent, spiritual, and reflective human being. Denise describes herself as, "sensitive, funny, musical, and happy." She is motivated and is "always reaching for the brass ring, never completely satisfied." She considers herself to be "somewhat of a perfectionist," but also "cooperative and easy to get along with." She is "very opinionated." She says she "likes to keep peace, but is not afraid to stand up" when she needs to. Because Denise is always reaching for the "brass ring," she agreed to collaborate on this research without hesitation.

Classroom Environment. I will present the classroom environment in detail in the following sections. This will include the physical arrangement of the room, and the organization of the classroom. The importance that time plays in Denise's classroom will be discussed. Then the materials and the environment's relationship to the play-based curriculum will be depicted.

Dr. Barnes described Denise as "exemplifying a true constructivist approach." She stated that Denise is a "strong believer that these children are discovering who they are." Denise's classroom is filled with creativity and play. "It's a room that allows the child's imagination to run wild," said Dr. Barnes.

Denise places great importance on the classroom environment. She said, "Environment is everything. It's definitely the third teacher in this room." Through Denise's organization of the room, center design, and prop selection, the classroom environment promotes amazing learning experiences through interactions and play.

Organization

Denise's process of organizing the classroom begins many days before school ever starts. Much of the early preparation occurs in her home, where she stores several of the centers that she rotates through her classroom. She determines which sociodramatic center she wants to use during the first several weeks of school. Then she gathers all the items that she will need for that center along with the other traditional centers and carries it all to school. At school Denise spends a lot of time to carefully set up the centers and the entire classroom. Every detail is addressed before the first day of school and the children's arrival.

But, I never saw this process and neither did the children. On our first day the classroom, including all the learning centers, was ready and waiting for us to explore. The classroom is bright and inviting. It is filled with colors, shapes, and objects that are enticing to even the adult eye. Within the classroom there are both big open spaces, and small secure spaces. There are places where children can be high and places where children can be low. There are loud interactive places and quiet intraspective places. Denise designed the classroom to provide something to fit every need or mood of each child.

On my first day I sat in the back of the room, overwhelmed by the activity level of the children and the beautiful environment. When I finally looked down at my watch, I had been in the classroom for over an hour before I could become involved. Later, I discussed my feelings with Denise, who told me that this was not an unusual reaction for an adult member of her classroom. She said of new teacher assistants and student teachers:

They just stand. They're so shocked at how busy we are in here. There's no other place that looks like this room, not in this building, not in any other school.

They're not used to the noise and they're not used to the pace, and they're not used to it being messy.

Physical setting

The classroom is not large in terms of square footage, but it projects a feeling of enormity. It is filled from floor to ceiling with stimulating objects and materials for young

children. It includes a space for circle time, many different centers, an art area, and a storage room.

As you walk into the classroom, linoleum and carpet cover the floor. The ceilings and walls are white, and the cabinets are bright yellow. There is a big window, covering one entire wall, that fills the room with light. There is a door into the storage area where there is a sink, refrigerator, bathroom, and cubbies for the children's book bags and coats. There are stacks of paper and storage containers on top of the cubbies all the way to the ceiling (see Appendix C).

On the left side of the classroom is the art area. It contains cabinets that are stuffed full with art materials such as paint, paper, paint brushes, glue, markers, crayons, cotton balls, foil, and hand made playdough. There are four child-size, yellow tables with small red chairs arranged in L shapes. Under the chairs are racks where the children's pencil boxes and coloring books are stored. On the table are name places cut out in the shape of Piglet, Winnie the Pooh, and Tigger and then laminated to the tables. There is one easel that looks like it has been well used by the children.

The remainder of the room is carpeted. On the right side of the space is the library center. It includes many books, a couch, puzzles, letters, paper, stickers, pencils, a Light Bright. There is a place under the wall cabinet for reading. Next to this center is a TV in a corner cabinet. Brown paper and green mesh fabric form a tree that towers above the TV.

There is a sociodramatic center that has rotating themes every few weeks. During my first week the center was a garage. There were large cars made out of cardboard and painted red. There was an unleaded gas pump made of cardboard with a nozzle attached.

The center also included the following props: desk with papers, pens, stamps, and key matching game; and car washing equipment.

There is a large open space in the middle of the classroom for circle time. Names are taped to the floor so that the children know where to sit. Behind this spot is a large dry erase board. On the floor sits Miss Denise's bar stool with a PVC pipe easel holding large paper. There is also a large storage bin next to her stool.

A large picture of Winnie the Pooh on a bulldozer, hanging from the ceiling, marks entrance into the block center. There are wooden blocks, large cardboard blocks, building logs, and Legos in this area. There are also plastic animals and people available for use by the children.

Next to the blocks is the music center. The focus of this center is the stage, an elevated surface covered in green carpet that is large enough for one adult and three or four children to dance and sing. There are many music oriented props including: microphones, miniature piano, electric keyboard, tape player and radio, record player with a variety of Elvis and country music records, a guitar, and a violin. There are lots of sparkly costumes, hats, and tiaras for the children to wear.

The housekeeping center has a big cardboard roof hanging from the ceiling with red fabric hanging from either side, as a door. It looks like a house from the front. The housekeeping center contains the traditional furniture: couch, table, chairs, crib, rocking chair, stove, refrigerator, and sink. This center also has many props including: realistic food items, cooking utensils, plates, cups, bottles, baby dolls, highchair, telephone, flowers, and dress up clothes for men, women, and baby.

The last area of the room, next to the windows along the back wall, contains the sand and water table. It includes a big green frog filled with pasta and beans rather than the traditional sand box. Other materials available are: water windmills, baby dolls, food coloring, bubbles, sponges, shovels, and buckets. There are plants on the window sill that the children can watch grow.

There are many things hanging from the ceiling, in addition to the Winnie the Pooh and the roof for the housekeeping center. There are large, multicolored, laminated letters hanging from strings. There are hoola hoops covered with colored mesh material hanging from strings. Lastly, there is children's art work hanging from fishing line with clothes hangers.

One of Denise's goals for the environment is to make the classroom "child oriented." She described one way that she knows she has reached that goal:

When the college class (creativity class that she teaches) makes the move from the college to my classroom.....It's a real comfort to me to know that 15 to 20 grown-ups in that room are uncomfortable. Because if they come into that room and they could sit down and I could shine the overhead easily and they could see around me easily and they were comfortable in all the furniture, then I would say that I have not done my job. The environment would not be conducive for four year olds. So, when I have these 15 to 20 college kids in there and they're struggling to see and to sit, then I really know that my environment is very much child-oriented, not adult-oriented.

Denise feels that the classroom environment “is everything.” It is the most important factor that influences the children. She plans her classroom environment so that “everything is where they can get it.” That is why there are no desks in Denise’s classroom. She adds that ideally there shouldn’t even be a teacher’s desk in the room, but that her desk “wouldn’t fit anywhere but here [in the corner of the classroom]. Denise’s classroom environment encourages the children to be independent by allowing them physical and emotional access to materials.

Role of time

Denise’s understanding of time plays an interesting role in the context of the classroom. Denise struggles with setting a schedule for her classroom. For example, Denise plans a schedule that allows the children an adequate amount of time in centers for play. While in these centers with the children, she often seems to get in flow and loses her sense of time as she is playing. Yet, she must work within the constraints of the school schedule. Denise appears to have tension between losing time and staying on schedule, and this leads to many changes in the daily routine of the class.

The classroom schedule for the preschool classroom is written on the dry erase board in the back of the room.

Staggered Week:

8:00-8:20	Breakfast
8:20-8:30	Arrival
8:30-8:45	Morning Time
8:45-9:00	Little Circle

9:00-9:30	Table Groups
9:30-10:15	Centers
10:15-10:30	Clean Up
10:30-10:40	Bathroom
10:40-11:10	Lunch
11:10-11:45	Out/Gym/Backpacks
11:45-12:00	Transition
12:00-12:30	Quiet
12:30-1:00	Math/Letter/Music
1:00-1:15	Snack
1:15-1:30	Dismiss

Although this schedule remained on the board for many weeks following my first day, I never saw Miss Denise follow this schedule, exactly. In fact, she changed her classroom schedule so many times that I eventually lost count. Denise said that she was unhappy with her schedule because “we’re stopping them and starting them too many times.” She noted that the children only had a short amount of time in school and she needed to fit in everything. “There’s too many transitions. We have to clean up too many times. We have to give them too many directions. We are telling them where to go all the time,” she said. So, Denise changed the schedule to have fewer changes throughout the day. She said of the latest schedule change, “It just wasn’t right to have a child like Grace, who still wanted to paint because she wasn’t finished, stop because seven of them were ready to go. I like it better this way.”

Denise is constantly assessing the classroom schedule and then making changes to make a classroom environment that is most beneficial for all children. Lunch is a specific consideration for Denise in terms of scheduling. Denise said, "I think it would be kind of cool if you could eat when you got hungry instead of having to go at 10:40. We have to go at 10:40 whether we want to or not." Yet, she was unable to change the lunch schedule to fit the needs of the children, due to the restraints of the school schedule.

Another area of concern for her is the placement and length of time for center play. In the course of three months, Denise moved center time from mid morning, to the afternoon, and then to first thing in the morning. At the beginning of the year, Denise planned for the children to stay in centers for a longer period of time than later in the year. Denise stated, "I felt that they (children) needed to get grounded in how to move about the centers and how to move about the room and where they're supposed to be. It's all new to them." While the children are learning about the classroom, Denise wanted fewer transitions because she believed this would decrease confusion.

Denise assesses the children's needs on a daily basis and then plans the schedule to address those needs. Initially, the children were "still a little excited about going to centers and they were still wanting to explore them a lot." so Denise skipped table time to give the children a longer period of time in centers. Later in the year Denise said of changing center time to the afternoon:

There wasn't enough time to do them in the morning and give them ample time.

They need at least 40 minutes. They need that 40 solid minutes to play. Thirty is not quite enough. With 60 the last ten sometimes fall apart. They might be able to

go to 45 because they'll get better at cleaning up. I wanted them to have the maximum amount of time they could have.

Denise also assesses the length of time spent by children in each center. Denise notes that as the school year progresses children begin to spend more time in one center, rather than moving from place to place. She said, "They get more involved. They know what's there and they know what they want to do and what they feel like. They're learning how they feel and what they want to be involved in." After a few months in the classroom the children began to remain longer in each center rather than moving from center to center. Then Denise added table time to the schedule because "they were ready."

Denise has a conflict between losing time in her classroom when she is in flow, and staying on the school's schedule. Denise is constantly reassessing the classroom schedule. She wants to make certain that the needs of the children are appropriately addressed at each point in time. The result is a classroom schedule that is in a state of continual change.

Environment and materials

Another aspect of the context of the classroom is Denise's design of the classroom environment and the materials she uses in her curriculum. One of the reasons that Denise characterizes her curriculum as play-based is due to her environmental focus on learning centers. Denise has designed and fabricated both traditional and non-traditional learning centers. She maintains a minimum of six centers, including a music center, open in her classroom. All of the centers include a variety of realistic props that have been created or purchased by Denise.

Denise has traditional learning centers in her classroom that remain set up in the classroom throughout the year. Those centers include: housekeeping, block, sand and water, art, library, and music. Denise also sets up a non-traditional sociodramatic center that she changes every two to three weeks throughout the school year. While I was in the classroom, the sociodramatic center was: a gas station and garage, a bakery, a restaurant, fire department, hospital, grocery store, and Santa's toy workshop. She never uses the same sociodramatic center twice during the year.

Each year Denise develops several new sociodramatic centers to add to her list, while dropping others. When determining what new centers to make, Denise considers the interests of the children. Denise gets many of her ideas for new centers from requests of the children. She enjoys the process "of building" the centers. Denise noted, "Some [centers] I never get tired of, and some I do... Also, some are more successful than others." Denise will not use a sociodramatic center again if it "flops in the preschool." For example, she eliminated the day care center and the fitness center because the children were not interested in them.

Denise determines which changing center to set up based on what she feels the children will be interested in. She does not "do them in any order." In November Denise set up a bakery center and her statement about this choice was, "Thanksgiving is coming up, which is food oriented, and then Christmas is coming up, which is also sort of food oriented."

Each time Denise sets up a new sociodramatic center in the classroom, she introduces it to the children during circle time. When introducing the bakery to the

children she asked questions to stimulate their interest by saying, "This is the bakery. What is a bakery? What do we do in the bakery? What can you make in a bakery?" Then she shows children the props in the center and explains some of their functions and uses. For the bakery Denise said, "Here's the play dough and you can roll it out and bake it." She explained, "I do the 'Vanna White' thing and they all watch and say, 'Ooh, Aah!' the first time they see it." Then Denise shows them the books that she has placed in the center. The books relate to the theme of the center.

Denise continually reassesses the effectiveness of the centers through the type of play that occurs in each area. When evaluating the sand and water center, Denise said, "We need to expand the water play. We need to take a good long look at some different kinds of toys and different ways to manipulate water."

Denise feels that the learning centers are what make her classroom look like a play-based environment. I asked her how her classroom environment is different than other traditional preschool classrooms. She answered, "(in traditional preschool classrooms) you might see a little house or you might see a reading loft or you might see a discovery center or something like that. You just don't see this many of them (centers) and time given to them." She gave me a clear example of the difference saying:

One of the teachers down the hall said that one of my parents came in at the first of the year and said, 'Where are the play centers?' She said, 'Well, this is kindergarten.' So what they call centers is not centers to me because the teacher will tell them where to go [centers are assigned]. Not that that's wrong, it's just

not me. It's not what I believe. That's not play. Once I tell you where to go, that's not play.

For Denise, "tubbing" is putting like items together in a crate or box. Teachers may put different building items like blocks, Legos, and Lincoln Logs into one container. The children then are given the building "tub" for a certain period of time to play. Denise says that in her classroom "play areas are very distinct and you can tell that people are going to play in them," where in the other classrooms "you're not sure how much they are going to play."

The props that Denise buys and makes are a part of the learning centers and the classroom environment. Denise makes the majority of the props that are in her sociodramatic centers. She stated that the props she makes, "must be durable. They have to be useable. They have to be safe. They have to be props that won't turn into a weapon automatically. There have to be enough to go around." Denise selects and makes props that are realistic and concrete. Dr. Barnes said, "When she [Denise] has an idea for a center, she wants it to be realistic. If I would let her, she would have real food in there all the time." She notes that her theoretical background for this belief is based on the work of Piaget and Vygotsky. She explained her selection of props further by saying:

In order to make abstract thought you have to have the concrete object to create a knowledge base in your mind, first. You have to have that concrete telephone, before the block will turn into a telephone, before nothing will be the telephone on the playground.

Denise spends time in the afternoons and on the weekends selecting and then making the most appropriate props for the children. Dr. Barnes stated that Denise "can design and make anything." She told about Denise working on a farm center. Dr. Barnes stated, "Denise went out to find out how to make a cow and how to get the things hooked to the cow to milk it. She figured out a rubber glove." She also has to repair the broken props. Denise stated, "It takes me about the first six weeks to get everything....The drums are tearing up. The tape player doesn't work. The headphones won't work."

The classroom budget for the year is \$300.00. Denise noted that this money "barely covers my paper and my paint. This year I bought Lego boards too." Therefore, Denise spends her own money to purchase props or she "begs for a lot of it." Denise also asks the parents to bring school supplies for the children. "I had the children bring scotch tape. I had the children bring glue. I had the children bring the markers and the crayons," she stated. "Food coloring is something I asked the parent to bring this year. Three dollars a whack of that stuff was breaking me up," she laughed.

"I buy the scissors because I want them to use the Fiskar's because I think they're the best scissors. All the shaving cream and toothpicks, I buy. All the play dough we make. The parents or I buy the flour and salt and all that kind of stuff," she said. At least once a week she walks into the classroom with a bag of "stuff" like cotton balls, chalk, or glitter for the children to use. When I asked her how she can do that on a teacher's salary, she laughed and replied, "I don't let Fred (her husband) see the checkbook." Then she told me that all teachers must be willing to buy materials for the classroom. "Every teacher that's worth a penny does it," she stated.

One of the centers that I observed children entering most frequently was the music center. Music and singing surrounds the preschool environment in a variety of ways. Denise sings and the children sing with her throughout the day, especially during circle and center time. They sing alone and they sing with music. They listen and sing to different types of music, from children's songs to country to Elvis. Denise stated, "They shouldn't always hear what I call children's music, like the 'ABC's'. They should hear real music, all kinds."

Denise believes that music is a very important mode for children to express their emotions. She said, "It's just another way of communicating with me. Another way to express the feelings that they are having." One way that Denise hopes to help them express their feelings is by maintaining a music center filled with musical instruments, records, tapes, and CD's. She thinks it is important to provide these materials "because most of the children don't have these instruments at home."

She also suggested that music is meaningful because of the relationship between it and the development of math skills. She said music gives you a "steady beat and rhythm." It also strengthens creativity through "making up your own words" to go with the music.

Music is an "inseparable part" of Denise. As a result, music is a consistent part of her classroom environment. Denise sings and plays music as much for herself as for the children. She said that she couldn't "imagine not singing some time during the day." She says that "music should be done for the sake of music." She stated that her ultimate goal is for music "to become part of their soul. I want them to appreciate it."

Guidance

The principles of guidance that Denise utilizes in her classroom are another dimension of the context of the classroom. Her methods of guidance are closely tied to the classroom environment. Denise has struggled to determine which methods of discipline work best for the children in her classroom. She has decided that an integrated approach to discipline is most effective, and she utilizes aspects of both behavior modification and environmental design. In general, Denise maintains a child-focused and responsive model of guidance.

Denise feels that the classroom environment plays a very important role in guiding children to become contributing members of society. Denise said that the “environment should be such that they’re so intrinsically motivated it (misbehavior) won’t happen.” She added that sometimes a teacher needs to use more than one approach to address children’s needs. Denise said:

I look around this room and I think I couldn’t do any more to the environment to seek out the behavior I want. Yet, I still have these children who come with problems that you have to solve one way or the other to get them to work inside our socio-culture.

Therefore, Denise does have several principles of discipline that she follows in her classroom. She stated, “Just talking about it, redirecting them, time out when they have to, and the worst thing that happens in here is that I make you go sit in the office time out chair. That’s when nothing else seems to work. So, that’s as far as I go.”

Denise gives the child a choice and then a consequence. She always follows through with the consequence, if the child does not respond with the "right choice." She says that one of her goals is "to be firm and mean what I say." She tries not to ever raise her voice because "that just tears me all to pieces to have to talk loud." Instead, she just uses "that old grouchy voice" to inform the child that he or she is doing the "wrong thing." In my analytic memos I wrote that Denise is very patient and consistent in her discipline. I observed her responding to children quickly and in what I believed was an appropriate manner. She often tells the children, "I am not going to change my mind."

There is a time out chair in the classroom (Eeyore chair) but Denise does not use it with regularity, nor does she threaten children with it. The children typically respond to her verbal request to "do the right thing." Denise stated about her use of time out, "I try to get them to do the right thing on their own before I have to send them to the Eeyore's chair." She added, "I try not to time them how long they stay. I usually take them over there and say, 'When you have your self-control then you can get up.'" Denise said of other discipline methods, "Sometimes the behavior is such that you have to intervene right then. 'Stop!'" Denise has taken children to the office to sit in the time out chair, but only when they hit or bite another child. This type of negative, harmful behavior only occurred on two occasions while I was in the classroom.

Denise said about her struggle to determine her own principles of discipline:

The very first year I was in here, I didn't have anything [behavior modification]. Then I went to using popsicle sticks because I didn't have anything for them to realize that 'Right there! That's the behavior I want you to stop!' [with

her finger pointing]. When I stop you and make you walk over to there, you know exactly why you're walking over there because that's the second I stopped you.

But, Denise determined that the popsicle stick method was not working and she eventually switched to using Winnie the Pooh. She said about this decision, "He just sort of happened. I think I just picked up a coloring book and said, 'Yeah, this would be kinda cool.'"

Denise gives verbal and physical inputs that act as rewards and reinforcers for positive behaviors. She gives verbal praise, hugs, kisses, or pats on the back for good behavior. Denise gives candy as reward when the children help clean up. I seldom observed Denise refrain from giving a treat, and when she did, she explained the reasoning behind her decision to that child. "Bad days" as Denise calls days where several children behave inappropriately only happen "about once or twice a year."

Denise described her principles of discipline as, "Every incident and every day is different. There is no real plan." The key to her discipline techniques appears to be that she is child-focused. By that I mean she considers the child and then the circumstance before taking action. Her responses depend on the individual child. She stated, "Everybody changes so much. Everybody's emotions and things are flexible. You have to just go with that moment." She further explained why she does not have specific guidelines to follow in her room, "You've seen teachers that say the first offense you do this and the second offense you do that? Well, fiddle. Whatever the offense takes when it happens is what I do. Sometimes you can just talk about it. Take Grace, for instance. If Grace does something, just telling her not to do it again would be the end of it. Luke,

sometimes you can redirect. Sometimes it's on and on until you have to say, 'I'm sorry. It's right over here and sit by yourself in the Eeoyre chair.'"

Denise is flexible, but not lenient in her actions. In my analytic memos I noted that Denise considers the child and the situation before determining the type of guidance she will use. She said of herself, "I bend a lot. I think that has a lot to do with special ed. I can tell you what bad behavior is. Let me tell you about trying to explain to somebody not to poop in their pants and write on the wall. That's bad behavior!" Because of her background in special education, Denise does not believe in calling a child "bad." In her preschool classroom she says, "There really is no such thing as bad behavior. They've just not done the right thing." I never heard Denise tell a child in her classroom that he or she was "bad."

Denise is not just responsive in her approach to discipline, she is also proactive. She tries to set up the environment so that the children do not exhibit inappropriate behaviors. For example, she made a "Winnie the Pooh" necklace that she sometimes wears during circle. She tells the children "I'm gonna put on my Winnie the Pooh necklace because it's my turn to talk. Okay, everybody put eyes up here." When Denise puts on her Winnie the Pooh necklace, children begin to quiet down to listen. She also has "special glasses" that she uses to make sure that she "sees the children doing the right thing." These are big, yellow, plastic glasses that she occasionally wears during quiet time. Although Denise used these creative props frequently during the first several weeks of class, by Thanksgiving she only used them sporadically. In addition to these

noninvasive assistive devices, Denise implements a curriculum that stimulates children to participate in learning rather than unwanted behaviors.

Curriculum. The curriculum that Denise utilizes in her classroom is the final component of the context of the classroom. The play-based curriculum is interconnected with the classroom environment. Denise has struggled to determine which theories will guide her practice. This tension appears to have stemmed from her previous use of behaviorist principles while she was working in ECSE and her more recent use of constructivist principles in ECE. At this point she has made the conscious decision to integrate these principles, with an emphasis on constructivist theory. Denise plans her curriculum to be child-centered and play-based. She continually assesses the children's learning through observation and portfolios, and then reflects on the effectiveness of her curriculum.

Denise bases her curriculum primarily on the theoretical principles of Piaget and Vygotsky. Denise considers herself to be a constructivist. Yet, she does utilize some traditional behaviorist principles in her classroom. At first sight, there appears to be a slight conflict between her practice and her beliefs, but actually she has made a conscious decision to integrate traditional and constructivist principles into practice. She said of this decision, "I think that people think that constructivists have no discipline and that's not true. You can be a constructivist, but you have to have some type of order. You can't be doing whatever you want to do."

Denise notes that it was hard for her to find that midpoint between traditional and constructivist principles in her preschool classroom. She said, "I had been a behaviorist

for years. It was hard to let go of that in the beginning and then I read Alfie Kohn's work and decided I wasn't going to do any of it at all. In Utopia we shouldn't have to do that [use punishment or rewards] and Alfie Kohn's philosophy is the way the world really should be," she remarked. Then I got last year's group and I found out that you have to have a middle between that."

I asked Denise to explain what Alfie Kohn's philosophy meant to her. She stated: He wrote the book, Punished by Rewards. He believes in no rewards whatsoever. He believes in total intrinsic motivation. He feels that the stickers are bad and the time out is bad and the praise is bad. We are not doing anything when we praise a child except coercing them into our way of thinking. He believes that the more you punish a child, the more you have to punish a child.... Something to think about.

But, it is difficult for Denise to use only Alfie Kohn's philosophy as a basis for discipline in her classroom. She stated, "It's not reality to me. You look at these kids and know some of them couldn't take a free environment,"

Denise has learned through her work in the Title I preschool program that "there are situations we can use behaviorism in." Denise assesses the children and then determines what principles work the best for them. She stated that a totally constructivist classroom would work, "if we could hand pick them [children], but we can't. It would be a perfect model. But, it's how the world really is and it wouldn't be fair to put just Marcus' picture up there."

Planning content

Even though Denise integrates a few traditional principles into her classroom, she still considers herself to be “a constructivist.” This constructivist view point is obvious in Denise’s organization of the classroom into a center-based learning environment. Denise carefully plans the content that she includes in her curriculum. She primarily uses a theme approach for planning, but she is open to allowing the children to explore their own interests through play.

Denise feels that two very important considerations in relation to centers is where to place them and what to put in them. Denise believes that the library and the block centers are the central centers to her room. On several occasions Denise stated that library center is pertinent for her children because “they come from homes that are not as print oriented.” Because she feels literature and math opportunities are so critical in early childhood education, she tries “to make sure that some time during the day there is time to write, time to cut, and time to look at those books because I know that children learn by doing [pause] participation in materials.” Often Denise allows the children to choose library or block center as a choice during table activities in the morning in addition to center time.

Denise’s constructivist teaching approach is also apparent in the way that she interacts with the children and considers their needs. She stated, “I think that with the preschoolers, the things that I do at the table, the things that I do in the circle, the things that we talk about continuously is the right thing for them to do.” When she was planning for her first week of class she said:

I've decided what I'm going to do as my topic, colors. I usually don't do colors because I feel that children learn them naturally from the environment.... It's not so much that I'm expecting them to grasp those colors in a week, but the fact I can use that easily in setting up the environment. I don't have to necessarily feel that pressure of making every table activity match that unit because color is everywhere and everything has color. So, it doesn't really matter what I give them. We're going to see the color in it.

Yet, before school began she had already changed her mind about starting the unit on colors. She noted, "I just felt that it was too overwhelming to compact the children's schedule that tightly at this point." So, she concentrated on teaching the children procedural issues the first week, such as where to put their back packs and how to move in and out of centers with their Winnie the Pooh names.

Once the children learned the necessary processes of functioning within the preschool classroom, Denise began to focus on the children getting play-based learning experiences. Dr. Barnes feels that Denise's preschool program is a "step above" other preschool programs because, "we have someone of Denise's caliber who spends just hours planning center-based learning."

Denise plans classroom activities including art, math, literature, and learning centers through a theme approach. Denise always plans a table activity for the day that typically incorporates language, math, and art. She described how she began and why she continues to use themes for planning activities:

Back when I first started you had the 'theme thing.' It's easier for me to collect as a theme. It's difficult for me to completely lay down the theme thing because it's like. Well, you pull from here and you pull from there and you pull here and you pull there and it just takes so long to organize that.

Denise does not always match all the activities, books, and changing sociodramatic center to one theme. She stated, "I don't think it hurts if it doesn't all go together.... I don't necessarily have to match them up." She added, "If I have enough [table activities] to just theme with the book, I do that. If I'm one short then I try to think of something to tie in with the letter."

The activities of one Monday morning revealed how Denise uses themes. Denise read a story about a gingerbread man during circle. She showed the children large, medium, and small brown, paper gingerbread men and the children helped her sort the gingerbread men by size. Next they acted like "gingerbread people." Denise instructed the children to crawl, freeze, walk, tiptoe, or jump in a gross motor, direction-following game. Immediately following this circle activity, Denise sang the "Cathy Cook" song as she showed the "Cathy Cook" book the children and they sang along with her. On a dry erase board, which she held in her lap, Denise demonstrated how to make the letter C, making mistakes and asking the children to help her.

Following circle time, the children went to "table activities." The children could select from three activities that Denise carefully explained during circle: 1) Making a gingerbread man: Denise stated, "He needs eyes, ears, nose, hair, and buttons. Whatever he needs to make him beautiful." The children were given brown paper, Cheerios,

buttons, string, fabric, markers, and glue for decorating their gingerbread man. 2) Comb painting: Denise explained that she had chosen all different types and sizes of combs and that they should “dip the combs into the paint to make different prints.” Denise also asked the children, “Did you know that comb starts with a C?” 3) Blocks: Denise told the children that there were “bristle blocks and slide blocks in the circle.” The theme for this day was ginger bread man, which is a type of cookie. Cookie starts with the letter C. Comb also starts with the letter C. C was the letter for that week.

Denise plans her themes for table activities, literature, and math on a daily or weekly basis. She typically plans activities a week in advance. She does not plan her themes or activities in any certain order. Denise is responsible for making sure that she has all the supplies necessary for the activities. Then she writes the activities on separate 5x7 note cards and gives them to Miss Mary, the teacher’s assistant. Each day Mary sets up the table activities according to these cards. Denise described how she plans her activities for each day:

I’ve collected so many that a lot of them I just pick and choose from the collection of what I have collected. Sometimes I try not to repeat the same activities every year. I try to have enough [activities] to where these kids have something different from last year’s kids. Some, I don’t have quite enough or I think they’re really good ones and I keep those. Mostly though, they’ve come from a collection over the years and I go through and choose what units or things that I want to do this year and I choose from those. I always try to write at least one or two new ones a year and throw out one or two.

Denise assesses the effectiveness of the art activities primarily based on their ability to "be open ended enough for all of them [outcomes] to look different." She says that for her to choose an activity, it has:

got to be something that's experimental. It's got to be something that's moveable and changeable for the most part. It needs to be something that they can basically do alone.... It needs to be something that they can manipulate and do, and it needs to be something that they can spring board off other ideas.... You know, something that sparks their interest to make them dig deeper into what they want.

Denise allows children to explore their own interests in the classroom. She said about written language, "The kids that are ready are going to get it, and the kids that aren't, are not." Denise carefully considered how to introduce letters to the children and she searched for years until she "ran across this letter song book set." Denise chose to use a multi-sensory approach to letters. She made a large song book for each letter of the alphabet. Then she bought tapes of songs that go with each book. She said about this multi-sensory approach to teaching, "If they're just learning the song, that's okay. If they're getting the sound, phonics, that's okay. They're going to figure out that everything is starting with a 'B.' If they're visual learners, they are going to see them (letters). So that was the best compromise"

Denise reads to the children during circle time and sometimes at the end of the day. The books usually relate to the theme of the week or the changing sociodramatic center. Denise is a wonderful story reader. She sits on a stool in front of the children, carefully moving the books so that the children can see the pictures. She uses voice

inflections to accentuate the story. She doesn't stumble or lose her place. She listens to the children if they interrupt to share a related experience. Then she returns to reading her story without missing a beat. She says about this skill, "I hardly ever get out there with a story that I've not pre-read. Some of these books I've read for years. I could almost tell them if the words were gone."

Assessment

Denise uses her theoretical knowledge of constructivist principles as a background for the assessment of children's learning within her classroom. Denise primarily observes the children to assess their progress, but she also uses a portfolio system and report cards. On more than one occasion Denise informed me that her assessment skills were not her greatest strength. She believes that "assessment is probably any early childhood development person's weakest part." Yet, she has a definite plan for assessing children's performance in her classroom.

Denise is required to use report cards every six weeks to assess the children in her classroom (see Appendix D). However, Denise does not consider report cards to be an accurate assessment tool of children's progress. She said of report cards, "Truly, in the beginning I hated the things. I thought they were cruel and inhuman. We did work on them some.... Thank the Lord they don't start until the second six weeks."

Denise prefers to assess the children's progress through portfolios. Denise said that the purpose of the learning portfolio is "to collect a collection of things that demonstrate their abilities and their strengths. I try not to put anything in their portfolio

that reflects weakness. I only want strong things in their portfolio.” Denise uses pizza boxes as the children’s portfolios. Each child’s portfolio includes “a large collection of pictures [photographs] and some of their art work and writing samples ... and all the comment cards.” She added, “I may fill up three [index cards] on Dedra and ten on Marcus. There’s no rhyme or reason to how many I fill up through the year.” At the end of the year Denise uses whatever has not gone in the portfolios to make memory books for the children’s parents.

Denise uses the comment cards that she puts in the children’s portfolios to describe what children are demonstrating through their play. She noted, “You can collect specifics with your cards. If I don’t have a card full of things that you’ve demonstrated, then something is wrong. I should be looking to see why I don’t have data.” When I asked her to tell me more about this process of assessing children through their play, she commented, “It’s more than what you can hold on to.” Specifically, she observes the children to watch if they “are just running chaotically around” and if “they can make a choice.” She also looks to see if the child “can stay on task.”

Denise often talks about children “scaffolding” other children when she is assessing their play skills during center time or elsewhere. She described a play scenario of a child in the classroom. Denise’s categorization of this scenario as including scaffolding between children clearly indicates that she bases much of her understanding of children’s learning from a constructivist frame of reference:

Today, they scaffolded each other into being in the band, the university band. That was a great idea. The shaker has hung over there on the wall [of the music center]

the whole time. Rebecca wore a university outfit yesterday.... And, today she goes over there and she sees the red and white shaker and she makes an association. And she gets up and the next thing you know they're all dressed up in their little leotards and those headbands and they've got the drums and they've got the violin and they've got that shaker and they're beating a perfect rhythm. 'Go state! Go state!' I mean it's a perfect marching rhythm. Then they start marching around and around. They would have never done that if Rebecca had not scaffolded them.

Summary. In summary of the contextual considerations, Denise teaches in a small Southern community where she has spent her entire life. Denise has experience teaching in both ECSE and ECE, and she is currently teaching 20 young children in her Title I preschool class. The majority of the children in her classroom live in low socioeconomic environments, and several have been identified as having developmental delays.

The learning environment in Denise's classroom is play-based. The focus of the environment is learning centers, where the children are surrounded by materials and objects that they are free to manipulate. Denise designs and fabricates the centers and many of the realistic props herself. She is in a constant struggle over time. She wants to be able to get in flow and to play freely, yet she must consider the school schedule.

Denise has integrated traditional and constructivist principles of guidance for her use in the classroom. Denise uses several behavioristic techniques such as time out and positive reinforcement. She has also set up the environment, including her consistency and responsiveness of guidance, to influence the children's behaviors.

Denise has designed a curriculum that is based primarily on the theoretical principles of Piaget and Vygotsky. The curriculum is play-based and Denise provides an environment that allows the children to construct their own knowledge. But, she has made a conscious decision to integrate some traditional principles into her constructivist framework. Denise believes that this combination of approaches gives children the freedom to learn, while also providing a sense of order.

The previous description of the community and classroom where Denise teaches was gathered through observation, interview, and document review. This information creates a context for the discussion of themes that have emerged from the data. The reader should now be able to ground the following themes in their contextual basis.

Thematic Analysis of Teacher: Heart and Voice of an Early Childhood Teacher

Three major themes emerged from analysis of the data: (a) view of child; (b) teacher as nurturing parent; and (c) struggle to weave personal characteristics into a pedagogical tapestry. A thorough description of each theme will be presented. Segments from observations, interviews, and Denise's reflective journal will illustrate the themes. Then a diagram that represents the interrelationship between themes will be provided.

View of Child. Through observation of Denise's interactions with the children in her classroom, interviews concerning her feelings toward the children, and review of her reflective journal, I found that Denise's view of the child is positive. She believes that children are innately good, and she treats them with equality. Denise listens to the children and trusts them. Denise respects children and their individual differences. She also respects the culture from which the children come.

"It doesn't matter what walks through that door. It's mine for nine months and I've got to figure out what to do with it," exclaimed Denise during our first interview. Denise explained that she tries not to see the bad in children. She said, "Life's too short for that." She also wants to make the children feel wanted. In my field notes, I noted Denise's positive view of children through statements to the children such as, "You are so creative." and "You are so smart." She believes all children were created equal, and that they are basically good. I observed Denise listening to the children, she trusting them, and she treating them with respect. I observed Denise to be a responsive teacher.

Denise thinks that children are innately good, and that is what she focuses on. She said:

They're all important. They're all good. I don't try to see the bad in them. I send them on to the other teachers and the other teachers come back and they say, 'So and so has got diarrhea of the mouth. How did you stand him?' I'm like, I didn't really notice. They are what they are, and they're only good. There's no need to dwell on the bad stuff.

Denise was excited to start the year off with a new group of children, with special qualities to share with her. She described the first week of school as "just a joy." She added, "It renews my faith in children every year when I get this new little bunch." Several weeks of school, Denise was already beginning to learn about each child's talents. She said:

You can already see some of the children who are going to be very musical, some very linguistic, and some that are very interpersonal. When you have those little

kids that are intrapersonal, they are so fun to work with. We describe them as demanding and stubborn and very into themselves.... I think it's interesting to see someone that is in tune to what they really want.... They are probably the ones that are often most creative.

Denise's view of the child has been impacted by her experiences in special education. Denise believes that all children, no matter what their socioeconomic, cognitive, or physical status, should be treated the same. She said, "I can remember going into the special ed. class.... The fall was right before the first day of school and I ran into another teacher. She asked me how I was going to approach them. I said I was going to treat them like regular children."

Denise has a few children with documented disabilities in her classroom each year. Denise selects open-ended materials for her classroom. These types of materials allow different levels of children to be successful. Denise changes her level of expectations to fit the level of the particular child. She revealed, "I expect different from them. I don't expect their products to look the same. I don't expect their process to be the same, but I give them the same materials to work with." There are two children in Denise's class this year who have speech and language delays. She said about these children, "You can't be in a room where everybody is talking all the time and not be immersed in language." She added that special services are very helpful for the children that need it.

Denise believes that an effective early childhood education program is child-centered. Denise said, "You have to let the children change what you give them.... It's so

hard not to say, 'No, that's not the way I wanted it.' That's the key to being a good early childhood teacher...to let the child change whatever. That's how they learn. That's how they learn to construct knowledge."

One morning during manipulative play, three boys finished their puzzles early. After getting their journals from Miss Mary, the boys went into the music center. Denise came over and asked, "Does anyone want clean paper?" All three boys took several sheets. Ethan folded his paper. He announced, "I'm making a plane." Marcus watched carefully. Ethan stated, "I'll show you, like this." Then Marcus and Bobby began to make paper airplanes as well. When Denise returned to check on the boys, she saw that they were folding paper and throwing it, rather than writing in their journals. Denise sat down on the floor with Ethan and Marcus, who asked her how to make airplanes fly. Denise responded, "Now, how do you think you should do it?" The boys folded and refolded, and threw their paper airplanes. Denise encouraged, "I bet if you keep trying different ways, you will find a way that makes it fly straight."

Each day Denise chooses table activities that allow the children to guide their own learning. Denise allows the children to make whatever they want out of the materials she provides. She chooses activities that will "spring something else into mind." Denise also allows the children to make noise and to be active as they learn. She said, "I've learned to expect that it's noisy, that's it's busy, and that everybody's going in a different direction.... I can comfortably say, they're four and it's supposed to be busy and it's supposed to be noisy."

One of the table activities before Thanksgiving was Indian corn painting. The children painted with the ears of Indian corn. After several children finished their paintings, they began to pull the corn off the ears. Corn kernels were flying across the room. Denise observed and then said to the children, "That's just like what the Indian's did. They shelled their corn." After a few more minutes, the children began throwing the corn. Denise then suggested that the children "take that corn over to the turtle [sand box] and shell them." This was an excellent example of how Denise's adaptability to children's needs is lived out in her view of the child.

Denise is careful to respect each child's interests. Although she believes that writing in front of the children is important, she considers the child's volition in this process. She stated:

I had real mixed emotions about that. Even thinking, why should I go around and write on top of every child's paper words for them if they don't want words on paper. Not because they shouldn't see the words, but because I think of the messages we send to children. Am I giving them the message, 'I know I told you to write, but you didn't write it correctly or like a grown-up does, so let me show you how it should really look'? I've begun taking dictation from the children that ask to be dictated. And, those that don't, if they're satisfied with what they've done, then that's fine.

Denise follows the children's interests. Just before Christmas, Denise took the children to see a presentation of 101 Dalmatians. When they returned later in the afternoon. One of the children asks why Cruella Deville wanted the puppies. This led to a

big discussion about greed. Denise gave a simple definition of greed. Then the children thought of people who are and are not greedy.

Denise listens to the children. Denise said, "You learn to listen to them, even when they think you're not listening." I observed Denise listening to the children, responding, and then returning to what she was doing without ever losing her place. Denise understands that children make personal associations with what she is reading, and she does not become upset by their interruptions. In my field notes, I emphasized that Denise carefully listened to each child's interjection before returning to the task at hand. I specifically noticed this behavior when Denise would read a book during circle. She stated:

I guess because I expect the story to make them think of other things. So, If I expect it to make them think of other things and they jump up and tell me something, then I've really sort of gotten what I wanted.... I guess I just practiced over the years. I don't ever remember losing my place.

Denise often takes the opportunity to scaffold children's knowledge by first listening and then responding to their statements. When they were talking about the letter C during circle, Marcus exclaimed, "C is a half circle it looks like a handle. Like on the CD [player]." Denise replied, "Your right. It looks like a handle." Marcus stated, "It's on your CD." Denise responded, "Did you hear what you said? You said C in CD." Marcus smiled with pride.

Denise has a great respect for the children. I found examples of this respect through triangulation of my field notes, interviews, and documents. I observed Denise

listening and responding to each child in the classroom, and these actions promoted a mutual respect between Denise and the children. Denise calls this a "two-way respect." In an interview she described how she promotes respect, "It's got to be very comfortable. They can't feel like they can't come to me. They have to feel like they can tell me anything, at anytime." I often observed the children interrupting Denise to tell her something that was important to them. Denise did not tell the children to be quiet, but rather, she listened, responded, and then redirected. In her reflective journal Denise discussed the importance of mutual respect in her classroom:

I have to respect them and they have to respect me. A lot of people ask me why I let them call me Miss Denise and I say, 'That's my name.' You can say 'Mrs. Brown' with disrespect. Respect is earned. It doesn't matter what they call me. It's what they call me with respect.

One morning, Dedra was sitting on the floor putting strips of tape on paper, after she quickly completed her shape vest during table activities. Denise asked Dedra, "What are you hoping to do with that tape?" Dedra did not respond, but just stared at Denise. Denise then asked, "Do you just like the way it feels?" Dedra replied, "Yeah." Then Dedra began putting tape on Denise who laughingly said, "I must be coming apart."

Denise's view of the children's families also impacts on her education of the children. Denise has a respectful relationship with the parents and caregivers. She said about the children doing a Christmas program for the families, "I want them to do it for their parents. The parent's memory.... They don't come to school. They don't get to see all the neat things the children do. It will be the only thing the parents remember."

Denise trusts the children. When she planned the children's presentation for the school board she told me that the children would wear the costumes that they had made in class. She said, "I never use anything that the kids don't make. They always make their own costumes and whatever."

Denise trusts the children in the room to use items such as staplers and tape dispensers. After children kept removing the one stapler from her desk to use in their fabrication of projects such as their "wild things costumes", Denise went out and bought several more. Denise also trusts that the children will clean up their messes. The room gets incredibly messy, especially during centers. But, Denise never cleans up for the children. She helps them and the room always gets cleaned up.

Denise views the children in her classroom as creative individuals. When the children were making their "wild thing masks" August called Denise to "look at my wild thing." Denise joyfully responded, "August, that is beautiful, I love the way you put long pieces on it. I would never have thought to do that." Denise then brought out the floor length mirror so that August could see herself with her mask on. Denise then said to August, "Look how you did that. What else are you going to put on?" August wore her mask in the presentation to the school board the next week.

Denise thinks that a teacher must be open to using more than one approach to teaching young children. She said, "You can't take one thing and that is it. We're too multi-cultural. We're too diverse.... We've got people from everywhere, from all religions. American public schools have many diverse problems. One theory or model

won't work." Denise respects the rural, southern, small town, culture in which the children in her class live.

An example of Denise's respect for the culture of each child occurred when Robert's grandfather informed Denise that he had caught a possum in his basement. He explained that Robert had been extremely interested in the possum and he thought the other children would enjoy seeing it. Denise agreed, and the next day, the grandfather brought a small possum in a wire cage onto the playground for the children to observe. Some children laughed as it hissed, while others just stood back and watched. Many children asked the grandfather questions about how the possum was captured. Denise demonstrated her understanding and respect for Robert's culture by allowing him to share that culture with the other children

Denise describes her classroom as "trusting, respectful, cooperative, loving, and kind-hearted." Denise trusts the children to learn and she follows their interests. Denise respects the different ways that children learn, and she adapts her interactions to fit the need of each child. Denise also respects the culture that surrounds the children, since she has been a part of this culture her entire life. Denise demonstrates her respect for the children by listening and then responding to them. She treats each child equally and is careful to give each of them special at some point during the day. Denise has a positive view of every child.

Teacher as Nurturing Parent. Closely related to Denise's positive view of children is her love of children. One of the first themes that I noted in my field notes and memos was the warmth that Denise exudes. This feeling of love and security surrounded the

room and left, even me, feeling happy and safe. I observed this caring attitude towards the children when Denise interacted with the children in the classroom and even when she discussed the children in her reflective journal or during interviews. Ultimately, I determined that the relationships that Denise develops with the children are parent-like. Denise is keenly aware of the influence that she has on these children's lives, and she wants to assure that she is doing the best that she can.

Denise considers herself to be a "surrogate mother" for the children in her classroom. She said of this role, "I'm the caregiver the whole time they're here. In fact, I don't think they see a big separation between me and their mom. I think they look at me as filling that role." Denise thinks that the relationship that she forms with the children is one of her strengths as a teacher. Often children will accidentally call Denise 'Mom' or 'Mommy.' Denise believes that "the greatest compliment they give me is when they call me Mommy."

Denise described why she feels that one of her roles is as a surrogate mother, "I think when they're hurt, they come to me. When they're sad, they come to me. When they're mad, they come to me. They come to me for everything just like they do their mommies." Denise says of the relationship between herself and the children, "It is a very trusting relationship. They're not afraid to say anything to me and in turn, I'm open to everything they have to say and do." Denise also stated that it is important that she not be afraid to correct the children, just as a mother would do. "You have to shape and mold them and move them away from things you don't want them to do at the same time."

Denise takes her role as surrogate parent very seriously. She is very concerned that she is making the right decisions when dealing with each child in her classroom. Denise said, "You just worry all the time. 'Did I do the right thing? Did I do the wrong thing? Did I hurt them? Did I hurt their feelings?'" She also realizes how difficult it can be to parent a young child. She stated, "I can't imagine how it would be to be a parent and have to make all these decisions all the time." She added, "I guess I am just so considerate about hurting their feelings. I don't want them to ever think of me as somebody who doesn't love them."

I observed Denise telling the children in her classroom that she loves them. Denise believes that loving the children is a pertinent part of the classroom environment. She lets the children know that they are loved by telling them. She stated, "I tell them I love them right off the bat. On the very first day when they go home I say, 'Now, Miss Denise loves you. Never forget Miss Denise loves you.'" I observed her not only saying this to the children at the end of every day, but also saying "I love you" to individual children during the day. I also observed her hugging, kissing, patting, or holding hands with the children as she said the word "love."

This love that Denise gives the children is unconditional. She noted, "When they're in trouble, the worst they can possibly be, I say, 'I love you. If I didn't love you, I would let you do anything you wanted to do. But, because I love you I have to teach you to do the right thing, and you're not doing the right thing.'" Denise reminds the children, "No matter what, I'll always love you, forever."

Being loving and showing warmth to the children is not a conscious decision that Denise makes. When I asked her about her actions she said, "I think it's just natural to me. I've never thought about it before." Denise believes that all children, no matter their socioeconomic, cognitive, or physical status deserve to be loved. She explained, "All children need that [love]. Even the children that you don't think need it, need that." Denise believes that sharing love with the children in her classroom will have a long lasting impact on their lives:

I couldn't imagine not loving them. How do you do this and not love them? That's where it's at. That's the thing they'll always remember. That's the thing that will carry them through to be adults. From this point on, that's what they'll remember.

Denise also believes she shows the children she loves them through consistency of her actions. She said, "You don't change the rules on them.... What I say on the first day of school, is what I say on the last day of school to a certain extent. You have to be pretty consistent with what you're doing." But, Denise is not afraid to tell the children that she has made a mistake. In her reflective journal she stated, "You have to be man enough to say, 'I've changed my mind.' I've done that...I've changed my mind before," she jokingly added.

Denise is demonstrating loving behaviors for these children. Through imitation and practice the children are not only learning the value of sharing love with others, but they are also learning what it feels like to be unconditionally accepted. After several days in the classroom I learned how important acceptance is. Marcus came to me and said as he hugged me, "I love you Miss Christy." It was a defining moment for me. Denise feels

that the behaviors like Marcus exhibited are meaningful. She stated, "It doesn't matter what they've done before. When they come up and say 'I love you' for no reason, it makes it all worth while."

Almost every day, children in the classroom share their love with Denise. One early Monday morning during back pack time, a child yelled from across the room, "I love you Miss Denise." Denise replied "I love you too, very much." Other children quickly yelled, "I love you Miss Denise." Denise replied again, "I love you too." Each time, Denise was careful to look the children in the eye and affirm their feelings.

Children in this classroom are not afraid to ask for love from any adult who is consistently in the classroom. The children say, "Teacher, Teacher, I need a hug." All of the adults in the classroom quickly respond to this request. I asked Miss Mary, the teacher's assistant, why the children do this. She replied that Denise "encourages them" to do this. She added, "If they come up to me and want to hug me, I'm not going to push them away.... They're so young, they need that. It's natural to them."

Denise receives love from the children in many different ways and this gives her gratification for her loving actions. She told of a instance when a fourth grade boy, who she taught in a special education classroom, demonstrated his feelings for her:

Randy, who got into things, like catching his pants on fire, got this little pencil and to the side of it was taped, 'I love you.' From a fourth grade boy, that doesn't happen all the time. It's a treasure. It's in my portfolio and I'll never sharpen it. I'll never use it. I will keep it forever. It really means a lot to me.

Denise allows herself to become very attached to the children. She is open to forming intense bonds with them. This bond she forms sometimes leaves her emotionally upset. She revealed, "When I go out there after they graduate, I just boo hoo everywhere. They are yours, and you are attached to them."

Sensitivity and kindness are characteristics that correspond with a nurturing parent. Denise demonstrates sensitivity and kindness to the children, and sometimes the relationships she forms with the children cause her emotional pain. When a little girl in her preschool class was physically abused by her father, Denise reported the incident to the school counselor, stayed with the child in the office, and then returned to teach. She said of this situation, "It just breaks your heart. I cried a river for her. I went up to my mom's last night and cried and cried and cried.... It doesn't matter how many years you teach or how often this happens to you, it absolutely chills you to the bone. You never get over the fact that one of them might be hurt [crying]."

There are bad things that happen to children in her classroom. This sort of thing has happened before and will happen again, but Denise does not shut herself off from the children. She risks the pain. She also does not allow the children to see her upset. It is though she must sacrifice her feelings for the good of the children. She said, "You just have to do it. I don't have time to let them know that I'm upset. I try not to ever let them know I'm really upset. There are days when I think, 'Oh, I'm gonna scream.' You know, I'm just human. I'm not some robot that doesn't have days that they feel bad." She added, "There are days that I could sleep forever, but when I get here, I'm like, 'Okay, I'm ready.' I have never dreaded doing this.... I've never dreaded them [the children]."

She added that a teacher must sometimes “press that button and make your happy thoughts or all the things that make you positive come to the front when you feel bad.”

Denise is aware that she is a very sensitive, caring person. She feels that this is a necessary component of being a good teacher and also a good parent. Her peers have not always agreed with her opinion on this matter:

A professor told one of my student teachers that she was too emotional, that she needed to get a grip of her emotions. I just couldn't believe that that was something she said to her. If anything, that's what kills a teacher. Once a teacher loses her emotion for the children, then I think it just becomes a job.... I just can't imagine that anybody would want to do this and not have a strong sense of emotion.

Denise sometimes faces the critical eye of other teachers in her school because she treats the children in her classroom as a nurturing parent would. She told about an encounter that her assistant had with another teacher during lunch:

I always cut their apples for them upstairs [in the cafeteria]. One of the teacher's commented to the assistant, 'You're spoiling them. You spoil them. You don't need to cut their apples. They can bite them.' I said [to the assistant], 'They are mine for nine months. I can do what I want to.' If I want to 'spoil' them, it's my business. That's the way I feel about it. They are mine.

Another aspect of being a nurturing parent is generosity. Through observation, interviews, and document review I found that Denise is a generous person who enjoys giving to others. This generosity takes many different forms in her work with children.

Several days I observed three girls in the classroom wearing the same black shoes. When I asked Miss Mary about the shoes, she told me that Denise had given them to the children. Miss Mary told me that Denise had gotten the shoes from her mother, who works in a department store. Denise has also bought the children gloves, hats, and even underwear if they need them.

Denise has a very small budget for classroom supplies. Typically, the \$300 is gone by Christmas time, so she takes it upon herself to “buy, beg, and steal” items that she feels will benefit the children. She said, “If I want some red paint, I’m going to have to go to the store and buy some red paint.” Each week she walks into the classroom carrying several bags full of materials that she has bought such as bubbles, cotton balls, chalk, toothpicks, or glitter.

Denise believes that having adequate art materials is necessary for the children to learn. In her reflective journal Denise stated, “I would probably, you know, turn down a new dress before I would not come in here with what they need.... Probably, I’ve done that [laughing] back when I was poor or I just don’t remember, because you have to.” In an interview she stated that most teachers have to spend their own money to buy materials.

Even though she buys so many of the supplies herself, I never heard her tell a child that he was using too much of something. I never saw her take away materials because the children were using too much. Denise commented, “If we use 1600 tooth picks in the next two days, I’ll go buy 1600 more.... That’s okay. You have to.” She

wants the children to learn through experiences and she is generous in providing those experiences.

Denise has an unconditional love for all children and she demonstrates this daily through both physical and emotional channels. The love Denise gives to the children produces the children's love for her. Denise responds reciprocally to their demonstrations of love. Denise acts as a surrogate parent for the children, often providing them with basic needs such as food and clothing. She is consistent in her interactions with the children, and is generous with her time and money as a parent should be. Through her nurturing behaviors Denise forms strong bonds with the children.

The Struggle to Weave Personal Characteristics into a Pedagogical Tapestry.

After I got to know Denise through our conversations and reading her personal reflections, I was then able to make connection between her personal characteristics and her practice in the classroom. Denise is an autonomous individual who is constantly searching for higher understanding and more effective teaching approaches. She has an internal struggle to become centered in her practice as an early childhood educator. This struggle is influenced by the constraints of the culture in which she works and her determination to make her own path. She attempts to project her voice by participating in mentoring relationships with new and practicing teachers.

Denise is a playful person, who is working to negotiate her role as player and as teacher. Denise is also a spiritual being who is strong in her faith and believes that she was led to work in the teaching profession. Because she is a perfectionist, Denise is in a

quest for more efficient and more effective techniques to use with young children. She sees problems and her flexibility leads to creative solutions.

Autonomous learner

One of the personal characteristics that influences Denise's practice in the classroom is her autonomy. Denise is an adult learner in the truest sense and a risk taker in life. She participates in scholarly activity. She is continually striving to learn not only about teaching, but also about herself. Denise noted, "You always need to learn what's new. If I did things the way I did them when I did my student teaching, it would be boring in here. You have to grow.... The more we know about how children learn, the better our programs will be." Denise has learned through graduate courses, continuing education courses, mentoring, and reading. Denise learns from her interactions with other teachers. She said:

When you can meet with the people who have been in the classroom with you for several years and share ideas and have the comfort to say, 'Man, this bombed.

What should I have done differently?' and you know that they are going to offer you back respect and give you some guidance, that is a real comforting thing.

Denise thinks her greatest learning has come through experience. She stated, "Piaget said you have to use what you know to learn something new. That's exactly what I did. I constructed that knowledge based on my past experiences."

Denise is a risk taker. She is not afraid to break through the traditional boundaries of Title I programs. In her reflective journal she said about her personality, "I'm not afraid to buck." When Denise first began teaching in the Title I preschool program, she

was unsatisfied with the report card that was being used. At that time there were no “creative aspects” on the card and the children were to know their upper and lower case letters as well as count from one to 20. Denise said:

I marched down to the central office and said that we needed to have a preschool meeting about these report cards. So, the head of Title I programs respected what we [preschool teachers] had to say. I did get the lower case off and we got 10 through 20 off, and I got aesthetics added. I lost the campaign on the upper case.

Based on my observations, I found that Denise also tried to change the assessment process for acceptance into the Title I preschool program in her school district. In an interview she stated:

They give them the Bracken, which is a language-based test, and I have moaned and groaned about it from the beginning.... We campaigned hard just to get a new copy of the Bracken because the pictures are in color and a little more clear. There's a study that shows that it doesn't matter if the pictures are colored or black or white. I said, 'I don't care. The pictures in the updated Bracken are a little more clear.' I think color would make a difference to a four year old.... A Battelle or a Gessell would be much better.

Denise does not seem to care what the other teachers think of her. I observed that Denise's children do not walk in a line to the cafeteria or to the playground like all the other classes at Brownsboro Elementary. When one of the other teachers asked her, “Don't you make yours walk in a line?” Denise answered, “No, We're more like an orderly mob.” Denise later reasoned:

Tell me where in your whole life you walked in a line except at school. You don't walk in line to the movies. You don't walk in line at McDonalds. You have to stand in the line. You don't walk in a line. They don't understand what a line is anyway, at this age. When I first started, though, I thought that was real important. I thought other people judged me because my kids weren't in a line. That lasted about two weeks. What the heck.

Denise is an autonomous thinker, and she is a scholar. She gathers information through reading research and related materials. Then she makes her own decisions about the effectiveness or usefulness of that approach. She said that believing in one teaching approach without question is "the problem with education as a whole. The 'this is the flavor of the week and this is the only flavor we're eating right now so don't crave anything else.' That's always been a problem."

All the teachers at Brownsboro Elementary attended a seminar on Alfie Kohn's teaching philosophy. Initially, Denise read about his theory and she decided that she would no longer use behaviorist principles in her classroom. Later, after utilizing Alfie Kohn's approaches, Denise said:

Most of us [teachers] realized that he just made us think about things.... Most of us thought he was so far left that we couldn't really use his entire philosophy.... It's unrealistic. We, our society, is set up that you are expected to follow certain guidelines. If you speed in your car, there's a fine. If you murder somebody and you're caught you go to prison. If I do my job and do it well, I get a paycheck.

Denise also attended a workshop on “tubbing.” Denise listened to the information and was open to trying it. After assessing the use of this approach in her own classroom, she decided that “tubbing” was not beneficial to her. In fact, she was already using a similar technique in her classroom. She said of this learning process:

The way they presented it [tubbing] in the workshop was you had the tub and the children went around and did the different tubs. Stars! It would work me to death having all that stuff in the tubs when I’ve already got it in the backpacks. It didn’t make any sense to me. You couldn’t play in them! Who am I to pick what you want to play in? You might not be ready for what’s in that tub. So, I just threw it right back out the window and didn’t do it.... I didn’t see it working in here. Even though I thought it was a real nice presentation and it made me think about it all.

Because Denise is a scholar of child development theory, she is able to relate a newly presented teaching technique back to its theoretical basis. When I asked her if “tubbing” was new she stated, “Montessori came up with it. That’s basically the way she did things. The teacher collected items to put in the tub. If you go into first or second grade they call that a center. I call it a tub because that’s what it is.”

Being an autonomous learner is a common source of stress for Denise. She said about making independent decisions, “They (instructors) come in and make you think that you have to do this. ‘It’s so detrimental if you don’t do this.’ They tear you up all over again and try to make you believe something you don’t. I have to weigh out not doing it.” After learning about the use of bubble maps and flow charts for sentence and paragraph

construction, Denise knew that she had another difficult decision making process to go through. Denise said:

I'm gonna try it next week.... I'll have to make another big decision about how different I want to be. So far no one has come down and said, 'Where's your bubble map? Where's your flow chart?' Until they do, I'm not going to get real excited. I just don't think, I don't know.... I think you have to think about what four-year-olds can do. What do they really understand? What can they really process?

Often Denise modifies an approach to fit her needs. For example she said, "You're supposed to put nouns in the middle and describe it all the way around. I'm not! We're going to put 'wild thing' in the middle and put all the other words that go with 'wild thing' around the middle. I'll probably put a little picture or something there as I do it.

Recently, Denise has been studying about the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education. Denise has read books on the subject and has attended several continuing education courses. She also participates in a study group that meets weekly to discuss readings on Reggio topics. Denise said of learning about the Reggio approach with a group, "To be with four people who say, 'We can't just pack that up and bring that over here, but we sure can learn a lot if we are willing to commit to understanding more about it' is really neat."

Denise's interest in the Reggio approach has given her a stronger theoretical basis for her utilization of the environment in the education of young children. She said,

“Environment is the third teacher according to Reggio Emilia. It’s definitely the third teacher in this room. The environment is everything and this environment wouldn’t change much if I went up to third grade.... There would probably still be centers.” The Reggio approach has also encouraged her to strengthen her documentation and assessment methods. She said, “We know documentation works, but we’re weak.” Her self-study of Reggio has also heightened her awareness of the impact of art on children, but she is still evaluating the use of art in her classroom. She said about immersion in art:

I just don’t think that we’re going to do that. I think my circle is important. I think my centers are important. I think music is important. I think socio-dramatic...look at the studies we’ve done on play all these years. I highly value that. I’m not just going to stop doing that and pick up this thing because it’s a new idea.... Our art center needs a lot of work. We need to take that as a guide and expand.

Internal struggle

Denise’s autonomous nature has placed her in a constant state of tension concerning methods of teaching young children. Denise works in a culture that supports academic training of young children, and she feels a responsibility to fit within the culture. Denise, however, believes that a constructivist approach is more effective in educating young children, and she strives to show the strength of this method.

Denise is consistently fighting the battle between traditional and constructivist approaches in early childhood education. She is working in a school system and with some families that value a traditional approach to teaching young children from low socioeconomic environments. Denise said about her responsibility to others, “I’m

accountable to 20 parents, a principal, six kindergarten teachers, a supervisor, seven school board members, and a superintendent. And, believe you me, they walk in here and ask me why I'm doing what I'm doing."

Yet, despite outside influences she believes that a constructivist approach can work in a Title I preschool setting. Denise said, "It makes you a professional fence straddler.... As you say, no room looks like this room, in a public school situation, probably.... It's like walking the thin gray line." Denise added, "Inside me, inside my mind and inside my heart I'm having a war."

Denise has said that if you want to see constructivist principles at work, "then look at my classroom environment." For Denise, constructivism "totally influences" her classroom. She stated that "there is nothing in my classroom that is not developmentally appropriate for a four-year-old." Traditionalism, on the other hand, "means I tell you what to do and you do it. I make them [children] converge to one answer." She shared with me an example of what she thinks is true traditionalism. She said, "I was in a room yesterday and they ran out of paint. They weren't given any more. The response was, 'You didn't do what I told you to do. You didn't follow the directions or you wouldn't have run out of paint.'"

In many ways Denise is free from the rigid structure of traditionalist approaches. She said, "If we run out of paint, you can have more. It's just that simple.... If you really are developmentally appropriate, if you really want them to experience, then you have to be open enough to let them use all that they want." She said about the children learning their letters, "I try not to make it real stressful. It's not like, 'Can you write a B in your

journal?' They're there when I'm writing and they can recognize it. That's good enough for me at this age." She believes that children should be allowed to guide their own learning. She stated, "The kids that are ready and going to get it. They kids that aren't [ready] are not. That's okay."

In other ways, Denise is tied to traditionalist principles due to the structure of her school and the culture that surrounds her. Denise believes that play is important to young children's development. She has, on several occasions, scheduled the children to go to centers twice a day. She said about this issue, "It works just fine that way, too. If they were here longer, if they were here past 1:30, I would definitely do two center times. That's part of it, and the second part is you've got to prove you have provided some academic curriculum, when you are in the public school system."

Denise further explained her position on academic training in her classroom. She said, "I think the purpose of Title I is to prepare these children for school as much as possible, and if I were not in Title I there are some things I would not do. I wouldn't do the letters and I wouldn't push the numbers that I'm asked to do." I asked Denise who asked her to work on letters and numbers. She answered,

I believe my principal, my supervisor, and my parents expect it. If I didn't do it my principal wouldn't come in here and say, 'You didn't do the numbers and I know you didn't do the numbers.' She wouldn't do that. When there are big bucks for certain math programs, and they put you through certain kinds of training, you know what they expect.... But, if I was in a private situation I probably wouldn't

be 'teaching' letters.... I would take a total creative approach. The letters and numbers will come naturally. They will if the environment is right.

Denise realizes that she will have an internal conflict as long as she continues to be autonomous in her fight to use a play-based curriculum in her Title I classroom. She said:

There's a lot of struggle with play.... It's bureaucracy breathing down your neck. I mean we went to faculty meeting Wednesday and Dr. Barnes told them all up front, 'If we don't make a 1% gain by such a time, we are going to lose \$220,000 of Title I money.... If I was sitting up there in second or third grade and my scores were the ones that were going to cause them to lose \$220,000, which is two teachers and five assistants, I don't know if I'd squelch or not. It would be hard.

You'd sure have to think about it.

Denise believes that the bureaucracy supports a more traditional approach to teaching. She added, "We're trapped against a government made up of men that don't know children. I don't know what the answer is...." Denise believes that she is lucky to be in a preschool program where the children are not given state tests and she is not at such a high risk for losing funding, which pays for her salary and her assistant's salary. She stated, "If they sent me up there [to second or third grade] I'd probably take the chance [of using a play-based curriculum].... As long as we have our money related to stuff like this, nobody is ever going to put their head on the chopping block that way."

Denise has a positive and supportive working relationship with her immediate superior, the principal. She said of interactions with Dr. Barnes:

It's real cooperative. She doesn't have to stand over me and so, therefore I don't have to bother her a lot. When I go up there she is ready to back me up all the way.... Yet, she doesn't have a problem telling me, 'I really don't think you should be doing this'.... I take that as good advice and I do it. I have great respect for her. She's the best principal I've ever worked for, by far. She's not afraid to make a decision even if it's not popular.

Denise also has the support of her assistant, Mary, who is certified in early childhood education. Mary sees the importance of a play-based approach to learning. Still, Denise feels the external pressure to conform and to use traditional approaches.

Although Denise considers herself to be a constructivist, she consistently reports that there are a few times when traditional methods are appropriate. She said, "It takes both.... There's a place for paper and pencil. But, true constructivists hate to say that." Denise appears to be searching for a compromise between the two approaches, with constructivism taking the lead. She stated, "I try not to put things in there that are totally traditional. Even the things that I give them, I don't want to take the traditional turn towards it." She gave me an example of how her teaching approach works in the classroom:

I gave them the little pumpkin books and they had the little pumpkins that were already there. They had to glue them in and say these pumpkins are sad or these pumpkins are happy.... I didn't care what color they colored them or how many they used. I didn't care what language they gave me back about their pumpkins.

Where as some people would only accept orange pumpkins and they would have to be one on a page.... That to me is traditional.

After years of being strong-minded and a risk-taker, Denise believes that her superiors and peers are finally beginning to accept her. She stated, "The first year, everybody came in and said, 'What are you doing in there now? What are you making? You've got to go down there and see.'" Things have changed in four years. "It's like now I'm totally accepted. It's just me making a mess and nobody comes to see me," she said. But, I believe this is a major understatement of Denise's influence. The local university sends students to observe in her classroom on a regular basis because she uses a play-based approach. Teachers in her school still stop and stare. Parents in the community still believe that children should be "learning, not playing." Denise will have to continue in her struggle to be accepted by the community where she teachers.

Playfulness

The personal characteristic that greatly influences Denise's use of a play-based approach is her playfulness. Denise enjoys playing with the children, and she is talented in scaffolding children's learning through play. She also is a scholar of the theories of play and the role play has in young children's learning. After all the internal and external conflict, Denise continues to advocate focusing on the "big picture" when teaching preschool children. She believes that a play-based approach can meet the needs of young children in a Title I classroom. This approach allows the children to make their own choices, rather than "forcing them to do what the teacher has selected."

Denise believes that there is a strong relationship between block play and math. "I want that 3-D thing going on for their math relationship. That's really where they begin to have some concept of halves and wholes," she explained. She wants the children to be able to experience those things, therefore she developed a block center. Denise observes the flow of children in and out of block center during play. If children are not playing in the block center, Denise will put blocks out as a third choice during table activities. Denise stated in an interview, "Everything that happens in this room is just a building block to what's going to happen in the future,"

Denise has her own definition of play, that she calls on when she designs her classroom environment and when she interacts with the children. For Denise, play includes several components. She said, "It has to be voluntary. It has to be intrinsically motivated. It has to be meaningful. It has to be rule bound by them." She added, "Play is one of the highest levels of thinking for these children. Play is where they rise above what they can do to another level.... Play is their world." She summed up these thoughts by saying, "Once I tell you where to go that's not play."

Denise bases her understanding of play based on the theoretical premises of Sara Smilansky and Howard Gardner. She said about Smilansky's influence, "I want the sequence of play. I want the play to endure. I want them to take on a role. I want them to become involved in that play." She suggested that Gardner's work has also influenced her view point. She said, "At the same time I'm looking at Gardner things. What kind of intellect are they exhibiting that seems to be their strength?" She noted the importance of constructive play. "I worry about their constructive play or their building skills. I just

think that that's so important....because there is such a relationship between math and constructive play." Lastly she added, "I don't want it to be influenced by media, if I can help it.... That would be more Levine and Carleson-Paige."

There are only two limits that Denise sets for the children's play. Firstly, she does not want the children to harm themselves. She said, "You can't push each other down or hurt someone." Secondly, she does not want the children to participate in "war play, violent play, or TV play." In my field notes I wrote, "When the children pretend to play with weapons or act as if they are fighting, Denise intervenes and redirects them to another type of play activity. Denise explained in an interview, "I finally said, you can play that on the playground, but you can't play it in the room." Denise added:

If I said to them, 'You can't do it and there is no where you can do it' then I'm saying to them that I don't value that...that's the perception that I'm giving. So I let them do it on the playground and I try not to stop it unless it gets physically violent and it gets to where they are really hurting someone.

She believes that she needs to intervene at times because, "It's disruptive, disoriented play.... No matter how enriched this environment is, it can fall apart in less than 30 seconds." She added, "They are so inundated with that [TV and violence], that all the play is compromised. But, once you stop that, then they begin to explore the environment and I begin to see more true play."

For Denise, the children's play is expanding when she sees "sequencing in the play that I haven't heard before." I observed Denise watching the children in play, and often making notes on cards concerning the length and structure of their play. She said,

"It starts off more parallel. They'll play side by side and they don't interact, and it starts off very brief." She wants to see the children expand and carry out the whole play sequence. She noted, "They're starting with the Mommy and the Daddy, and they're cooking dinner, and they're sticking it out." She observes to see if children are exhibiting cooperative play, where the children are negotiating for roles. She gave an example of the children's conversations, "I want to be Mommy. No, you be the Mommy. Oh, Okay, I'll be the Mommy." For Denise, "this is the beginning of real play." After several weeks in the classroom the children stay in a selected center "a good 15 minutes" before they go somewhere else.

Denise is a playful person. Denise plays at school with the children and at home. She said, "I like to play. I like to play with the children. I like to play with the grown ups." As many other adults, she often can not find enough time for play. She emphasized:

You see, now I'm bordering on this great depression in real life because I can't play. My whole time is consumed of working and going home and trying to straighten out this new house.... It's really hard for me not to play. I'm frustrated because I haven't gotten to do anything that I like to do other than cleaning and getting it moved.

Denise described the type of activities that are play for her:

It's reading. Reading is playful to me.... It's just like seeing a movie on my eyelids.... Singing for me, when we get to practice and learn new songs, that's great for me. Bicycling for me is play. Going to the movies is play for me.

Watching TV is really play for me as a grown up.... Making crafty things, If I have time.... Just average things that grown ups do.

I observed the enjoyment that Denise receives when she is playing with the children in her classroom. She smiles and laughs as she interacts through play. Her favorite spot for play is in the music center. She said, "I play there every day just like the children. You know, they have the one [center] they like best, that they go to everyday, sometime. I go there everyday sometime." On one occasion I observed that no children were in the music center, and several children were wandering aimlessly around the room. Denise entered the area and said to the children, "Who's gonna play music with me? Who's gonna dress up?" Several children who were nearby yelled "Me!" Denise responded, "We've gotta get busy. We might win the CMA (Country Music Association) award." One of the children starts a record on the record player. Denise stands on the stage with two girls who are dressed in brightly-colored dance costumes. One girl shakes a pom-pom, another a shaker, and Denise sings into a microphone. A boy pretends to play the piano.

Denise realizes the influence that her presence has on the children's play. Denise asks the children, "Can I play?" She reasoned, "You just can't barge into their play. You have to realize that as an adult, once you go in, you've changed the play. You change the type of play. You change how long it's going to last. You change everything about it. You have to be sure that they're willing to let you play."

Denise believes that she "is a model for play." She scaffolds the children's use of materials and interactions in play. She stated, "You'll have to do some intervention

because they're just learning how to use materials....And, what is sharing and how do you share, using your words and all that....You have to give them the words and the tools with which to use."

The first day that the garage center was open in the classroom, Denise went in to play with the children. She put on a gray shirt with a name badge that said "Frank." While looking at the large cardboard car in the middle of the garage, she said to the children, "This person is picking up their car at 3:00 tomorrow. What am I supposed to do to car number three? Oil change? Marcus read the book and see." Marcus answered, "a hammer." Denise began to work on the car with a hammer. After a few minutes she said to another child, "Fill it up with gas. It's just filthy." Then she proceeded to use a squeegee to wash the windows. Children then became very busy exhibiting dramatic play appropriate for a garage. One child talked on the phone and asked for a phone number. Another wrote down the number on a pad of paper. The third washed the car. Once the play was activated, Denise removed her shirt and left this center for another.

On another day in the bakery center, Denise scaffolded the children by saying, "I'm the waitress. What are we gonna do?" August answered, "Bake cookies." Denise replied, "Okay, let's bake cookies." She then began to work along side two other children. She commentated the children's actions. She said, "Luke is rolling out the dough with a rolling pin." She also encouraged the children to take their play a step further by saying, "You get the pan Courtney, to make my cookies.... I need some more cookie cutters. Where are the cookie cutters?" Denise rolled out the dough and cut out a

cookie. Then Courtney, Luke, and Ethan began using the cookie cutters to cut out shapes and placed the dough on the cookie sheet.

Denise believes that playing with young children is an art. It would seem almost impossible to teach someone else to play with young children with the talent that Denise does. Denise gave the analogy:

It's like building...a mountain musical instrument by hand with no pattern. You go in, and you watch somebody do that and you think, I could write that down. I could diagram that out. I could get that sound out of the wood, and yet you can't.... You just know what you are supposed to do.

Denise's use of a play-based curriculum appears to be related to her playful nature. She has turned this personal characteristic into a useful teaching method in the classroom.

Spiritual

Not only is Denise a very autonomous and playful person, but she is also very spiritual. She is as strong in her spiritual beliefs as she is in her academic beliefs. I first realized what an influence her spirituality had on her life, when I asked her how she decided to be a teacher. She answered, "It was a calling just like people are called to be ministers. I just had to do it." This response encouraged me to search for a greater understanding of this aspect of her personality.

I noted the influence of Denise's spiritual sense in her reflective journal and interviews. In an interview Denise explained that her spirituality not only impacts her outlook on life, but also affects her work with children. Denise believes that her talent for teaching is a reflection of her spirituality. When I asked her how other teachers can learn

to be exceptional she stated, "I think it's a calling. I'm not sure you can teach people these things.... It's the seventh sense."

Denise has a faith that helps her to remain optimistic. Denise described how her spirituality influenced her taking this job as a Title I preschool teacher. She stated, "I knew I was going to get this job. I knew I was going to go to preschool.... There is a peace that comes with that." Denise gains strength from her beliefs. She said "How do you deal with the hardships? How do you deal with it if you don't believe in a higher force? I'm glad I was raised the way I was raised."

Denise shared that her religious faith is Baptist. She said of her church, "We're still pretty old fashioned. I'm considered pretty liberal where I come from." But, Denise describes her spirituality as being something much more than religion. She revealed, "I would much rather be known as spiritual. The spirit is what lives inside of me, not religion. It doesn't really matter where I sit on Sunday morning. It's what I carry with me all the time."

I asked Denise how this spirituality actually carried over into the classroom. She noted that she never brings up God, or a higher power, but that she will discuss these topics if a child initiates a conversation. She said, "When they bring it up, that's fine. I'll talk about it. If they asked to sing "Jesus Loves Me," I would sing it. It wouldn't bother me and they have in years past." I never observed Denise talking about God or religion in her classroom. Rather than talking about spirituality Denise says she would rather "live it." She revealed, "What you do speaks so loud I can't hear what your saying," is a motto she tries to follow in the classroom.

Denise's spirituality seems to give her peace and understanding, which is shown in her patience. I never observed Denise losing her temper with a child. In fact, I only documented one occasion when she raised her voice.

The spiritual aspect of Denise's personality is seen in her interactions with both children and adults. Denise's spirituality is closely tied to the love she feels for children. In her reflective journal she stated about her spirituality:

It's just what makes me love people.... If you didn't have that strong spiritual sense how would you understand love? How would you love a child when he's driving you nuts? I think that's the biggest thing. That's what makes me understand what love is.... To love somebody no matter what they bring you.

Her spirituality also impacts the respect and understanding she has for the children, the families, and the culture in which they live.

Perfectionist

Denise has a strong sense of responsibility for the children in her classroom. This feeling is related not only to her spirituality, but also another personality characteristic as well. Specifically, Denise considers herself to be a perfectionist. In interviews and her reflective journal, Denise reported that she is always working to achieve perfection in herself. I observed the influence of this personality trait in Denise's continually changing classroom environment.

Denise's perfectionism is demonstrated through reflection. In interviews and her reflective journals Denise often discussed how she reflects, changes, and reflects again on her performance and the children's performance in her classroom. Her reflective nature

leads to flexibility in the classroom, and it also encourages her creative problem-solving abilities.

Denise expects the best from herself. Denise described her feelings when she first learned that she got the Title I preschool job. She said, "I didn't think I would be good enough. She told me that she sat in a professor's office and "boohooed thinking what if I can't do it. What if I do the wrong thing?" Now, she can reflect on that situation and this leads to a greater understanding of herself. She explained, "I'm so hard on myself. But, I am doing the right thing. I have to keep hanging on to that. I am doing the right thing."

So how does Denise know when she has done "the right thing?" In her reflective journal she described this feeling that she calls "the perfection state":

What satisfies my soul. What makes me lay down at night and not cry.... My mother said to me the other day, 'What has happened to you? You never used to cry?' I just really know how much more important life is. There's so much left undone, you know. There's so many more things we could have taught them. There's so many more experiences I could give them [crying].

Denise is a reflective practitioner. She said, "You're never through assessing it." She is constantly thinking, considering, and reflecting. She said about this process, "Everything has to be thought through. You just don't do things just for the sake of doing them." Denise is not content with the status of her sand and water center. On several occasions I observed her discussing changes that she wanted to make in this center with her teacher's assistant. She later explained to me in an interview:

One thing I've always wanted to do and I've never been brave enough to do is to hang liter bottles from the ceiling.... Hopefully in the spring we'll have water play outside. We can do some stuff with hoses, things we just can't do in the room.... We can expand it more out there than we can do in the room where the tile is slick. But, it needs work. We need to think about it.

Denise also is unsatisfied by the amount of block play that children in her classroom do. In my field notes I noted that Denise often observes the block center. As she observes she sometimes makes notes on index cards concerning the type of play in which children are involved in the block center. She believes that block play is important because "it draws on their imagination." She considered:

I'll probably have to continue to put blocks out as a third choice [during table activities] and maybe they'll pick it more at center time. I took the little house out because I found they were just playing with the little house and not playing with the blocks. So, I think with this group, We're going to have to pull the blocks out and make them one of the smaller choices.... Even when the socio-dramatic center is closed for a day or two while I take it down and put the new up, They're not in blocks as much as I'd like. But, today, when it was just the third choice, they almost all played in them for some amount of time and some made really pretty structures.

Denise's reflective nature leads to flexibility and change in the classroom.

For Denise every change is "another way of making it better." In her reflective journal, Denise noted that learning new techniques often leaves her feeling "depressed because I

can't do it all right now, tomorrow." She added, "That's me. I'm never satisfied. Let's go in there and change it.... I've learned you can't do that." Denise saves big changes for the summer. She said, "It seems that I always have a big project in mind that I want to accomplish over the summer."

Denise's flexibility is best demonstrated by her changing classroom schedule. During my observation experience in the classroom, Denise changed center time from late morning to afternoon to early morning. Early in the year Denise commented to me, "Miss Mary doesn't know it yet, but I'm still not happy with the schedule. So, just roll with me. I'm gonna make a few changes." She said the schedule that was written on the board was "too time oriented and too many changes. It's driving me crazy." She told Miss Mary, "We are going to try something new." Miss Mary smiled and quietly replied, "Oh, my." At the end of the day, Denise told me, "I will change our morning again tomorrow." When I asked her to explain her reasoning further, she stated, "It's never perfect and I have to keep changing it. It drives my aides crazy. They have to be flexible."

Denise also changes the classroom environment. She said about the organization of the classroom:

The first year I was in here I moved the furniture so much that the children actually played moving furniture. Because, I kept moving it until I was satisfied with the traffic pattern. And, see, I can't do that by drawing it on a piece of paper. I just don't have that spatial ability. I have to see it and the children have to use it. So, I would drag it around and them in here playing around it.... It took a long time. It was a year and a half process, almost two." She added that all this work

was worth it because, "I got it situated. I know these are the places these things belong."

Denise changes the props in the centers on a regular basis. She described changes in the library center:

I think it needs to become a place of total book reading, and total writing. And, some things to keep them interested over there, like maybe something like those little electronic ABC boards, the magna doodles, the tapes and things like that. We need more flannel story telling things. I'm thinking about moving the puppet stage over to there too.... I see so many ways that needs to be improved....It's never looked exactly like I thought it should. We'll keep working at it.

After working two hours to change the library center Denise added, "It looks more like a library. There are more places to write....It looks a little better now and a little more like what I wanted. The types of things going on in there are more appropriate, too."

She also changes one socio-dramatic center every few weeks. She observes the children playing in all the centers. When the children stop playing in the changing socio-dramatic center, then she changes it. She said, "If you watch, they'll run two weeks, maybe three. On the Wednesday of that second or third week, it will be empty for part of the center time. So, I'll close it."

Denise has an assistant who is open to learning how to be flexible. Miss Mary said one of the biggest things she has learned from Denise is how to deal with change. She stated:

Just the way she is so easy going about things. At center time she carries everything out onto the art table and doesn't care about how big of a mess they make because she knows that it is going to get cleaned up. She's so flexible and it's helped me a lot.

The children in Denise's classroom also are learning how to accept the change that surrounds them. They are not rigid. They almost seem to enjoy the adventure of their flexible environment and schedule. Denise or Miss Mary always inform the children before a change in their schedule occurs. On one occasion, Mary informed the children that they were going to go to centers "in the morning instead of the afternoon. Now isn't that strange?" Several children nodded their heads in agreement, and most looked excited. None looked concerned about this change. When Denise puts the stop sign up in the socio-dramatic center while she is changing it, children often wander by studying the center to see if they can figure out what is coming next. Denise said, "They know I'm up to something and there's going to be something else in there when they go back."

Denise is a creative problem solver. Sometimes she takes her time to consider the most appropriate solution. Denise described a problem in the classroom and how she solved it. She said:

One of the things has been how to store their pencils and things so they can get to it easily. Last year I used the chair pouches and I made them out of felt....It was just a simple matter of folding them and running a side stitch. Then we became real concerned over the school year with the lice problem and these felt covers on the chairs....So I thought I would make them out of plastic table cloths. So, I

bought one set and they didn't have any felt backing. I felt like when they put the stuff down in there they were going to stretch and rip....So I took the table cloth and stuck it in the drawer for a messy mat....It came to me that I could just put a hook on the back of their chair and buy some of those pencil boxes with the handles on them and just hang the pencil box on the back of the chair.... We'll see how that environment change makes things easier or harder or works or doesn't work.

Other times Denise must be quick with her solutions. She comes up with immediate creative solutions to problems on a daily basis. One Tuesday several children were using sidewalk chalk to write on the walls of the school during outside play. Denise observed this playful activity, and then told me that the principal did not want the children to write on the school walls. Denise rushed inside and returned with two sand buckets full of water and several large paint brushes. She gave the buckets and brushes to the children and asked them, "Who wants to be a wall cleaner?" All the children answered, "Me!" Denise then watched with pleasure as the children washed all the chalk off the walls. Four children lined up across the wall, feverishly painting, like Tom Sawyer painting the fence.

Denise's perfectionism is a personality characteristic that is interrelated to her reflective nature. It is impossible to ascertain whether Denise is reflective because she is a perfectionist, or her reflective nature provides space for her to be perfect. Through observations and interviews, it is apparent that Denise is a reflective practitioner who

searches for creative solutions to everyday problems within the classroom. The answers to those problems often lead to change and flexibility for herself and the children.

Search for voice

A final personality characteristic that is apparent in Denise's actions is her search for a voice. Denise is consistently looking for validation as a skilled preschool teacher. She struggles to find her voice to educate others on the use of a play-based curriculum with all young children. Her search for voice seems to be closely tied to her perfectionism. Denise searches for validation through her children's progress, mentoring others, participation in certification and award programs, and even her inclusion in this research study. She wants other teachers to understand why she is doing what she is doing.

Denise often remarks that she believes her peers and superiors do not understand her style of teaching. She indicated that if the children's grade cards did not show progress, then others would be quick to say, "She doesn't do anything in there. She just plays." Because none of the kindergarten classrooms in Brownsboro Elementary are as play-based, Denise worries that her classroom will make kindergarten more difficult for a few of the children. Should she allow the children to guide their own learning because this may be the last time that they have freedom and joy in a classroom, or is it more important to prepare them for the next year? She said:

That's the battle. Am I doing the right thing by teaching them it's okay to stay with tasks, when I know that when they go to kindergarten, they're probably going to be demanded to clean up now. I fight that all the time.... It's a terrible

decision to make, and it's just like this inside me all the time. It's rubber band over here, bang, rubber band over there. In my mind I feel that all the time.

Denise wants to share her talents through mentoring other teachers, student teachers, and undergraduate college students. In my analytic memos I noted that Denise seems to believe if she makes an impact on one teacher's practice, then she has taken a small step towards being understood. In addition, she has played a decisive role in the education of her assistant, Mary. Mary commented that Denise "is a really good mentor for me." Mary added:

I feel that I have learned so much from being in her [Denise's] her classroom: teaching methods and getting ideas. I just feel like it's been a great growing and learning experience for me. Hopefully, one I can carry with me when I'm in my own classroom.

Denise said of her influence on her assistant and the student teachers, "If you have kid contact, they'll have kid contact. If you sit behind a desk, they'll sit behind a desk. They'll do exactly what you do....The more they see me play, the more they do." At the beginning of the year, Mary did not play in the centers with the children. She was more concerned with getting the environment prepared. After a couple of months, Mary frequently entered the centers and used play tutoring to expand the children's play. By the end of my participation in the classroom, Mary told me that playing with the children was one of her "responsibilities when they are in center time."

Denise has a voice in a small group of preschool teachers in Brownsboro. She meets with these teachers each week to study new approaches to ECE and theories in

child development. She said, "I think that meeting together with the other preschool teachers has been a big help for me personally, because...it gives me some validity."

Denise shares her opinions with her peers, but she is also open to their points of view.

She stated, "It let's me know that I'm doing it similar to them, or I can pick up things that make me better. I can share things that maybe will help them grow."

Denise educates undergraduate students from the local university through a creativity class that she teaches every semester. She also teaches students through observation in her classroom. She said, "These people say, 'You need to go to Denise's room.' I do two or three observers every week and I think when they come they need to see the best that I can give them. And, maybe it is the best. It's really what's best for four-year-olds." Denise believes that this is a way that she can give back to her profession, and thereby, use her voice. She never tires of having student teachers or undergraduate students in her classroom. She said, "I've been around long enough to know that these student teachers that I'm teaching today are going to be the ones that come in and make a difference."

Denise often feels the pressure of teaching adult learners the "right way" to do things in a preschool classroom. She said, "I feel like they [professors] tell them [students] all this stuff and they come and they say, 'Is this all there is?' I'm probably not what they were expecting." She also feels that it is difficult for her to play two roles: one as classroom teacher, and the other as professor. She said:

They look at me half way as a teacher here, and the other half of the way they look at me as a professor.... And some where we've given them the connotation that if they're not doing what I'm doing, it's wrong, and that's not true either.

Denise warns that she is careful not to give "rash generalized ideas" to the early childhood students. She feels this leaves the students, "caught in the middle, because they don't know what's right and what's wrong."

Denise is consistently reaching for the "brass ring." She was nominated and then selected as Brownsboro's teacher of the year in 1996. Denise has done several presentations at national, state, and local meetings on center play. Denise is the president of her local educator's association. She is a member of both state and national early childhood education associations.

In addition, Denise worked to receive National Board Certification in early childhood education. Her principal asked her to take the exam, and she agreed. The school system paid the exam fee. She spent over 150 hours preparing an extensive portfolio of her professional skills. Then she traveled to a local university where she took the exam, which lasted six hours. After several months of waiting, she received word through the mail that she had not passed. She scored a 270 and 275 was needed to pass. The results included scores and very little information on her specific areas of weakness. She said of this experience:

I think I live in a glass house. These people don't know.... I don't know what more I could do....The issue is, okay I gave you what is my best. You said it

wasn't good enough. But, you're not willing to tell me where you want me to improve.... You can't grow from something that you don't get feedback on."

There have been no preschool teachers, and only one early childhood educator in the state that have passed the exam to date.

Even after receiving word that she did not pass the exam, Denise remained optimistic of her talent. She said, "If I really didn't know myself, and know that I'm real good at what I do, it would have probably crushed me. I've lived too long to know that and understand it. So, tomorrow is another day." She perseveres. Denise signed up to retake one portion of the exam.

Denise also is searching for voice by participating in this research study. She is looking for self-knowledge that will help her to be a better teacher. Denise never complained about all the reading and correcting of my observation notes, interviews, and her own reflective journal. Denise said, "I've really had a good time doing it. I didn't know at all what to expect. It's made me see a lot about myself. It's made me think a lot about why I am the way I am.... I'm stronger for doing this."

Through this research process, Denise has been able to represent herself and her approach to teaching. Just by listening to her, I have allowed her to feel validation that her work with young children is important. In addition to voicing her opinions, she feels that she has learned from the process. Denise explained, "It makes you see your strengths, makes you see where your weaknesses are." She stated, "When I read the classroom observation part...it's like I didn't notice that, or that shocked me by how much I've done." She added "It's the process we take for granted....I've watched them do that for

so long, it's like that is what I expect to happen. But, then when you come in here and make me really look at it, it's like Wow! That's pretty miraculous isn't it.... You never see the big picture of yourself, I guess."

Denise reads and then reflects on her actions and the results on the children in her classroom. Then she becomes better able to explain why and how she is teaching the way she teaches. She said, "It's real hard because people expect you to teach them [the children] something. And, then you come in and you say, 'Are they learning? How do you know?' Because I know." Denise says that her talent for teaching "is just a natural thing." She feels that it is very hard to teach another person to do what she does. But, she wants to try. She said, "So many of us want people to understand."

Denise is learning to be secure with her own voice. She realizes that some people will think that she is "a turtle in the bunch," but she is beginning to accept those differences as part of her unique pedagogical tapestry. Denise is beginning to cope with being different. She confessed, "I learned a long time ago that I am what I am.... People in the room will see me for what I am."

Denise sometimes feels like she is all alone "in the big cruel world" working to educate others in the usefulness of play with all young children. She said, "I just feel like I'm banging this big brass drum, and leading this parade, and there's only a few behind me.... Hello, are you listening?" Denise's ultimate goal is to make a difference in the life of one person. She believes that she was led to be a teacher so that she could show others "how it's supposed to be done." She added, "I look around and I wonder, have I done enough to make a difference?"

Summary

Denise's view of the child is very positive and trusting. Denise listens to the children and is responsive to their needs. She treats all the children in her classroom with equality. She respects the children and the culture in which they live. Her respect is most likely influenced by her own experiences in this culture, for she has lived her entire life in the community where she teaches.

Her view of the child is so strong that it permeates her role as a nurturing parent. Denise loves the children in her classroom as a good parent would. She addresses their physical needs by providing food, clothing, and a safe environment. She also attends to their emotional needs through hugs, kisses, respect, and responsiveness. Denise's parental behaviors encourage the children's positive social-emotional development.

Denise has many personal characteristics that impact her interactions in the classroom. Denise is a strong, autonomous learner and risk taker. Denise values playfulness and is skillful in her play with young children. She is also a perfectionist who strives to find creative solutions to problems in the classroom. These traits enable her to utilize a play-based curriculum in a culture that values academic training. Lastly, Denise is a very spiritual person and this carries over to the respect, sensitivity, and love she expresses to the children. Therefore, the children in Denise's classroom get sense of security that is necessary for learning and growing to occur in all areas of development.

Although I have presented the themes as separate entities, in reality they are all interrelated. I began by developing a matrix in an outline format with headings as themes

and subheadings as subthemes. I took the headings from the matrix and formed a diagram. I created this diagram based on overlapping themes and themes in context.

The diagram reveals a series of layers where the closest interrelationship is seen between Denise's view of the child and her role as a nurturing parent. These two themes are overlapped to show that they have a reciprocal influence (see Figure 1). Both the teacher's view of the child and her role as nurturing parent are strongly influenced by her personal characteristics, so they are located at the center of the diagram. Denise's personal characteristics include the following: autonomous, internal struggle, playful, spiritual, perfectionist, and search for voice. The context provides a landscape for understanding all the themes, and is therefore, represented as the overarching layer (see Figure 2). The context for the themes includes the following: community culture, biography of the teacher, classroom environment, and curriculum. The interrelationship between the themes and the influence of the context on the themes will be further explained in the fifth chapter.

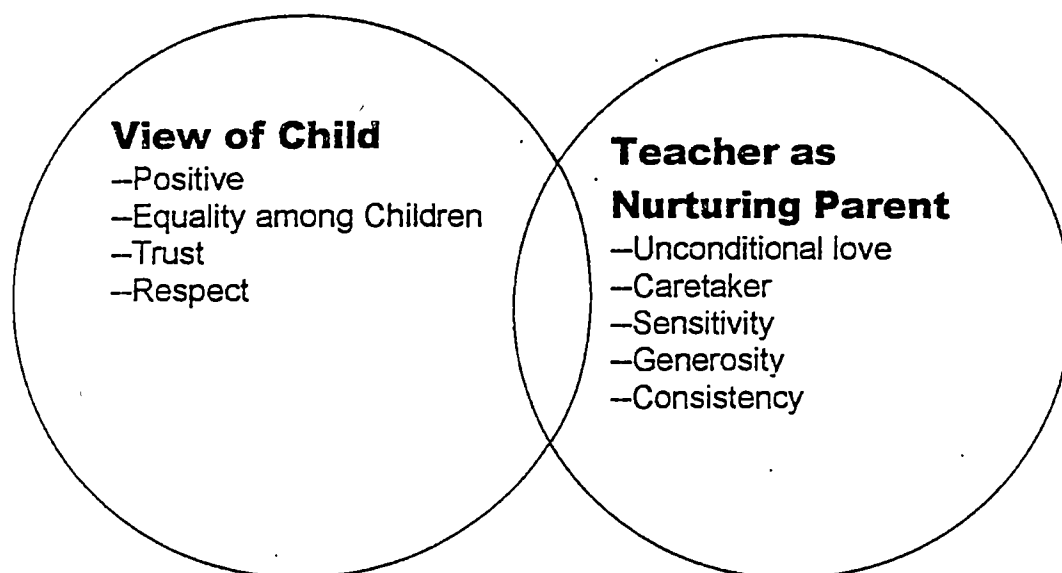


Figure 1. Diagram of the interrelationship between two themes.

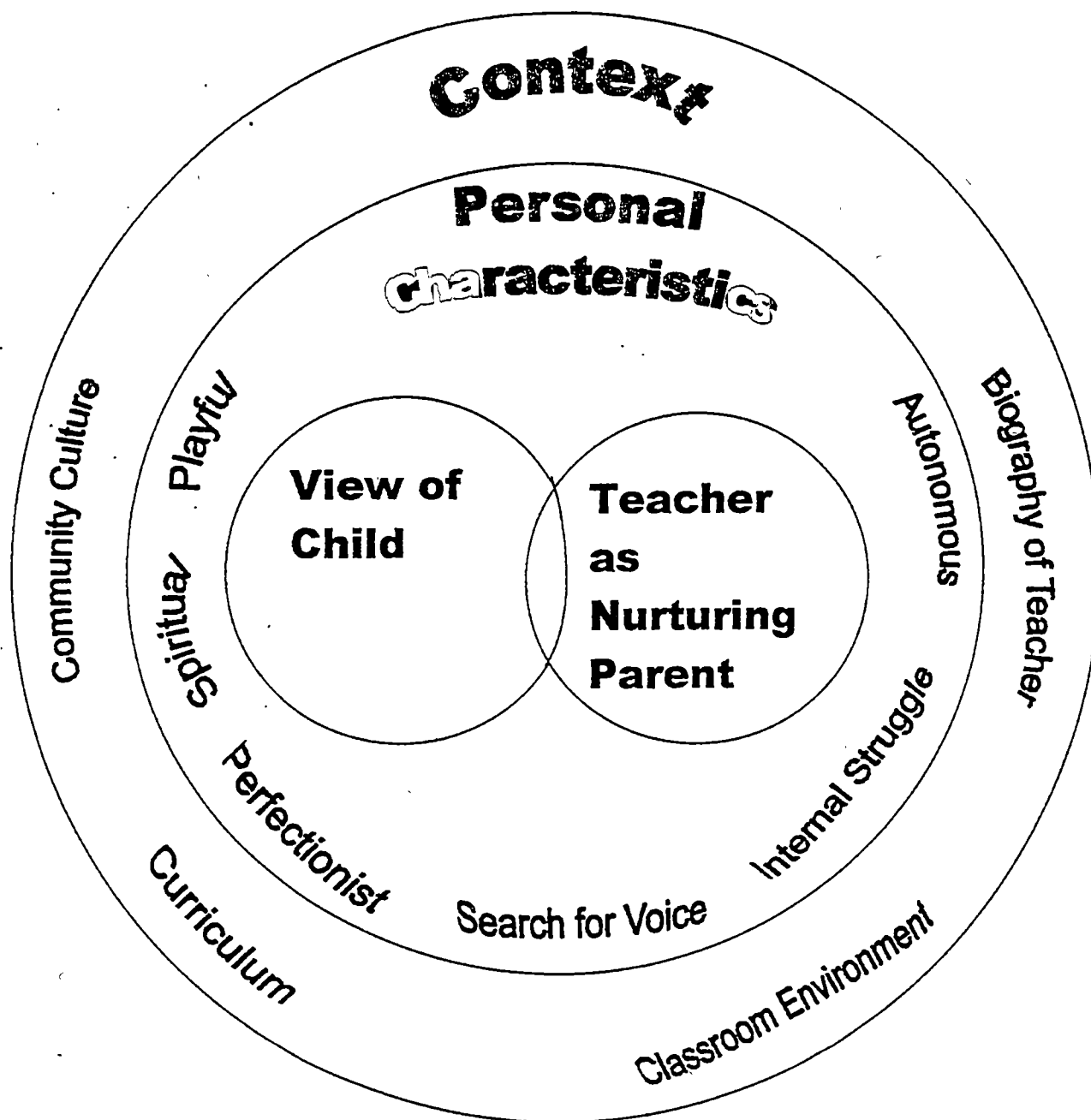


Figure 2. Diagram of interrelationship between three themes and the context.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

Research has suggested that there is a high incidence of teacher-directed instruction in classrooms that include children who are economically disadvantaged and children with developmental delays (Bricker & Cripe, 1992; Mahoney, Robinson, & Powell, 1992; Odom & McEvoy, 1990). In 1993, Hanline and Fox concluded that a play-based setting is the most appropriate for young children with developmental delays. While other researchers have suggested that DAP guidelines, which recommend a play-based environment, should only be used as a basis for incorporating components of intervention into early childhood special education environments (Wolery, Strain, & Bailey, 1992). Therefore, the question still remains: Can a play-based curriculum meet the demands of young children who have special needs? This study assessed the function of a play-based approach, by defining specific features of a play-based curriculum in an early childhood education program for children who are economically disadvantaged and may also have developmental delays.

The purpose of this research study was to develop a greater understanding of how one teacher uses a play-based curriculum with young children who have special needs. Through a qualitative case study method, I attempted to represent how this early childhood teacher, who works in a Title I preschool classroom, interacts with young children in a play-based environment. Based on my observations, interviews, and review of Denise's reflective journal, I described the context that surrounds the teacher's

pedagogical practice. I also revealed the teacher's interpretations of her own actions through themes. Finally, I presented the interrelationship of these themes in context.

Advantages of Case Study

This was a case study of one teacher in one classroom and in one school. "The value of the case study is it's uniqueness; consequently, reliability in the traditional sense of replicability is pointless here" (Janesick, 1998, p. 51). The teacher was described in detail so that the reader could draw conclusions while identifying similar characteristics or contexts. The reader may use this case study as a small step towards generalizability, if she so chooses (Cambell, 1975). It is a natural tendency for one to reflect on his or her own practices as she reads a qualitative research study. Therefore, this case study could be used to assist teachers in constructing knowledge about themselves and their practice. This study may also help teacher educators in designing ECE and ECSE courses.

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DeVries and Kohlberg (1987) also recommended that teachers act as mentors who guide children through play, experimentation, reasoning, and social collaboration. The constructivist view promotes the use of educational methods that place a strong emphasis on play. Denise values play, and she has designed a play-based curriculum and an environment that encourages learning through play. Denise also frequently mentors children by playing along side them and modeling collaborative play.

Denise's interactions with the children in her classroom match Kamii and Devries' (1977) recommendations for early education. Their recommendations were also based on the constructivist theory of Piaget. Denise encourages the children's development of socioemotional skills by structuring the classroom so they work together. She allows them to resolve their own conflicts. She also promotes children's independence by providing them the opportunity to search for their own answers. Denise believes that the young children in her classroom can form their own understanding and are capable learners.

Denise's classroom can be described as child-directed, which also fits within Piaget's framework. Denise promotes cognitive skills through the context of child's play and by setting up experiences that will activate learning. Denise is careful to listen and follow the interests of the children. She also accepts the children's "wrong" answers, rather than constantly correcting them. She realizes all the children's responses provide a mirror to their level of understanding.

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Using Vygotsky's (1962) theory of child development as a guide, Denise scaffold's children's learning. She helps to maintain the children in their zone of proximal development. She structures the environment through learning centers, so that the demands on each child are appropriately challenging. She adjusts the amount of adult intervention to fit the needs of each child (Berk & Winsler, 1995). When necessary, she joins the children's play scenarios and encourages their cooperative play and sociodramatic play. Denise is skilled at reaching intersubjectivity (Newson & Newson, 1975) with each child. She has that innate ability to enter into a play situation, collaborate to find the shared meaning of that play situation with the children, and then gently expand their interactions with her words and behaviors. She also knows to leave when the children no longer need her involvement.

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Denise has a strong awareness of the DAP guidelines (NAEYC, 1997). She has designed an environment that allows children to actively learn through observing and participating. Her classroom environment affords children playful experiences with available materials and equipment. The environment adjusts to individual and group differences. The play-based curriculum allows for experiences in all developmental domains: physical, cognitive, social, emotional, linguistic, and aesthetic. When Denise does utilize teacher-directed instruction, she is careful to consider each individual child and their unique understanding.

The classroom accommodates children who have diverse life experiences, learning styles, needs, and interests. Denise understands the culture in which the children in her classroom live. She grew up in the community where she teaches, and she appreciates the values and principles that guide the people in this region. This knowledge helps Denise plan learning experiences that are meaningful for the children. In addition, Denise demonstrates her respect for the children and their families by listening and responding to their needs.

Denise's actions within the classroom fit within the guidelines of DAP (NAEYC, 1997). Denise bases her decisions about the education of young children on the following information: (a) what she knows about child development and age-appropriate learning; (b) what she knows about the interests, needs, and strengths of each child; and (c) what she knows about the social and cultural contexts in which the children live. Denise is constantly making decisions in her classroom that support DAP.

After observation and reflection, I believe that Denise's Title I preschool classroom is true to constructivist theory. She has designed an amazingly beautiful classroom environment full of learning centers that contain realistic, enticing props. She allows children adequate amounts of time to explore their own interests and structure their own knowledge through play. Denise consistently scaffolds children through her playful and thoughtful interactions. She understands the children's culture, and she is able to set up the just right challenge to promote each child's education.

Interrelation of Thematic Findings in Context

The outermost layer of the diagram presented in the fourth chapter contains the context for understanding the themes that emerged from the data (see Figure 2). The context for this study included the following: community culture, biography of teacher, classroom environment, and curriculum. As noted previously, the context has an overarching and interactive influence on Denise's personal characteristics as well as her view of children, and her role as nurturing parent.

The following sections will discuss how the context of the findings has a strong impact on the teacher's personal characteristics, view of children, and role as nurturing

parent. Next, the interrelationship between the teacher's view of children and role as nurturing parent will be presented. Lastly, the overarching influence of the teacher's personal characteristics on her view of children and role as a nurturing parent will be described.

View of child

The first of three recurring themes found in this study was the teacher's view of the child. Denise views children as capable individuals. Denise's positive view of children influences the learning environment of the classroom. Denise selects open-ended materials for her classroom because she trusts the child's ability to select. These types of materials help each of the children to be successful and creative.

Denise's view of the child reflects the principles of DAP in her classroom environment. She allows the children to direct their own learning, by adjusting the environment based on their interests. She also continually changes her level of expectations to fit the level of the child, but she knows everyone can be successful if the match is appropriate.

Denise's view of children is closely tied to her biographical context. Her view appears to be related to the spirituality that she has developed through her childhood and adulthood experiences. Denise has been a member of the same church her whole life. Her family, which was headed by a grandfather who was a minister, raised her to have Christian beliefs. Based on these beliefs, Denise has faith that all children are innately good. As a result, she treats all the children with equality and kindness.

The experiences Denise had in special education have also impacted her view of the child. Denise treats all the children in her classroom the same, no matter what their socioeconomic, cognitive, or physical status. She is careful to make sure that every child gets individual attention from her each day. Denise trusts the children to do the best that they can, and she knows they will.

Denise respects the children in her classroom and the culture that surrounds them. Again, the respect she has for the community culture is closely tied with her background. Denise grew up, went to college, and lives with her husband in the same community where she now teaches. She has a thorough understanding and appreciation of the children's culture. Her life experience has led to her empathy for both the children and their parents. She is able to interact with them in a manner that is reverential and supportive, and this leads to mutual respect.

The respect that Denise has for young children has an impact on the teaching methods she chooses to utilize. Denise uses a child-centered approach in her classroom. Researchers have recommended that teachers should not inhibit children's play by promoting "adult-established concepts of completion, achievement, and failure" (Bredekamp, 1987, p. 3). Bricker and Woods-Cripe (1992) have proposed that activities that the child initiates is most likely to have the most appeal to the child and require the least external support. Denise follows the child's lead and scaffolds their knowledge by responding and expanding their interests. Research has shown that a teacher's responsiveness promotes children's language (Kaiser, Hendrickson, & Alpert, 1991).

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

Research has suggested that there is a high incidence of teacher-directed instruction in classrooms that include children who are economically disadvantaged and children with developmental delays (Bricker & Cripe, 1992; Mahoney, Robinson, & Powell, 1992; Odom & McEvoy, 1990). In 1993, Hanline and Fox concluded that a play-based setting is the most appropriate for young children with developmental delays. While other researchers have suggested that DAP guidelines, which recommend a play-based environment, should only be used as a basis for incorporating components of intervention into early childhood special education environments (Wolery, Strain, & Bailey, 1992). Therefore, the question still remains: Can a play-based curriculum meet the demands of young children who have special needs? This study assessed the function of a play-based approach, by defining specific features of a play-based curriculum in an early childhood education program for children who are economically disadvantaged and may also have developmental delays.

The purpose of this research study was to develop a greater understanding of how one teacher uses a play-based curriculum with young children who have special needs. Through a qualitative case study method, I attempted to represent how this early childhood teacher, who works in a Title I preschool classroom, interacts with young children in a play-based environment. Based on my observations, interviews, and review of Denise's reflective journal, I described the context that surrounds the teacher's

pedagogical practice. I also revealed the teacher's interpretations of her own actions through themes. Finally, I presented the interrelationship of these themes in context.

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Teacher as nurturing parent

The second recurring theme found in this study was this early childhood teacher's role as a nurturing parent for the children in her classroom. Denise considers herself a "surrogate mother" for the children, and she treats them as if they were her own. Her nurturing style is related to her biography, and it is also bound to the environment she provides for the children.

Denise demonstrates an unconditional love for every child in her classroom. This unconditional love is associated with the spiritual sense that she has cultivated since her childhood. As noted above, Denise was raised in a spiritually rich environment. She believes that all children deserve love, no matter their socioeconomic status, race, or religious beliefs. Denise provides love to all the children in her classroom with impartiality.

Denise grew up in a warm, loving home environment where she was the recipient of the nurturing practices of her parents and grandparents. Denise now demonstrates that same type of affection and warmth for the children in her classroom. She hugs the children, holds them in her lap, or just pats them on the back for comfort. Throughout the day Denise tells the children that she loves them, saying words like, "No matter what, I'll always love you forever." Denise came from a very loving family, and these displays of affection are very natural and sincere for her.

Denise's nurturing style assists her in being responsive to the children's needs. Berk and Winsler (1995) noted that an important aspect of helping children to construct their knowledge is the emotional tone of the collaboration between the teacher and the child. Children's involvement with a task is highest when the interaction with the teacher is

“pleasant, warm, and responsive” (Berk & Winsler, 1995, p. 29). Denise is a very sensitive and caring teacher, and she clearly demonstrates that sensitivity is a necessary component of teaching for her.

Denise’s role as a nurturing parent influences the classroom environment. Denise has developed a structured and loving environment that addresses children’s needs for safety. Maslow (1970) suggested that children must have all their basic physiological, safety, and love needs met before they can work towards self-respect. In order for a child to feel secure, he or she must have freedom from fear, anxiety, and chaos.

Because Denise provides the children with a strong sense of love and acceptance, she has set up a psychologically safe environment. Rogers (1954) suggested that there is a strong relationship between psychological safety, the classroom environment, and creativity. Rogers proposed that psychological safety is fostered by three related processes: (a) acceptance of the individual as of unconditional worth; (b) providing a climate in which external evaluation is absent; and (c) understanding empathically. Bootzin, Bower, Crocker, and Hall (1991) defined unconditional positive regard as the total acceptance of an individual no matter what that child says or does. Denise demonstrates an unconditional positive regard for all the children in her classroom. She treats every child in her classroom fairly. Her nurturing behaviors sustain an environment where children feel a sense of psychological safety. Children can feel free to explore and be creative without fear of ridicule or rejection.

Denise works to maintain a classroom environment that is without external evaluation. External evaluation is defined as the process of being judged by others. Rogers

(1954) recommended the use of an open classroom environment where children are not evaluated or measured by an external standard. Denise is aware of the negative impact that external evaluation has on children, and she is careful not to critique or criticize the children's ideas or products. She has designed a play-based curriculum and an environment that allows children to be successful, while limiting the need for external praise.

Denise is empathic towards young children and the culture in which they live. Researchers have defined empathic understanding as the "ability to hear the individual at all levels of communication: words, thoughts, feelings, and unspoken cues for help" (Bootzin et al., 1991). Rogers (1954) stated that individuals are able to express themselves when they are in a climate of psychological safety. Denise provides the children with empathic understanding through her responsive behaviors. Therefore, the children in her classroom feel psychologically free to be playful and creative.

Denise's role as a nurturing parent is also consistent with Pestalozzian method. This method emphasizes learning through the senses and has a spiritual basis. Pestalozzi stated that maternal love is a pertinent aspect of education. He proposed that people must love and trust others before they can love and trust God. The combination of trust, love, and gratitude forms the initial aspect of the conscience (Spring, 1994). Pestalozzi stated, "The first instruction of the child should never be the business of the head or of reason; it should always be the business of the senses, or the heart, of the mother" (Pestalozzi, 1898, p. 294). Each and every day, Denise teaches the children in her classroom how to love and trust.

Interrelation of view of child and teacher as nurturing parent

Denise's view of children and her role as nurturing parent are closely related to each other (see Figure 1). These two themes are at the center of the diagram (see Figure 2), and the following section will describe the strong relationship between them. The placement of these two overlapping circles in the center of the diagram reveals the overarching influence of the teacher's personal characteristics, which are impacted by the context.

Denise has an optimistic view of young children. She also nurtures the children. These two themes overlap to form Denise's positive, loving interaction with the children in her classroom. These supportive interactions assist in providing the children a sense of psychological safety.

Denise treats all children fairly and impartially. This action is tied to the unconditional love that she has for each child. Denise is sensitive and responsive to the children's needs, as a nurturing parent should be. One of the roles of a good parent is to guide the young child and later to release that child into society. Denise does this with the children in her class. She begins by teaching the children how to interact, and then she trusts that they will act appropriately in her classroom.

Denise respects the children's interests and desires. Denise trusts the children to make choices, but she does not force them to do so. Instead she designs an environment that will entice the children to construct their own knowledge. In comparison, good parenting includes allowing children to make decisions. Children then learn through the natural consequences of their decisions.

The children in Denise's classroom are loved and accepted. Denise assures that the basic needs of each child is met. These basic needs include shelter, food, clothing, and love. She treats each child with equality. The children then develop a sense of psychological safety in her classroom. Therefore, they are free to create, to play, and to construct their own knowledge. Thus these two themes are closely interrelated because her positive view of young children influences her love for these children. In return, her role as nurturing parent has an impact on her optimistic view of children.

Struggle to weave personal characteristics into a pedagogical tapestry

The final theme is the teacher's weaving of her personal characteristics into her practice of teaching young children. The personal characteristics that Denise is struggling to weave into her teaching are greatly influenced by the context of Denise's biography. This theme reveals itself in the learning environment that Denise has prepared in her Title I preschool classroom.

Firstly, Denise is an autonomous learner and a very strong person. She knows what she believes both spiritually and academically. She is constantly searching for a greater understanding of herself and of the best practices of early childhood education through scholarly activities. Denise is a risk taker who is striving to break the boundary of traditional Title I practice. She makes her own decisions about the usefulness of different teaching approaches in her classroom.

Based on the work of Carl Rogers (1961), Denise appears to be striving for personal growth. Rogers stated that significant learning occurs more quickly in situations that the learner perceives as a problem, and Denise is constantly searching for answers to

problems. One of the problems that Denise is attempting to solve is her philosophical conflict over the use of several behaviorist approaches in her primarily constructivist classroom. Rogers noted that learning has a greater influence on behavior when it is self-discovered and appropriate to the learner's own experiences.

Denise is able to maintain that a constructivist approach is effective in her classroom because of her sense of autonomy. Denise is sure in her belief that young children construct their knowledge through play, so she utilizes a play-based curriculum. But, she continues in her struggle to find the most appropriate learning environment for her classroom. This tension is related to her characteristic quest for knowledge. She is a scholar who is in a constant state of learning. Her scholarly activities promote changes both within herself and in the classroom. Denise knows that her own learning will have an effect on her classroom environment and ultimately, the children's learning.

Play is a pertinent component of children's education in Denise's classroom. For Denise, play is the best means for expressing the construction of meaningful educational experiences for children. Denise is a careful observer of children's play. She skillfully plans an environment that invites play. She also is a masterful participant in children's play.

Denise is a playful adult, who enjoys playing with young children. Rubin, Fein, and Vandenberg (1993) defined play as being intrinsically motivating, spontaneous, process-oriented, and free from externally imposed rules. I observed these characteristics of play when Denise interacted with children in learning centers. In interviews, Denise described the joyous, "intrinsically motivated, and spontaneous" experience of playing with children.

Because Denise is playful, the use of a play-based curriculum is a natural fit for her. The influence of Denise's playfulness can be seen in the classroom environment. She thrives while playing with children in her classroom. I observed Denise scaffolding the children's use of materials and their interactions in play, by intervening either inside or outside the play (Smilansky, 1968). She can enter a play scenario and become involved without disrupting the process. By so doing, she helps move the children to a higher level of play and knowledge. It would be difficult for other teachers to imitate Denise's natural ability to play. Playfulness like Denise demonstrated with the children in her classroom, cannot be learned.

Denise's use of a play-based curriculum in her Title I classroom combines both Piaget's (1962) and Vygotsky's (1962) central framework for children's development. Play encourages and supports physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and linguistic development (Smilansky & Shefatya, 1990; Vygotsky, 1967). Through observing children's play, the teacher can develop a greater understanding of each child's development. Play also encourages children's development of new strategies. The teacher may need to support young children with special needs to play through the arrangement of the environment and materials (Cook, Tessier, & Klein, 1996). Play gives children a context to practice their newly acquired developmental skills, and to solve complex problems (Mallory & New, 1994). Play is a valuable learning activity for young children, and is appropriately the focus of Denise's classroom because she has a natural playful ability. It is also appropriate because Denise is an autonomous learner and, she has formed a strong knowledge base on the role that play takes in child development.

Carl Rogers stated, "Life, at its best, is a flowing, changing process in which nothing is fixed" (1961, p. 27). Denise's spirituality guides her reflective practice. Through her reflections, Denise is searching for perfection in herself. She is a creative problem solver and is constantly thinking and rethinking problems and searching for solutions. Rogers (1961) noted that this tendency for an individual to develop, extend, and become autonomous is "the mainspring of life" (p. 35). This personality characteristic leads to a large amount of change and flexibility within Denise's classroom. She wants her classroom environment and curriculum to be the best it can be, and she hasn't achieved that yet, as evidenced in her concern with changing the environment and altering the schedule.

Schon (1983) stated that many early childhood educators seem to rely on knowing in action. These teachers use actions automatically and do not think about them during their performance. Denise, however, is in a reflecting-in-action mode. She seems to notice what she is doing and how it is working. She then theorizes and experiments to make improvements in performance. Schon (1983) proposed that this method of reflection can help to develop greater professionalism.

Denise is struggling to find her voice and to receive validation as a skilled early childhood educator. She often feels discouraged when it seems as though her peers and superiors do not understand, nor want to understand, her style of teaching. So, she searches for confirmation through mentoring interactions with student teachers and undergraduate students. Denise also gathers support from a few early childhood educators in her region, who she believes are reflective teachers. Lastly, Denise agreed to participate

in this research study so that she could gain a better understanding of herself, while improving her practice.

Interrelation of Three Themes

As noted previously, Denise's personal characteristics influence her view of children and role as nurturing parent. In the fourth chapter I presented a diagram of the interrelationship between themes within the context (see Figure 2). The innermost layer of this diagram consists of two overlapping circles. These two circles represent the themes that I feel are most closely bound: view of child and teacher as nurturing parent.

The second layer of the diagram includes the teacher's personal characteristics that are interwoven into her practice. These personal characteristics have a powerful influence on her view of children and the role she has assumed as a nurturing parent. Denise's personal characteristics include the following: spirituality, perfectionism, playfulness, internal struggle and search for voice. Denise's personal characteristics are salient to her teaching, and this will be described in the following section.

Denise is an autonomous person. Denise knows what she believes, and she is not afraid to state her opinions. Her autonomy impacts her parent-like interactions with children. Although others may disagree, Denise believes that being sensitive and loving to the children in the classroom is one of the most important aspects of early childhood education. Denise feels that she should act as a surrogate parent for the children in her classroom, and she works hard to address all their needs. As a result, her autonomy is apparent in the theme of teacher as nurturing parent.

Denise is a spiritual being. She believes her talent for teaching is a reflection of her spirituality. Denise feels she was led to teach young children, and she takes this responsibility very seriously. As discussed previously, Denise reveals her spiritual side through her optimism, hope, and love for the children demonstrated by the theme of her view of children. Her spirituality is intricately tied to her view of the child and her role as a nurturing parent as well. Thus her spirituality is a personal trait that is also evident in the two other themes of view of children and nurturing parent.

Denise describes herself as a perfectionist. Her perfectionism is closely tied to her practice of personal reflection. Denise's reflective nature influences both her view of the child and her parental involvement with the children in her class. Denise is often reflective about her role as a nurturing parent. Denise has a great respect for the children in her classroom, and she strives to make the most appropriate decisions for each child.

The influence of Denise's perfectionism can also be seen in her classroom environment. Denise is consistently reflecting on the developmental appropriateness of her classroom environment. The outcome of her perfectionism is changes within the environment. Through this practice of reflection and change, Denise has created her preschool classroom as a manifestation of DAP.

Denise has a natural talent for playing with young children. Because she has constructed much of her own knowledge through play, she can see the important role of play in child development. This characteristic influences her view of children. Denise is playful, and she believes that children capable of being playful. She is certain that children are capable, and she trusts that they will construct their own learning through play.

Denise has done a masterful job of integrating her view of children, her role as a nurturing parent, and her personal characteristics into her practice of teaching young children. The result is an almost seamless experience. The only incongruities appear to be her internal struggle to combine theoretical principles in practice and the search for a voice. But, after further consideration these tensions seem to be an integral part of her experience. It may be these struggles that help Denise to construct, re-construct, and then co-construct her reality of teaching.

Summary

Denise is a person, and she cannot be separated into pieces. Every theme that I have revealed through my role as participant observer is interrelated. These themes combine to form both the person, and ultimately, the culture of her classroom. Denise is a spiritual, playful person who is searching for a voice through her struggle to be autonomous. She not only constructs her own knowledge, but she also constructs learning for the children in her Title I preschool classroom.

The most connected themes are Denise's view of the child and her role as a nurturing parent. Denise has an optimistic and respectful view of children, and this is associated with the love and responsibility she feels for the children in her classroom. Denise's personality characteristics including her autonomy, perfectionism, spirituality, and playfulness, also combine to have a reciprocal affect on her view of the child and her parent-like relationship with children. The integration of these themes has allowed Denise to create DAP based on a constructivist approach with children who have special needs.

Lastly, consider the themes under the context of Denise's biographical history and the culture in which she lives.

Implications

Play has been established within the guidelines for DAP for early childhood education (Reifel & Yeatman, 1993). In general, there is a lack of research on the relationship of play behavior to all areas of development for children with special needs. The majority of research with children from low socioeconomic environments has focused on the impact of play on cognitive development (Cheyne & Rubin, 1983; Dansky, 1980; Vandenberg, 1981) and social development (Daglish & Herzmark, 1981; Smith & Sydall, 1978; Smith, Reifel, & Yeatman, 1993). Few researchers have qualitatively studied the manner in which early childhood educators carry out the practice of play with children who are economically disadvantaged and children who have developmental delays. Based on findings from my qualitative case study of one early childhood educator who uses a play-based curriculum with children who have these types of special needs, I will suggest topics for future research, while also giving recommendations for classroom practice. These implications will address topics related to play-based curriculums, seamless teaching, teacher education, and reflective teaching.

It is important to note that the original focus of this study was one teacher's use of a play-based curriculum with children who had special needs. Indeed, all the children in Denise's Title I classroom had special needs. These children either lived in economically disadvantaged environments, or they had been identified as having a developmental delay. However, this characteristic did not emerge with any saliency.

Denise was careful to become aware of each child's special needs. She realized that several of the children in her classroom needed special focus. Denise remarked that some of the children in her classroom needed structure some of the time. However, she addressed these needs without the appearance of intervention. I did not observe Denise interacting with any of the children in an exclusive manner. As a participant observer, I became aware of children's individual needs, but not their "special needs." Denise's use of a play-based curriculum in her Title I preschool classroom was inclusive.

In reference to the context for play, future research should address the classroom environment and how it supports play in young children with special needs. Since the focus on "special needs" was not identified in the analysis of the data, further observation of more classrooms where play is being utilized with children who have special needs is warranted. Future observations may assist in the identification of patterns of practice. It is evident in research with typically developing children that there is a relationship between play and dimensions of development (Reifel & Yeatman, 1993). More quantitative studies in ECSE classrooms are necessary to assess the impact of play on specific variables. Questions for future research in ECSE may include the relationship of play-based curriculum and the following dimensions of development: self-care skills, motor development, social-emotional development, and language development.

Both early childhood educators and early childhood special educators need further guidance to acknowledge the benefits of play with children who have special needs. The teacher in this study had a great understanding of constructivist theory and the relationship of play to early childhood education. Teacher educators should further emphasize DAP

guidelines in their training of teachers. There is also a need for pre-service training of teachers to help them assimilate the constructivist theory.

The teacher in this study was masterful at designing learning centers, and she was able to create a play-based classroom. To promote effective practice, early childhood educators and early childhood special educators should receive training in the design and implementation of learning centers in their classrooms. Through practice and mentoring relationships, teachers can begin to construct their own ideas. Then they may provide play opportunities that match the level of development and individual interests of the children in their classrooms.

Another implication that is related to the teacher's view of the child is that researchers should focus on the relationship between teacher's perceptions of children and classroom practice. The teacher in this study participated in a study group that looked at the Reggio Emilia Approach to teaching young children. It is recommended that teachers stay current by reading and studying various early childhood material such as books and articles on the Reggio Emilia Approach and other approaches. Study of various approaches may help teachers view children as capable and valuable members of the community.

Further research is warranted to refine the outcomes of different styles of interactions between teachers and children within pedagogical contexts. The teacher in this study took on a role as a nurturing parent for the children in her classroom. Future research questions related to the teacher as nurturing parent may include the following: 1) Does teacher warmth have an impact on children's cognitive development? 2) Does

teacher warmth have an impact on children's social-emotional development? 3) How can we develop early childhood teacher's caring attitudes and nurturing behaviors? In general, does our educational system acknowledge or encourage the concept of teaching as a seamless experience wherein self, values, and beliefs are incorporated into teaching?

It is important that ECE and ECSE programs use an integrated approach to child development, which includes the social-emotional development of young children.

Teachers must realize that their education of young children should not just focus on academics, but should also emphasize affective development. It is further recommended that teachers in training have field experiences with teachers who have been selected because of their caring and responsive interactions with young children. Observing these teachers' behaviors and their effects on children can have a powerful influence on teachers in training.

Research related to the theme of weaving personal characteristics into practice could address the following questions: 1) Is there a relationship between teachers' personality characteristics and their principles of guidance? 2) Is there a relationship between teachers' personality characteristics and their understanding of time or schedules? 3) Is there a relationship between teachers' personality characteristics and the curriculum they utilize? In general, researchers could look at the relationship between teachers' interests and practice. Researchers could also study the relationship between teachers' learning styles and practice. Lastly, the connection between spirituality and practice should be considered.

Reflective practice leads to responsive teaching and to self-awareness (Fu, Stremmel, & Stone, 1991). Teachers need to find methods of becoming more consciously aware of their practices. One method of achieving a higher level of consciousness may be maintaining a reflective journal. This practice of reflection in action will assist teachers in developing a repertoire of teaching techniques so they can adjust to the vast range of individual differences. To assist teachers in becoming more self aware, it is also proposed that practicing teachers be exposed to in-services where they can explore personality assessments. In addition, teachers must continue to read and study early childhood materials. After teachers become more aware of their personal characteristics, they can focus on utilizing these strengths in their practice. Through self discovery, teachers can add skills that will help them to overcome their weaknesses as they develop as professionals.

Lastly, teachers who are searching for a voice, need validation. Teachers who want to change practices need other teachers with whom they can collaborate and discuss the utilization and effectiveness of different teaching techniques. Therefore, an implication of this study is the suggestion that teachers form mentoring relationships with other teachers or join study groups. In-services, pre-services, or administrative support for mentoring would assist teachers with forming these relationships. Small groups of supportive individuals can encourage the struggling teacher. Teachers should also become members of professional groups at the local, state, or national level. Teachers can gain knowledge of new trends, while receiving support for changing practices by attending or presenting at these conferences.

Based on my experiences with Denise in this research process, I believe that better relationships should be developed between researchers and reflective practitioners.

Through collaborative action research projects involving researchers and early childhood educators, more applied implications can be found. The collaborative process will address the needs of the practitioners, and lend validity to their pedagogical practice.

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Appendixes

Appendix A

FORM B

IRB# _____

Date Received in Office of Research _____

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville
Application for Review of Research Involving Human Subjects

I. IDENTIFICATION OF PROJECT**A. PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:** Christy Isbell Gamble, doctoral candidate

Department of Child and Family Studies

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FACULTY ADVISOR:

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DEPARTMENT/UNIT: Child and Family Studies Department**B. PROJECT CLASSIFICATION:** Doctoral dissertation**C. PROJECT TITLE:** The work of a teacher in a Title I preschool program.**D. STARTING DATE:** Upon IRB approval.**E. ESTIMATED COMPLETION DATE:** May 15, 2000**F. EXTERNAL FUNDING:** N/A**II. PROJECT OBJECTIVES:**

In a play-based preschool program, the teacher's role is one of facilitator, encouraging creative learning by providing a psychologically safe environment where problem finding and problem solving may be encouraged. Title I is a formula-grant program that awards funds to states, which in turn provide funds to school districts based on poverty. Students targeted by Title I include those who live in school areas where at least 35% of the children are from low-income families. Eligible students must be identified by the school as failing or most at risk of failing to meet the state's student performance standards on objective criteria established by the school district (U.S. Department of Education, 1993). Children who have developmental delays share many of the same characteristics as

children who are eligible for Title I services, including low text scores and poor classroom performance.

The purpose of this study is to understand how one early childhood educator uses a play-based curriculum in a Title I preschool classroom. The culture of the classroom will be studied through qualitative methods. The research question to be addressed through this study is as follows: How does a teacher utilize a play-based curriculum with young children in a Title I preschool program?

III. DESCRIPTION AND SOURCE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS:

For inclusion into this study, the teacher of the Title I classroom had to meet several criteria. The teacher was recommended by professor in the Human Development and Learning Department at the local university. This teacher has advanced education in the form of a Masters in Early Childhood Education and an undergraduate degree in Early Childhood Special Education. The teacher consistently uses a play-based curriculum in her classroom. The principal reports that the teacher successfully uses play in the education of young children. Lastly, the teacher must sign informed consent and be a willing participant in the research process.

The classroom for study has been chosen using a criterion based selection. The classroom selected will be a Title I classroom that includes four- and five-year-old children who are from low socioeconomic backgrounds and are considered to be environmentally at-risk. Several of the children in the classroom may also be considered developmentally delayed. There will be approximately twenty children in this classroom however, the census may be higher or lower. I want to avoid disrupting the life of the classroom and have chosen a setting in which adult visitors are a regular feature. The children and aides in the classroom must have informed consent to participate in the study. Parents and/or legal guardians will provide informed consent for the children.

IV. METHODS AND PROCEDURES:

Qualitative research methods have been chosen for this study so as to generate data rich in detail and embedded in context. The research design to be utilized is the case study. Case study is defined as "a detailed examination of one setting, or single subject depository of documents, or one particular event," (Merriam, 1988). Informed consent will be obtained from all participants before beginning the research process.

The focus of this study is the teacher, which will include the environment of her classroom and the curriculum she utilizes. In addition, the ways in which this teacher interacts with her students, the classroom aides, and the principal will be described and interpreted. There is no desire or intent to evaluate the work of the early childhood educator.

The purpose of this study will be explained to each adult participant and the parents/guardians of the child participants. The teacher will explain to the children about the researcher's inclusion in the classroom. The children will be told that the researcher is a visiting member in the class who will be taking notes on things that go on in the classroom. The children will be told that the researcher is trying to learn how teachers work with children. Participation in this study is voluntary. There is no incentive to participate in this study. Participants may stop participation at any time or refuse to

respond to specific questions. There will be no penalty to those who choose not to participate.

Observation. Observation will be the initial method of data collection for this case study. I plan to begin the research process at the beginning of September, 1998. The Title I program meets Monday through Friday from 8:00 A.M. until 1:30 P.M. I will observe in the classroom for a full day on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays. This frequency and amount of time will continue until I am comfortable with the classroom process. Expected completion of the observational process is January, 1999.

I will assume the role of observer. I will request entrance into the classroom from the teacher on each visit. I will interact with the teacher, children, and aides in a friendly, but unobtrusive manner. I will not teach, assist, or give advice to the teacher, aides, or children. I will take descriptive notes from the back of the classroom through the use of a field notebook. I will record notes on the setting, participants, and events. The field notes will be handwritten and then transcribed. Adult participants and the parents/guardians of the child participants will be given the opportunity to read the transcripts. They may make additions to the transcripts or note disagreements, if they so desire.

Interview. Since the teacher is the focus of this study, it is estimated that she will be interviewed 15 times. Other participants who are discovered to have an influence on the use of play-based curriculum in this classroom may be interviewed. Other participants will probably include the principal of the school and the classroom aides. Each interview will last from 30 to 60 minutes and will occur at a time and place agreed upon by the adult participants and researcher. Children will not be interviewed.

A list of initial interview questions for the teacher, principal, and classroom aide is attached. Interview questions will emerge through participant observations and the evolution of the study. Questions will be connected to observed behavior. Interviews will be tape recorded and transcribed by the researcher as quickly as possible. Participants will be given the opportunity to review and make changes in the typed transcripts if they feel their thoughts have not been accurately reflected through the descriptions.

Collection of documents. The teacher's organizational plans will be reviewed as documents. The children's portfolios of classroom work will also be reviewed. Organizational plans and the children's portfolios will be used in combination with field notes to describe the classroom activities and settings. The teacher will be asked to keep a written reflective journal on her feelings and interpretations of the events in her class. These types of documents will be used to plan interview questions for the teacher that will further explain the process she is experiencing in this classroom. Notes on these documents will be transcribed as quickly as possible by the researcher.

Data analysis. Data analysis will be ongoing. Field notes will be handwritten and interviews will be tape recorded. Notes on documents will be handwritten. The researcher will use a microcassette transcriber for the transcription of all interviews.

Analysis of field notes, interviews, and documents will be coded during data collection. Codes will be developed using Glaser's (1965) "grounded approach." Codes will emerge from participants' actions and interpretations. Interviews will be reread for codes that emerge as data collection evolves. Patterns and themes will be identified and given a code for the properties of each theme.

Matrices will be constructed from the data to identify patterns and trends. Interview questions will be developed to answer the questions that emerge. I will review the research process and themes with the faculty advisor and a qualitative research group in the Child and Family Studies Department.

This study will reflect the words and actions of the participants, but it will be filtered through the researcher's own perceptions. The words of the participants will be used to reflect the themes and ideas they represent. I will use the narrative style for presentation of the research. A statement of confidentiality that the members of the qualitative research group must sign has been included for IRB review.

V. SPECIFIC RISKS AND PROTECTION MEASURES

The identity of all participants will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. The consent forms will be stored in a locked file in Dr. Deborah Tegano's locked office in the Department of Child and Family Studies at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville for three years past completion of the study. Then the consent forms will be destroyed.

After transcription and analysis, data will be stored in a separate locked file in Dr. Deborah Tegano's locked office in the Department of Child and Family Studies at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Data will be kept for three years and then destroyed. Tapes and field notes will be destroyed after completion of transcription.

There are no anticipated risks to either the adult or child participants. The child participants will be observed, but not interviewed. The adult participants and parents/guardians will be given the opportunity to read and note disagreements with transcripts that they feel do not accurately reflect their actions. There is no invasive manipulation of the classroom environment. The only disruption to the daily classroom routine will be the presence of one observer. After several days, the participants probably will become acclimated to this change. If data reflect activities in the classroom that the teacher's colleagues may not agree with, then this may be a potential risk to the teacher.

All data will be kept confidential. The minimal risk of breach of confidentiality will be controlled through the consistent use of pseudonyms for names and locations in all written materials. All data will be stored in a locked drawer in a locked office, separated from the consent forms. The data will be used for research purposes only and no names will be associated with any published findings. Data will be prepared in manuscript format and may be published in professional journals. The data may be presented at professional meetings.

In the event that a child's parents/guardians do not give informed consent, the child will continue to participate in the classroom as planned. The child's education will not be affected though lack of participation in this study. If the child does not have consent, no notes will be taken on that child's actions.

VI. BENEFITS

The primary benefit of participation in this study is the opportunity to contribute to the body of knowledge on the use of play in early childhood education. From this research study I want to develop a greater understanding of how one teacher uses play to educate young children in a Title I classroom. The techniques and skills that I identify as helping these children to learn will be useful for other teachers who are working under similar

conditions. To improve the practice of early childhood educators, research needs to emphasize the context within which the activities studied occur. Research must also examine the meanings of studied activities for the participants. Qualitative research methods meet these needs.

VII. METHODS FOR OBTAINING "INFORMED CONSENT" FROM PARTICIPANTS

Use of a written consent document will be used to obtain informed consent from the teacher, principal, classroom aides, and parents or authorized legal guardians of the children. The informed consent form has been attached for IRB review. The informed consent will be orally described and interpreted for all adult participants and the children's parents/guardians during a mandatory parent/teacher meeting at the school. The principal and teacher's assistant will be present. Any parent or guardian who can not attend the meeting will be given an explanation of the informed consent form during school pick up or drop off. For a child to participate in the Title I preschool program, parents are required to drop off and pick up their children from school. The parents/guardians of new children who come into the classroom after the study begins will be given the consent form and a thorough explanation of its contents by the researcher during this drop off or pick up time. The teacher, principal, classroom aides, and parents/guardians will be asked to read and sign the statement of informed consent. An extra copy of the informed consent form will be provided for the participants' use and information.

Child assent will be obtained through verbal report. The classroom teacher will tell all of the children that the researcher is going to be a visiting member of the classroom for the next 4 to 5 months. The teacher will explain how the researcher will be taking notes and learning about how a teacher works with young children. The children will then be asked to inform the teacher if they do not want to be a part of the learning process. The children will also be told that they may withdraw from this process at any time, by telling their teacher that they no longer wish to participate.

VIII. QUALIFICATIONS OF THE INVESTIGATOR(S)

The principal investigator is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Child and Family Studies. The investigator is a registered and licensed occupational therapist in the state of Tennessee, with eight years of experience in the evaluation and treatment of pediatric clients. The investigator is also an assistant professor in the Occupational Therapy Department at Milligan College in Milligan, Tennessee. The faculty advisor, Dr. Deborah Tegano, is an associate professor in the Department of Child and Family Studies at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville. She has directed graduate research studies for 15 years, and has conducted many studies of young children.

XI. FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT TO BE USED IN THE RESEARCH

Research will be completed in the Title I preschool classroom in the Mountain View School in Johnson City, Tennessee. The letter of permission from authorized officials in the Johnson City School System is enclosed.

X. RESPONSIBILITY OF THE PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

By compliance with the policies established by the Institutional Review Board of The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, the principal investigator subscribes to the principles stated in "The Belmont Report" and standards of professional ethics in all

research, development, and related activities involving human subjects under the auspices of The University of Tennessee, Knoxville. The principal investigator further agrees that:

- a. Approval will be obtained from the Institutional Review Board prior to instituting any change in this research project.
- b. Development of any unexpected risks will be immediately reported to the Compliance's Section.
- c. An annual review and progress report (Form R) will be completed and submitted when requested by the Institutional Review Board.
- d. Signed informed consent documents will be kept for the duration of the project for at least three years thereafter at a location approved by the Institutional Review Board.

XI. SIGNATURES

Principal Investigator

(Name)

(Signature)

(Date)

Faculty Advisor

(Name)

(Signature)

(Date)

XII. DEPARTMENT REVIEW AND APPROVAL:

The application described above has been reviewed by the IRB departmental review committee and has been approved. The DRC further recommends that this application be reviewed as:

() Expedited Review—Category(ies): _____
or () Full IRB Review
Chair, DRC

(Name)

(Signature)

(Date)

Department Head

(Name)

(Signature)

(Date)

Protocol sent to Compliance Section for final approval on (Date) _____

**Approved: Compliance Section
Office of Research
404 Andy Holt Tower**

Signature_____ **Date**_____

**The Work of a Teacher in a Title I Preschool Program
Research Group Confidentiality Form**

I understand that this research involves working with participants whose confidentiality must be respected. My signature below indicates that I will not discuss data from these transcripts outside of this research group and will in every way protect the confidentiality of the participants.

Name (Print)_____

Signature_____

Date_____

Informed Consent Form For Teacher
The Work of a Teacher in a Title I Preschool Program

Please read the following information, sign, and return one copy to Christy Gamble. Please retain the other copy for your own information.

You are invited to participate in a research study. Please consider the following information:

1. The purpose of this study is to understand how a teacher works with preschool children in a Title I classroom. The primary goal of this study is to develop an understanding of the teaching process. Your work will not be evaluated. Your input is very important.
2. As a participant, you will be observed in your classroom or workplace, three days a week for 4 to 5 months. Notes will be taken so as to capture your words and actions. You will also be asked to take part in approximately 15 informal interviews. Each interview will last no more than one hour and will be held at a mutually agreed upon location. Your principal and classroom aides will also be interviewed. They will be asked about their perception of your use of a play-based curriculum in a Title I preschool program. The interviews will be audiotaped. You will be asked to keep a written journal on your daily classroom activities. The journal entries will be reviewed by the researcher and notes will be taken. Both the notes and the audiotapes will be transcribed by the researcher. You will be given an opportunity to read and make changes in the transcripts if there are inaccuracies.
3. After transcription and analysis, the tapes and field notes will be destroyed. The data will be stored in a locked file in a locked office. The data will be kept for three years and then destroyed.
4. Your identity will be kept totally confidential through the use of pseudonyms. The consent form will be stored in a separate locked file in a locked office for three years past completion of the study. Then the consent forms will also be destroyed.
5. There are little anticipated risks involved in your participation in this study. There is potential risk if the data reflects actions in the classroom that your colleagues may disagree with. You will not receive any direct benefits from participation, but the results will be used to help develop a better understanding of the practices of teachers in Title I preschool classrooms.
6. Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be returned to you or destroyed, per your request.
7. All data are confidential. Data will be used for research purposes. Data will be prepared in manuscript format and may be published in peer reviewed professional journals. The data may also be presented in professional meetings.
8. You may contact the following persons if you have any further questions or concerns about the project or participation in it.

Christy Gamble
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 College of Human Ecology
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 gamble@greene.xtn.net

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 (423) 974-4538
 dwTegano@utk.edu

Your signature below indicates that you have read the above information, agree to participate in this study, and have received a copy of this form.

Participant's Name (print) _____

Participant's Signature _____

Date _____

**Informed Consent Form for Adult Participants
The Work of a Teacher in a Title I Preschool Program**

Please read the following information, sign, and return one copy to Christy Gamble. Please retain the other copy for your own information.

You are invited to participate in a research study. Please consider the following information:

1. The purpose of this study is to understand how a teacher works with preschool children in a Title I classroom. The primary goal of this study is to develop an understanding of the process. Your work will not be evaluated. Your input is very important.
2. You will be observed in your classroom or workplace on three days a week for 4 to 5 months. Notes will be taken so as to capture your words and actions. You will be asked to take part in 1 to 2 informal interviews. Each interview will last no more than one hour and will be held at a mutually agreed upon location. The interview will be audiotaped. Both the notes and the audiotapes will be transcribed by the researcher. You will be given an opportunity to read and make changes in the transcripts if there are inaccuracies.
3. After transcription and analysis, the tapes will be destroyed. Data will be stored in a locked file in a locked office. Data will be stored for three years and then destroyed.
4. Your identity will be kept totally confidential through the use of pseudonyms. The consent forms will be stored in a separate locked file in a locked office for three years past completion of the study. Then the consent forms will also be destroyed.
5. There are little or no anticipated risks involved in your participation in this study. You will not receive any direct benefits from participation, but the results will be used to help develop a better understanding of the practices of teachers in Title I preschool classrooms.
6. Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be returned to you or destroyed, upon your request.
7. All data are confidential. The data will be used for research purposes. Data will be prepared in manuscript format and may be published in peer reviewed professional journals. The data may also be presented in professional meetings.
8. You may contact the following persons if you have any further questions or concerns about the project or participation in it.

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Your signature below indicates that you have read the above information, agree to participate in this study, and have received a copy of this form.

Participant's Name (PRINT) _____

Participant's Signature _____

Date _____

August 31, 1998

Dear Parents or Legal Guardians,

As a doctoral candidate in Child Development at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, I am interested in the ways that teachers use play to work with children in Title I preschool programs. In an effort to further understand this process, I am conducting research that will describe how one teacher works in a Title I classroom.

To complete this project, I will be observing in your child's preschool classroom at Mountain View School. The teacher will tell all the children that I am a visiting member of the classroom, who is taking notes and learning about how a teacher works with children. Your child will be observed as he or she interacts with the teacher and participates in regular classroom activities.

I will be in your child's classroom, three days a week for 4 to 5 months. I will only take notes on your child's interactions with the teacher if you give consent for your child to participate in this study. If you give consent, I may also take notes on your child's classroom work such as paintings or writings. Your child will be given a false name and all locations in the study will be given false names. This will help to prevent your child from being identified.

The focus of this study is on the teacher, not the children. However, your child's participation in this study is very important. All the information gathered in this study will be kept confidential and will be used for research purposes only. There are little or no anticipated risks to your child. You or your child may choose to withdraw from this study at any time with no affect on your child's regular school participation.

If you give permission for your child to participate in this project, please sign the attached consent form and return it to your child's teacher. Thank you for your cooperation. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Christy Gamble

**Informed Consent Form For Parents/Legal Guardians of Children
The Work of a Teacher in a Title I Preschool Program**

Please read the following information, sign, and return one copy to Christy Gamble. Please keep the other copy for your information.

Your child is invited to participate in a research study. Please think about the following information:

- 1) The purpose of this study is to understand how a teacher works with preschool children in a Title I classroom. The main goal of this study is to develop an understanding of this process. Your child will not be judged. Your child's participation in this study is very important.
- 2) Your child will be observed in the classroom and during school activities three days a week for 4 to 5 months. If you give permission, notes will be taken so that the researcher can understand how the teacher works with your child in the classroom. The researcher may also review and take notes on your child's classroom work. The notes that have been taken will be transcribed. You will be given an opportunity to read and note any disagreements that you may have with the transcripts.
- 3) After transcription and analysis, the notes will be destroyed. The data will be stored in a locked file in locked office. The data will be kept for three years and then destroyed.
- 4) Your child's identity will be kept completely secret. A false name will be consistently used for your child's name and locations in all written work. All permission forms will be stored in a separate locked file in a locked office for three years past completion of the study. Then the permission forms will also be destroyed.
- 5) There are no anticipated risks to your child from his or her participation in this study. Your child will be observed, and his or her education will not be hindered in any way. Your child will not receive any direct benefits from participation, but the results of this study will be used to help develop a better understanding of the practices of teachers in Title I preschool classrooms.
- 6) Your child's participation in this study is voluntary. If you allow your child to participate, you may take your child out of the study or your child can remove him or herself from the study at any time without any punishment or loss of benefits to your child. If you take your child out of the study before data collection is completed, the notes on your child's classroom activities will be returned to you or destroyed, per your request.
- 7) All data are secret. Data will be used for research purposes. Data will be prepared in writing and may be published in professional journals. The research may also be presented in professional meetings.
- 8) You may contact the following persons if you have any further questions or concerns about the project or your child's participation in it.

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Your signature below shows that you have read the above information, give permission for your child to participate in this study under these circumstances, and have received a copy of this form.

Child's Name (PRINT) _____

Parent/Guardian's Name (PRINT) _____

Parent/Guardian's Signature _____

Date _____

Appendix B

Proposed Initial Interview Questions

Teacher's Questions

1. Tell me about the purpose of Title I preschool programs.
2. What do you think is the purpose of play for children with developmental delays?
3. What do you think is the purpose of play for children from low socioeconomic environments?
4. What do you think is the purpose of play for typically developing children?
5. How do you encourage appropriate play in your classroom?
6. How do you set up the classroom environment?
7. What types of centers do you find encourage play in your children?
8. What does a play-based curriculum mean to you?
9. Do you utilize play tutoring with children in your class?
10. Do you use different methods of teaching for different children?
11. Do you consider your program to be consistent with the guidelines for developmentally appropriate practice (DAP)?
12. Tell me about your relationship with the principal of your school.
13. Tell me about your relationship with the classroom aide.
14. Tell me about your relationship with the children in your class.

Principal's Questions

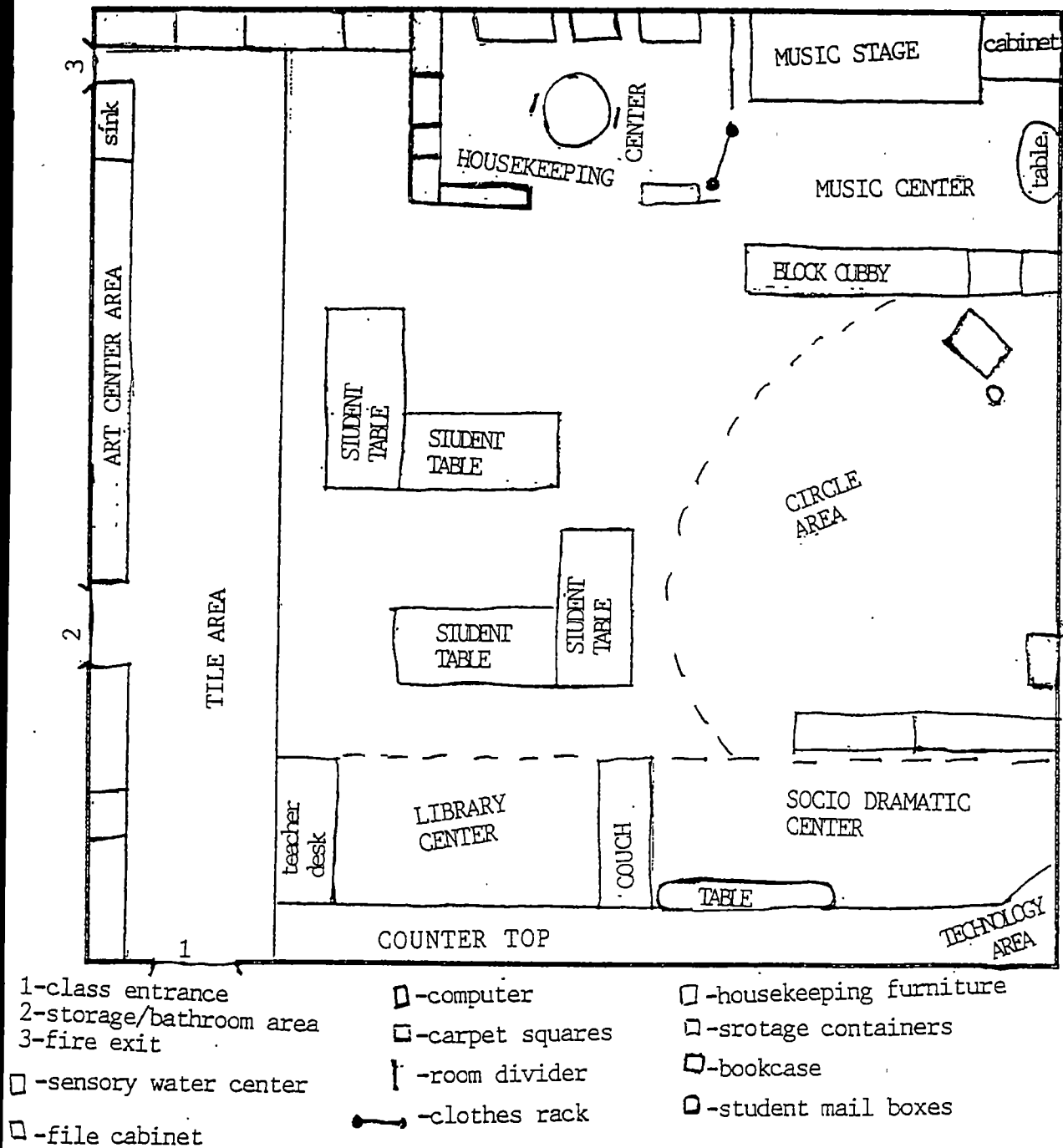
1. Tell me about the funding you receive for your Title I preschool program.
2. What is the primary purpose of Title I funding?
3. What is the main goal of your Title I program?
4. What procedure did you follow to obtain federal funding?
5. What population of children do you serve at your school?
6. How did you select the teacher for the Title I preschool program?
7. How would characterize the teacher's style of teaching?
8. How would you describe the teacher's skill level?
9. What do you think is the role of play in a Title I preschool program?
10. Tell me about your relationship with the teacher.
11. What role do you play in the process of educating young children in this Title I classroom?

Classroom Aide's Questions

1. Tell me about your relationship with the teacher.
2. Tell me about your relationship with the children in your class.
3. What are your roles in this classroom?
4. Have you been trained in specific techniques to use with the children in this classroom?
5. If so, Please describe some of these techniques.
6. Who trained you in these techniques?
7. How do you feel about the use of play in your classroom?
8. How do you encourage play behaviors in the children in your classroom?

Appendix C Classroom Sketch

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Appendix D Preschool Report Card

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Preschool

Student
Teacher
Room
Address

Aesthetic Development	
Expresses ideas through art	
Shows an appreciation for art	
Engages in creative alternate activities	
Builds a three dimensional structure	

Skills Code	
Mastered	☒
Checked, but not mastered	☒
Not checked	☐

Development	Reporting Periods				
	2	3	4	5	6
Respects rights of others					
Self-control					
Responsibility for own behavior					
Reactions					
Initiatively					
Materials and equipment property					
Care of personal items					
Comes willingly					
Participates appropriately in group activities					
Helps others					
Completes tasks and works independently					
Follows classroom, playground, and school rules					
Talks about self and abilities					
Knows name					

Mathematics	
Matches shapes	
Names shapes	
Understands position words	
Counts orally to 20	
Represents a given number with objects	
Names numerals:	
0 1 2 3 4 5	
6 7 8 9 10	
Copies patterns of two or three objects	
Identifies longer and shorter	
Identifies small, medium, large	
Identifies same and different	
Selects heaviest object	
Sorts like objects	

Language Arts	
Shows interest in books	
Retells familiar stories	
Matches letters	
Sings alphabet	
Recognizes difference between letters and numerals	
Recognizes upper case letters:	
A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z	
Follows two-step directions	
Asks questions	
Identifies colors (red, blue, yellow, green, purple, black, brown, white, orange)	
Participates orally in songs, finger plays, stories	
Recognizes first name	
Prints letters at random	
Prints first name	
Attempts to copy numbers or letters	

Motor Skills: Fine	
Small muscle skills: manipulatives	☐
Cuts	☐
Glues	☐
Colors	☐
Draws	☐
Paints	☐
Puzzles	☐
Scissors/outlines shapes/patterns	☐

Motor Skills: Gross	
Develops large muscle skills:	
Jumps	☐
Hops	☐
Balances	☐
Gallops	☐
Throws with direction	☐
Runs smoothly	☐

Appendix E Personal Reflections

As I wrote this dissertation, it became more and more apparent how my own beliefs influenced Denise's story. Throughout the process I kept personal memos to keep my biases in check. But in the end, this was my research study. Therefore, I felt I should reveal some of my own feelings about the qualitative process.

Firstly, I was and still am passionate about the children in Denise's classroom. After the first day, I found that I couldn't help myself from interacting with them, no matter how I tried. I consciously attempted to sit or stand in the back of the room. But, by the third week, children were coming to me for hugs, to tie their shoes, to show me their best "work," and to solve their problems. In most instances I did not intervene, but rather, redirected. I always felt that in some unconscious way these children knew that I was open to them. No matter what the reason, I am aware that my presence must have influenced the children's and Denise's actions.

Another pertinent point to make is that I liked Denise. On another day, in another place, I think we would have been friends. This, of course, was impossible under the circumstances surrounding the research process. I felt a constant struggle not to reveal too much about myself. I also found myself feeling guilty that I was learning so much about her personal and professional life, while I was responding with so little about myself. The biggest comfort was knowing that Denise was very proud to be part of this research process. If this study touches one teacher, then both Denise and I will be gratified.

I began the research study with the belief that a play-based approach could be utilized with children in a Title I preschool program. Yet, I did not know how this could

be done. So, I searched for understanding. I was open to Denise's approach. I was like a sponge, quickly soaking in as much as I could at once. I often felt overwhelmed and I feared I would never get everything down on paper.

My initial shock that Denise interwove some "traditional" practices into her pedagogical tapestry was later tempered. I found that the classroom environment and her interactions with the children were overwhelmingly child-centered and play-based. I also learned that Denise had made the conscious decision to use these principles for what she believed to be the good of the children. By the end of my participation in the classroom, I saw that a play-based curriculum can fit the needs of every child in the classroom. It was as though her way of thinking had slipped in through osmosis. I even thought that I knew why she was doing the things she did.

One of the most difficult aspects of the research process was withdrawing from the classroom. Eventually, I did wean myself from Denise and the children, but I still long to go back. This process was undoubtedly the best learning experience of my life. None of the doctoral classes prepared me for the joy I would feel when themes emerged or the words easily flowed onto the paper. The biggest reward was when it all began to make sense.

Vita

Christy Isbell Gamble was born on September 22, 1969 in Greeneville, Tennessee. She was raised by her parents, William and Rebecca Isbell. She has one younger brother, Marty. She attended school in the Greeneville City School System from kindergarten through high school. As a child, she enjoyed playing golf, tennis, soccer, basketball, and swimming.

After graduating from Greeneville High School, she attended East Tennessee State University in Johnson City, Tennessee. There she completed her pre-requisites for occupational therapy. She then attended the Medical University of South Carolina in Charleston. She graduated with a Bachelors of Science in Occupational Therapy in 1991. For the past eight years she has worked in the specialty area of pediatrics including a Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, Pediatric Intensive Care Unit, early intervention programs, developmental evaluation centers, school systems, and private practice. While working as an occupational therapist, Christy completed her Masters in Health Science at the Medical University of South Carolina.

In April 1995, Christy married Dr. James W. Gamble, Jr. and soon afterward they relocated to East Tennessee. Christy entered the doctoral program in the Child and Family Studies Department at The University of Tennessee, Knoxville in the Fall of 1996. She began an assistant professorship in the Occupational Therapy Graduate Program at Milligan College in Milligan, Tennessee in the Fall of 1998. She graduated with her Ph.D. from The University of Tennessee, Knoxville in August of 1999.