The Relationship Between Teachers’ Beliefs and Observed Practices: The Voices of Two Head Start Teachers

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I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Stephani Michelle Phelps entitled "The Relationship Between Teachers' Beliefs and Observed Practices: The Voices of Two Head Start Teachers." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, with a major in Child and Family Studies.

Mary Jane Moran, Major Professor

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Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)
The Relationship Between Teachers’ Beliefs and Observed Practices: The Voices of Two Head Start Teachers

A Thesis Presented for the
Master of Science
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Stephani Michelle Phelps
August 2016
Abstract

This study examined Head Start teachers’ interactions with children in relation to teachers’ beliefs about decision making and roles in various classroom activities. The purposes of this study were to (a) document preschool teachers’ verbal interactions with children and (b) explore the relationship between teachers’ beliefs and their classroom practices. Participants were from two Head Start classrooms in East Tennessee, which included two teachers and 40 children ranging in age from 3-5 years. Approximately two hours of focal child observations were completed for each child over the course of 7 months. Observations captured teachers’ interactions with focal children. Two semi-structured interviews with teachers were completed to gain insight into their beliefs and perceptions about their decision making and classroom roles. The qualitative findings indicate that both teachers’ held similar child-centered beliefs. The quantitative findings revealed specific observed practices that illuminated their reported personal beliefs. Implications for future research and practice include (a) the value of a focal-child and interview methodology for investigating the relationship of teachers’ beliefs and practice; and (b) the value of examining teachers’ personal-practical knowledge for understanding the linkages between teachers’ pedagogical and relational knowledge.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Today, more pressure is being placed upon educators to begin with formal learning as early as possible. In the United States (Miller & Almon, 2009; Nicolopoulou, 2010), this position is well observed. As a result, time for playing and the level of teacher engagement in play is diminishing or being replaced by more structured activities. Munn (2010) stated that the strain between play and learning is a product of the way the discourse about early childhood education is rooted in the societal discourse. In this way, play and learning are constructed as counterparts.

Within the early childhood education field, play has been long recognized as the quintessential way toward learning and development (Bjorklund, 2007; Hannikainen, Singer, & Van Oers, 2013; Sutton-Smith, 1997). Adult interactions and engagement in children’s play function as important practices for stimulating children’s learning and fostering development (Pelligrini, Dupuis, & Smith, 2007; Rogoff, 1990, 2003). Although theories of best practices in early childhood education emphasize that teachers should take an active, involved role while children are playing, not all educators assume this role while engaging with children.

The decisions teachers make are based, in part, on their beliefs, which are informed by education, personal values, and experiences (Vartuli, 2005). Teachers’ beliefs are often unspoken, yet influence their perceptions, roles, classroom environments, interactions with children, and decisions about classroom practices (Vartuli, 2005). Beliefs vary and often influence teachers’ decision-making and roles.
across various classroom activities, including play. A focus on both teachers’ beliefs and teachers’ practices during interactions with children may shed further light on how beliefs function as a foundation for classroom decision-making (Clark & Peterson, 1986; Fang, 1996). This focus may also help define the stigma that play and learning are separate entities. This perspective is based on the assumption that beliefs are the best markers of the decisions individuals make throughout their lives (Bandura, 1977, 1986; Dewey, 1933).

**Purpose of the Study**

This study seeks to examine teachers’ interactions with preschool children in relation to teachers’ beliefs and perceptions about decision-making and roles in the classroom. The purposes of this study are to (a) document teachers’ verbal interactions with preschool children and (b) explore the relationship between teachers’ beliefs and their classroom practices. This study utilizes multiple methods, to quantitatively examine teachers’ practice using focal-child observations, and qualitatively, explore teachers’ beliefs through semi-structured interviews. The quantitative data are part of a larger study looking at all social partners’ (i.e., teachers and peers) interactions with child participants (i.e., focal child). For the purposes of this study, data regarding focal-children’s experiences with teachers were used.

The focal child data provide examples of ways teachers verbally engage and interact with children. The teacher interview data are used to better understand what informs teachers’ decisions about the ways in which they engage with children. To this end, I pose the following questions to guide my research:
1) How do teachers verbally engage children during classroom activities as indicated when using a focal-child protocol?

2) In what ways do teachers’ reported beliefs influence their classroom practice?

It is hypothesized that teachers’ practice will reflect teachers’ reported beliefs. Specifically, if teachers have a child-centered orientation it is hypothesized their practices will reflect that orientation through the implementation of practices such as: engaging in social conversations with children, recasting children’s behavior to correct, expand, or question children’s input to gain understanding, accepting the child’s input, taking the child’s perspective, referring children to other social partners, and following children’s lead. If teachers embrace a more top-down, teacher lead perspective, it is hypothesized their practices will mirror their orientation with practices such as: giving directions, using basic and deep level questions, providing explanations, offering feedback, and correcting off task or inappropriate behaviors.

**Significance of the Study**

This study is significant for three reasons. First, ample amount of research supports the importance of program and teacher quality in early childhood education with implications for young children’s development (e.g., NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2002, 2004, 2005; Smilansky & Gootman, 2003). However, targeted investigations of teachers’ underlying beliefs and contextual explorations of their practices are scant. To date, most of the research on the belief-practice relationship has been based largely on surveys with less on observations (Wilcox-Herzog, 2002). Second,
a majority of research on teachers’ beliefs and practices has been focused on kindergarten or elementary-age children (McCarthy, Abbott-Shim, & Lambert, 2001), as well as, topics surrounding developmentally appropriate practice (Charlesworth, Hart, Burts, & DeWolf, 1993; Charlesworth, Hart, Burts, & Hernandez, 1991; Dunn & Kontos, 1997; Hyson, Hirsh-Pasek, & Rescorla, 1990; Rentzou & Sakellariou, 2010; Sakellariou & Rentzou, 2012; Zeng & Seng, 2005). This study seeks to fill these gaps in the literature by conducting naturalistic observations and include interviews of preschool teachers. Given the recent national policy focus on early care and education, and given the increased availability of preschool programs, including state-funded pre-K and federally funded Head Start programs, an examination of the beliefs and practices of preschool teachers has important implications for improving the quality of education offered by early education programs. Third, the current study has the potential to provide insights into early childhood teacher preparation and professional development, as well as program development for federally funded Head Start programs.

The current study is rooted in Lev Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory to understand teacher practice as experienced by children and how teachers’ beliefs influence their classroom practice. The benchmark of this theory supports the importance of children’s engagement with social partners, more specifically, the role teachers’ play in fostering learning through various practices such as scaffolding (Vygotsky, 1978a, 1978b, 1981) and guided participation (Rogoff, 1990, 2003). This framework will provide a critical perspective as teachers’ verbal interactions with children are examined in relation to teachers’ beliefs. In the next chapter, the theoretical perspectives used in this study will
be discussed as well as relevant research related to pedagogy and teacher beliefs that informed this study. In Chapter III, a description of the methodology sets the stage for this study. Following, Chapter IV includes the study’s findings, organized in two sections that clearly illustrate both the quantitative and qualitative findings. The thesis will end with a discussion that concludes study limitations and implications for future research and practice.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

Within the field of early childhood education many tenets of teacher practices have proven to be sufficient indicators of quality education. Some of these practices include what teachers say and do with children (Wilcox-Herzog & Kontos, 1998). Teachers’ decisions on how to interact and engage with children are informed by teachers’ beliefs about what they should and should not do (Vartuli, 2005). To introduce this study, Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory is discussed as a framework linking theory to teacher practice. Relevant literature on teachers’ practices and beliefs across activities are also discussed, followed by the current educational landscape of Head Start Programs in East Tennessee.

Theoretical Perspective

This study was situated in a conceptual framework that places the development of teachers’ beliefs and children’s learning in context, with bidirectional influences between the individual and the environment, including social partners with whom they interact. Specifically, sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1981) provided the theoretical foundation for exploring this study’s questions and was significant for two reasons. First, this theory sheds light on the importance of children’s interactions and experiences with social partners as they co-construct knowledge together. Secondly, this theory supports that the connection between an individual (e.g., teachers) and the societal context, creates a “dialectic relationship” (Vygotsky, 1978a, 1978b, 1981; Van Huizen, Van Oers, & Wubbels, 2005), which influences the individual on multiple levels through interactions.
with people, materials, and tools. Given the twofold importance of the sociocultural theory for this study, this theoretical orientation will be used to support the focal-child observations, including all the variables and their significance on children’s’ learning, as well as the development and significance of teachers’ beliefs about their practice.

The sociocultural theory highlights that children learn and develop in social interaction with others. Social exchanges, reciprocal conversations, and collaborative activities with more experienced social partners help children develop skills, master activities, and reason in ways that are meaningful to society’s culture (Berk, 2008). A well-known concept of Vygotsky’s theory, the zone of proximal development (ZPD), affirms the critical role that adults and more experienced peers play in advancing children’s learning and development. Vygotsky (1978a) defined the ZPD as the “distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 86). The definition of the ZPD embraces the notion that learning is clearly reciprocal (Trudge & Scrimsher, 2003).

As the sociocultural perspective establishes a reciprocal, co-construction of knowledge with others, the perspective also provides a unique cultural outlook on teaching and learning. In the classroom, teaching and learning take place under differing cultural circumstances and in differing contexts, contributing to a contextualized rather than a universalistic theory of development (Vygotsky, 1978a, 1978b, 1981). This highlights the importance that both teachers and children bring experiences, histories, interests, abilities, and much more into the classroom, creating a rich and diverse
classroom community. It is in such communities that relationships are formed and interactions take place. Teachers’ practices and interactions with children are not universal, but in fact, a product of their classroom communities and personally and pedagogically developed perceptions and beliefs.

**Theory to Practice**

Teachers’ roles and levels of involvement in children’s play are supported by key tenets of socio-cultural theory. Vygotsky believed that adults play episodes with children can aide children’s acquisition of cultural norms and tools through collaboration and joint engagement in activity (Bodrova & Leong, 2007; Vygotsky, 1978a, 1978b). While the sociocultural theory stresses play as a leading activity for preschool children that facilitates meaningful and higher levels of learning (van Oers, 2003, 2010; Vygotsky, 1978a, 1978b), it is also recognized that a teacher’s role in supporting children’s play is multifaceted (Winsler, 2003; Wood & Bennett, 1997; Kontos, 1999; Kontos, Burchinal, Howes, Wisseh, & Galinsky, 2002).

Related to the ZPD is the practice of ‘scaffolding’, the instructional strategies implemented by teachers that support and extend children’s learning (Pentimonti & Justice, 2010; Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976). Scaffolding was first described by Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976) as an “adult controlling those elements of the task that are essentially beyond the learner’s capacity, thus permitting him to concentrate upon and complete only those elements that are within his range of competence” (p. 9). Assisting the child to bridge the gap between what can be done independently and done with support depends on the resources and the kinds of support provided.
Barbara Rogoff (1990) developed the concept of *guided participation* to suggest that both guidance and participation in activities are critical to children’s apprenticeship. Guided participation is a process in which caregivers and children collaborate in arrangements and interactions to support children in learning to manage more advanced skills and understanding (Rogoff, 1990, 2003). Underlying the process of guided participation is *intersubjectivity*, which is attained when the adult and child, or child:child collaboratively redefine the task so that there is combined ownership and shared understanding (Puntambekar & Hubscher, 2005; Rogoff 1990). Children and their social partners are viewed as interdependent rather than independent.

Research (e.g. Dickinson & Porche, 2011; Justice, Petsher, Schatshneider, Mashburn, 2011) has stressed the significance of scaffolding practices in assisting children to reach their academic and social potentials. For example, research regarding children’s language development (e.g. Girolametto & Weitzman, 2002; Turnbull, Anthony, Justice, Bowles, 2009) has identified multiple responsive strategies that teachers utilize when scaffolding children’s language development, which include: expanding and extending children’s ideas, asking deep level questions, and adding cognitively challenging responses. For this reason, the observations or quantitative variables of interest were developed to explore the way in which teachers guide focal-children’s learning (pp. 41).

**Teacher Practice**

Preschool is viewed as an important opportunity to foster skills and development and to promote children’s school readiness (Duncan, 2011; Reynolds, Temple,
Robertson, & Mann, 2001). In the U. S., federally funded programs, like Head Start, are created to support children from low-income families in attaining school readiness. Research has stressed the importance of children’s early development of skills and competencies for later academic success, including developing social skills, forming relationships, utilizing self-regulation, and language development (Blair, 2002; Burchinal, Peisner-Feiberg, Pianta, & Howes, 2002; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Ladd, 2005; Wasik, Bond, & Hindman, 2006). Over recent years, it has been established that these important school readiness competencies develop within interactions with adults, peers, and materials (Downer, Booren, Lima, Lucker, & Pianta, 2010; Ladd 2005; Pianta & Walsh, 1996).

Understanding that opportunities for experiences and positive interactions are foundational to furthering children’s development and learning, Head Start programs assert to make these aspects an important measure of overall classroom quality. Research has documented that teacher-child interactions occur effortlessly and frequently in many activities across the preschool day, including circle time, meal time, and play time (Cote, 2001; Gest, Holland-Coviello, Welsh, Eicher-Catt, & Gill, 2006), creating chances for teachers to involve themselves with children in conversation and interactions. Many studies documenting children’s engagement with teachers are typically conducted from the child’s perspective. However, Layzer, Goodson, & Moss (1993) found that, from the teacher’s perspective, teachers spend 70% of their time engaged with children in some way. Erwin, Carpenter, & Kontos (1993) found similar results, with teachers in direct involvement with children 72% of the time.
Some research has determined the ways in which children’s interactions with teachers and peers vary across classroom activities. For example, children interact more frequently with teachers during teacher-led contexts like large group and small group activities (Pianta, Howes, Burchinal, Bryant, Clifford, Early, & Barbarian, 2005; Layzer et al., 1993). Looking at peer interactions, children spend a significantly greater time interacting with peers during free play activities than any other activity (Innocenti, Stowitschek, Rule, Killoran, Striefel, Boswell, 1986; Odom & Peterson, 1990). This can be explained by the fact teachers are outnumbered by children and from the child’s perspective it is portrayed that teachers are not involved with individual children (Kontos, 1999). One might also argue that children do not need teachers because they have their peers to interact and engage with (Booth-Laforce, Rubin, Rose-Kransor, & Burgess, 2005; Fantuzzo, Sekino, & Cohen, 2004; Mathur & Berndt, 2006). While there is a significant amount of research on teacher-child interactions in a ‘typical’ preschool day (Booren & Downer, & Vitiello; 2012; Cabell, DeCoste, LoCasale-Crouch, Hamre, & Pianta, 2012; Erwin, et al., 1993; Layzer, et al., 1993), and research acknowledging the confounds that inhibit teachers’ engagement with individual children (Kontos, 1999), there is little research examining teachers’ interactions with children in relation to teachers’ beliefs about their roles in the classroom.

**Teachers’ engagement with children during play activities.** Play is an important experience for young children. Early childhood education is supported by a well recognized tradition that regards play as essential to young children’s learning and development (Bruce, 1987; Anning, 1997; Berkhout, Bakkers, Hoekman, Goorhuis-
Brouwer, 2013). Through play, children interact and engage with the world around them, which includes people and things (Ginsburg, 2009). Play enables children to ‘sample’ their environments and develop innovative behaviors, compared to more formal learning methods where children typically replicate existing practices (Pellegrini, et al., 2007). Play functions to enhance learning and development (Kendrick, 2005; Lofdahl, 2005; Rowe, 2008), specifically fostering social-emotional, cognitive, and physical development that cannot be acquired through formal instruction (Pehlivan, 2005).

Pellegrini and others (2007) note that the behaviors generated through play can be more advanced and allow for further practice of newly developed behaviors.

While children’s play may encompass many learning opportunities, there is some doubt that children will not learn what they need to know to meet academic standards through play. Providing opportunities for children that are thought out and well planned increases the chance that they will learn through play (Morrison, 2014; Zigler, Singer, & Bishop-Josef, 2004). In fact, Wood and Bennett (1997) found that through focus groups and individual interviews each teacher held personal theories about play and its relationship to learning. They found that teachers revealed five major themes that clearly linked play to learning and include: children’s interests and ideas are central to play; children intuitively know what they need and meet those needs through play; play is natural; play enables children to explore and experiment; children cannot fail; and children develop language and social skills. The teachers viewed their roles in play as: provider, observer, and participant (Wood & Bennett, 1997). Similarly, other research
found teachers’ role in play as play managers and play enhancers (Kontos, 1999; Kontos, et al., 2002).

In the U.S., culture is produced for children primarily by adults (Mouritsen, 1998). This is represented through the institutional world. This adult-derived culture is intended to socialize children in the qualities that are believed to be socially desirable and prepares children. Viewing teachers as providers or play managers (Wood & Bennett, 1997) within the play context, teachers are believed to be the creators of a stimulating environment. Teachers as play managers provide detailed planning and produce an intentionally rich environment that is open-ended, linked to a current topic, and arranged in appealing learning centers (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1993; Laevers, 2005; Moore, 1986). Teachers as providers during play were planning for possibilities (Wood & Bennett, 1997). Teachers’ roles as observers were significant for assessment and interpretation of children’s learning. Lastly, teachers as play participants (Wood & Bennett, 1997) or enhancers (Kontos, 1999) exposed some differences between their typical didactic roles and as they were seen as collaborators with children. Teachers were directly engaged with children’s play (Robson & Rowe, 2012). Teachers can enhance play engagement by directing attention to novelty and interacting in a responsive and reciprocal way (Durden & Dangel, 2008; Musatti, & Mayer, 2011; Rimm-Kaufman, Voorhees, Snell, & La Paro, 2003).

Teachers’ direct involvement in play may also have a negative impact on children’s engagement. For example, teachers have been found to shape play activities toward more structure, take over the control of play and children’s initiatives (Trawick-
Some researchers point out that teachers need to find a middle ground between their level of engagement and their perceptions of how much and what kind of support children need to continue to learn (Trawick-Smith & Dziurgot, 2011).

Teacher involvement in children’s play has been a controversial issue in the U. S. Until the 1960’s most teachers believed they should not interfere in children’s play (Johnson, Christie, & Yawkey, 1987). However, since the 1960’s and 70’s teachers’ roles in play have become more pronounced, influenced by the findings of Smilansky’s play training studies (Smilansky, 1971), and the growing familiarity of Vygotsky’s Sociocultural theory. Now, child-initiated play supported by teachers, is an important part of early childhood education and developmentally appropriate practice (Bredekamp, & Coopple, 1997).

The importance of play regarding children’s development has been discussed as well as when and how teachers should engage in play with children. However, although teachers typically acknowledge the importance of play in development, many teachers seem unsure of how to use play in an instructional way (McInnes, Howard, Miles, & Crowley, 2011; Saracho & Spodek, 1998). Therefore, a gap in teachers’ beliefs about

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1 Smilansky (1971) conducted a seminal empirical study of the effects of play training on low SES Israeli children. Smilansky trained the children in socio-dramatic play. Adults engage in two types of intervention: inside and outside intervention. Results from this study suggest that socio-dramatic play training improves both the quality and amount of low-SES children’s play.
their roles in play continues. This study will further examine teachers’ roles in children’s play and contribute to this understanding by gaining insight into teachers’ beliefs about their roles in play.

**Teachers’ engagement with children during instructional activities.** In recent decades there has been an obvious shift in the field of early childhood education from a play-based approach toward standardization and school readiness initiatives. Discussions about how best to teach children and how children learn best have been dismissed by discussions regarding what preschool children should be learning in the classroom. Due to the school readiness movement, early childhood educators are now pressured to consider what knowledge and skills children need to be prepared for kindergarten (Barbarian & Wasik, 2009; Pianta, Cox, & Snow, 2007).

School readiness is defined as academic content learning, specifically in the areas of literacy, math, and self-regulatory and social skills (Barbarian & Wasik). The push to determine what children should be learning in the preschool years has become greater since the standards-based accountability movement has increased in K-12 schools (Brown, 2007; Kagan & Kauerz, 2007). Currently, almost every state has developed and implemented learning standards in early childhood education (Burns, Midgette, Leong, & Bodrova, 2003; Neuman & Roskos, 2005; Scott-Little, Kagan, & Frelow, 2003). Many early childhood educators are struggling to meet the developmentally appropriate guidelines established by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) with the academic content learning demands (Bredekamp & Copple, 2009). Teachers are responding in various ways, from strong resistance to guarded gusto.
Some research has begun examining time use in preschools along with other child experiences measures. The National Center for Early Development and Learning conducted two large studies with publically funded preschool programs (Early, Iruka, Ritchie, Barbarian, Winn, Crawford, Frome, Clifford, Burchinal, Howes, Byrant, & Painata, 2010). Early et al. (2010) used time sampling observations to examine the amount of time children spent in highly structured activities (i.e., large group and small group) versus less structured activities (i.e., free play). The study examined relationships between time spent in various activities and measures of quality. They found that preschool children typically spend 30% of time in less structured activities and 37% in highly structured activities. Programs with more Latino or African American children spent less time in free play and more in large group and small group time. Furthermore, the time spent in whole group was negatively correlated with classroom quality, as determined by developmentally appropriate practices (DAP).

Using the same dataset, Chein, Howes, Burchinal and colleagues (2010) classified children in profiles of engagement according to various activities (using activity context, children’s engagement, and t-c interactions). Chein and colleagues (2010) found that children in “free play” and “scaffolded” learning groups exhibited significantly higher process quality than children in didactic instruction groups. However, children in the “free play” profile exhibited smaller gains in academic content learning than children in “instructional” profiles. Other research has found that during instruction, teachers used richer vocabulary with novel words (Cote, 2001), asked open-ended questions and
offered elaborations (Turnbull et al., 2009); children also initiated interactions with teachers more during instruction (Pianta et. al., 2005).

Reflecting on the two studies mentioned above by Early and colleagues (2010) and Chein et al., (2010), their findings suggest that the more time children spend playing coupled with less teacher instruction, the classroom will exhibit higher levels of quality. Nonetheless, obscuring the picture is the finding that children who spent high amounts of time in play exhibited smaller gains on school readiness competencies (Chein et al., 2010). An explanation of these findings is that teachers should be mindful in balancing children’s time in structured and less structured activities. Children’s play time may be the trademark of DAP, but there is a growing acknowledgment that children can learn vital competencies for education across various classroom activities.

While play has been stressed as important for children’s development, the academic content learned during instruction has also been recognized. As teachers confront the current school readiness debate in early childhood education many teachers are unsure how to use play to facilitate children’s learning and development. This study’s objective is to gain further understanding around this issue. The current study’s goal is to further examine children’s interactions with teachers to present the classroom landscape of teachers’ practices. This study also aims to explore teachers’ beliefs and perspectives in relations to their observed practices. How do teachers believe children learn? What are the teachers’ roles? Are they practicing what they believe?
Head Start Landscape

Since it’s beginning in 1965, Head Start has continued to remain a comprehensive, family focused early childhood education program serving low-income families across the United States. Head Start helps build relationships with families that support their well-being and health. The Head Start program offers four major components to children and families, which include: education, health, parent involvement, and social service. Currently, Head Starts goal is to, “promote school readiness of children from birth to age five from low-income families by enhancing their cognitive, social and emotional development” (Peck, & Bell, 2014; U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2010). This goal changed from 1993, which was “to promote social competence in children,” (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2010). The change in the program goal illuminates the rapid transformation happening within the field of early childhood education in recent years.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services awards grants to local agencies; the federal resource funds 80% of the program cost and the community provides the remaining 20% (Peck & Bell, 2014; U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2010). Other federal funds are set aside for training, technical assistance, and meeting Program Performance Standards. In 1994, the Head Start program was reauthorized and included new requirements for ensuring quality. In fact, no program in the United States will continue to receive funds if it falls below minimum quality level or is slow in correcting the insufficiencies (Peck & Bell, 2014; U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2010). The Tennessee Department of Education seeks to make
Tennessee the fastest-improving state in the nation through a pledge of endless improvement. To do this, all students must improve every year, and those furthest behind must improve at a faster rate. The Department of Education (DOP) is dedicated to supporting the “rapid improvement” philosophy by changing the trajectory of the education system through First to the Top statewide reform (Office of Head Start, 2015). This strategic plan is focused on growth at every level: state, district, school, classroom, and students themselves. The state of Tennessee is also adopting the Common Core State Standards, ensuring that instruction in Tennessee is aligned (Office of Head Start, 2015). It is safe to say there are many systems, standards, and regulations governing Head Start and changing their interwork system.

A program component that is part of Head Start preschool programs is the use of the GOLD child assessment tool. GOLD can be used in any early childhood program and offers predictors of school success that are aligned with the Common Core Standards and the Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework. Quoted from the GOLD site, “These help teachers focus on what matters most for children’s success,” (Lamber, Kim, Burts, 2015). The National Association of Education for Young Children (NAEYC) noted that, “any standard that expects children to demonstrate learning in ways that run contrary to what is known about the sequence of learning will inherently be inappropriate and could undermine developmentally appropriate practices” (Snow, Van Hemel, 2008, p. 2). More simply put, standards provide the “what” of education, while instruction provides the “how”. Now that the standards are beginning to shift from DAP to Common Core, one should question how this movement will affect teachers’
classroom practices and beliefs about how children learn and their roles in helping children learn.

**Role of the Teacher**

The role of the teacher in the classroom is dependent on the teachers’ philosophical beliefs about pedagogy. Do they believe in the standards, assessment, and teaching to the test? Or, do teachers believe in the traditional philosophy of early childhood education defined as engaging in developmentally appropriate practices? These two questions are partial in determining teachers’ beliefs of how children learn and how teachers can facilitate that learning. Other factors such as program philosophy, nation-, state-, and district- regulations, administration requirements, and even characteristics within the individual classrooms (Haupt & Ostlund, 1997; Wen, Elicker, McMullen, 2011; Stipek & Byler, 1997; Stephen, 2010) are influential in determining whether teachers’ practices represent their personal beliefs about early childhood education.

Researchers have found two constellations of practices that are fundamentally different, theoretically, regarding how children learn and the role of adults (Bryant, Clifford, & Peisner, 1991; Charlesworth, Hart, Burts, & DeWolf, 1993; Haupt, Larsen, Robinson, & Hart, 1995; Kagan & Smith, 1988; Oakes & Caruso, 1990; Spidell-Rusher, McGrevin, & Lambiotte, 1992; Stipek & Byler, 1997). The two theories are child-centered practices and basic-skills orientation. Child-centered practices are associated with the constructivist theory of Piaget. A child-centered perspective is described as children constructing their own knowledge by exploring, confronting, and solving
problems while directly experiencing and manipulating their natural environment (Bredekamp, & Copple, 1997; Morrison, 2001). According to this view, children’s learning organically develops, but with overprescribed practice, teachers may interfere with this trajectory. Adults are seen as facilitators by producing an environment that is conducive to children’s learning, creating an environment that is both familiar and slightly novel. A basic-skills orientation is related to learning theory, in which cognitive proficiencies are assumed to be transmitted according to the ideologies of repetition and reinforcement (Bandura, 1977). Learning occurs during structured, teacher-directed instruction where repetition, practice, and review are substantial. Learning also transpires when children repeat right responses to teacher-created stimuli, and is aided by breaking tasks and responses into isolated, sequenced units. Error must be corrected to keep children from learning incorrect responses, therefore teacher assessment and various forms of feedback are critical (Pollard, 1990; Sadler, 1989; Tunstall & Gipps, 1996). The basic-skills orientation is in accordance with the recent school-readiness movement in early childhood education.

The NAEYC and DAP Guidelines emulate the view of most early childhood educators and are largely supported by research on the effects of instructional styles on children’s learning, development, and motivation (Hart, Burts, & Charlesworth, 1997; Stipek, 1993). Conversely, a fraction of experts still recommend a larger priority on basic-skills using direct, highly structured teaching approaches (Becker & Gersten, 1982; Carnine, Carnine, Karp, & Weisberg, 1988). Decisions about whether to apply a more basic-skills or child-centered approach may be rooted in teachers’ central values about
the goals of early childhood education, in what they want to help children achieve, and personal beliefs, experiences, and histories teachers bring into the classroom.

**Teachers’ beliefs and practices.** According to Kagan (1992), as a teachers’ experience in the classroom increases, their knowledge becomes richer and therefore personalizes their teaching beliefs that control perceptions, judgments, and behaviors. Vartuli (2005) supports this idea stating that, “beliefs are formed from personal experiences, education, and values” (p. 76). These personal beliefs are part of one’s personal-practical knowledge, which is knowledge that is essentially known and generated by teachers themselves. Personal-practical knowledge is determined by individual experiences, personal histories, and subject matter knowledge (Connelly & Clandinin 1988; Verloop, Van Driel & Meijer, 2001). Connelly and Clandinin (1988) state that personal-practical knowledge is “a particular way of reconstructing the past and the intentions of the future to deal with the exigencies of the present situation” (p. 125). Therefore, this type of knowledge forms the base for teachers’ actions and practices (Verloop et al., 2001; Meijer, Verloop, Beijaard, 1999). Clandinin (1986) supported this perspective by claiming, “action is imbued with knowledge….and knowledge with experiences that make up a person’s being” (p. 362). Teachers’ practices and roles in any given situation may in fact be based on their previous experiences.

As many teachers spend substantial amounts of time with children, teachers may learn how to act “tactfully”. Van Manen (2008) described tact when teachers are “able to see what goes on with children, to understand the child’s experiences, to sense the pedagogical significance for their situation, to know how and what to do, and to actually
do something right” (p. 15). This supports the notion emphasized by sociocultural theory, suggesting that the teachers and children work together, creating a bi-directional influence within a classroom cultural context. As the teacher implements practices based on beliefs, which in turn, influences children’s learning and the environment, this dynamic experience is then internalized by the teacher and processed in a way that further personalizes her knowledge, beliefs, and future practice.

According to Clark and Peterson (1986), teachers’ beliefs and theories about early childhood education serve as a “contextual filter” through which teachers monitor their experiences in the classroom, translate them, and adjust their later classroom practice. This view has been supported by a few studies that suggest that teachers’ beliefs about how children learn and how teaching affects learning play a critical role in their interactions with children (e.g., Maxwell, McWilliam, Hemmeter, Ault, & Schuster, 2002). Interactive decisions made impromptu in the midst of stress, uncertainty, and tension in the classroom are based mainly on teachers’ beliefs. From a professional development perspective, teacher education programs spend a substantial amount of time attempting to shape teachers’ pedagogical beliefs based on the assumption that beliefs about teaching and learning will impact classroom practices. Spodek (1988), a regularly cited reference regarding the impact of teachers’ beliefs on practice, asserts that there is a need to understand the role of teachers’ pedagogic theories, those ideas about teaching and learning that cultivate from experience and knowledge.

In a review of research on teacher beliefs and classroom practice, Isenberg (1990) suggests that broadening the view of instruction to include thoughts and beliefs as well as
behaviors may lead to a better understanding of the variations in practice seen across individual teachers as well as the incongruity seen when teachers do not consistently use recommended teaching behaviors. Given these basic assumptions, to date, much research on early childhood teachers’ beliefs and practices has focused on measuring teachers developmentally appropriate or inappropriate beliefs and practice (e.g., Charlesworth, et al., 1991; Charlesworth, Hart, Burts, Thomasson, Mosley, & Fleege, 1993; Dunn & Kontos, 1997; Hyson, et al., 1990), which has shed light on their more child-centered orientation or basic-skills orientation.

For example, Charlesworth and colleagues (1991) examined the relationship between teachers’ beliefs and their practices. To do this, they had early childhood teachers complete the Teacher Beliefs Scale (TBS) and the Instructional Activities Scale (IAS). The results revealed positive correlations between developmentally appropriate beliefs and activities and developmentally inappropriate beliefs and activities. The results also revealed that teachers who reported feeling more in control of planning and instruction had more developmentally appropriate scores on both scales. Similarly, Stipek and Byler (1997) conducted surveys and observations in classrooms with 60 preschool, kindergarten, and first grade teachers. They concluded that preschool and kindergarten teachers’ reported beliefs about appropriate and effective instruction were significantly correlated with their observed classroom practice. Child-centered beliefs were positively associated with an observed positive social climate and negatively associated with an emphasis on a basic-skills approach. McMullian, Elicker, Geotse, and colleagues (2006) compared what preschool teachers reported about their beliefs in relation to their actual
classroom practices as examined by observations, curriculum materials, daily plans, program artifacts, and other evidence collected from their classroom environments and programs. Results indicated that when child-directed free play, emergent literacy, and language development activities were observed, teachers’ self-reported beliefs were more strongly aligned with DAP. But when more highly structured activities were observed, like: routines, preplanned small group, and teacher-directed large group learning, teachers more strongly endorsed academic teaching or basic-skills oriented.

Although the studies described above illustrate a link between beliefs and actions, this is not always the case. In contrast to studies proposing similarity between early childhood teachers’ beliefs and reported—or observed—practices, other studies have discovered an inconsistency between beliefs and practices. Wilcox-Herzog (2002) compared preschool teachers’ reported beliefs with their observed practices with children (e.g., sensitivity, involvement, and play style) and did not find correlations between teachers’ reported child-centered beliefs and classroom practices.

The combined results of the studies described above suggest that the relationship between early childhood teachers’ beliefs and practices are mixed. There are several possible reasons for this lack of consensus across studies. First, the findings may be contingent on the specific method of measuring teachers’ beliefs and practices. Some researchers have investigated teachers’ self-reported beliefs and self-reported behaviors, finding sufficient associations between the two (e.g., Charlesworth et al., 1991), whereas other researchers have assessed self-reported beliefs and observed classroom practices, finding that they are forever-changing (e.g., Wilcox-Herzog, 2002). There are evidently
differences between what teachers think they should do (beliefs), what they actually do (observed practices), and what teachers overtly represent that they have done (self-reported practices). In many cases, teachers may have clear ideas about how they should teach because of infamous guidelines such as the DAP guidelines encouraged by the NAEYC. However, there seems to be a gap between teachers’ observed and self-reported behaviors.

A second potential reason for the varied findings regarding the relationship between beliefs and practice is that the two constructs are sometimes not measured at the same level of generality or specificity (Azjen, 1996). For example, teacher beliefs may be assessed regarding broad issues (e.g., child learning and development), whereas classroom practice observations may have a much more specific focus (e.g., teachers’ play with children or prevalence of free choice). The level of concept and analysis mismatch could produce misleading results.

Chapter Summary

This review of literature has covered many important positions regarding teachers’ engagement with children in the classroom. In summary, teachers’ beliefs, classroom practices, and interactions with children are not universal, but in fact, a product of teachers’ experiences, knowledge, and personal beliefs and reflections (Connelly & Clandinin 1988; Kagan 1992; Verloop, Van Driel & Meijer, 2001). Teachers have been found to demonstrate many roles in children’s experiences (Kontos, 1999; Kontos, Burchinal, Howes, Wisseh, & Galinsky, 2002; Robson & Rowe, 2012; Trawick-Smith & Dziurgo, 2011; Wood & Bennett, 1997), apply various strategies to engage and guide
children (Dickinson & Porche, 2011; Justice, Petsher, Schatsheinder, Mashburn, 2011), and have a range of beliefs about early childhood education (Charlesworth, Hart, Burts, & Hernandez, 1991; McMullian, Elicker, Goetze, Huang, Lee, Mathers, et al., 2006; Vartuli 2005). As Clark and Peterson (1986) implied, teachers’ beliefs and theories about early childhood education serve as contextual filters through which teachers orient their classroom practice. This study seeks to explore both (a) teachers’ beliefs and (b) classroom practices to examine this belief-practice relationship.
Chapter 3

Purpose and Procedures

This chapter describes the study’s purpose, methodological framework and research procedures, that include: the Head Start context and classroom settings, participants, training, data collection, my role as a researcher, and data analysis procedures.

The purpose of this study was to examine teachers’ interactions with preschool children in relation to teachers’ beliefs and perceptions about decision-making and their roles in the classroom. The goals of this study were to (a) document teachers’ verbal interactions with preschool children and (b) explore the relationship between teachers’ beliefs and their classroom practices. The research questions are:

1) How do teachers verbally engage children during classroom activities as indicated when using a focal-child protocol?

2) In what ways do teachers’ reported beliefs influence their classroom practice?

This study utilized both qualitative and quantitative methods, by bringing together one primary and two secondary sources of data. As the primary source of data, individual, semi-structured interviews with the classroom teachers were conducted to gain insight into their beliefs regarding their roles in the classrooms and children’s needs as they learn in a supportive, rich classroom environment. Naturalistic, focal-child observations using a time sampling method were employed to depict children’s experiences with teachers. Lastly, daily entries in my research journal were used as a
secondary source of data. As this study was a continuous process of reflection, the journal served as a tool to make connections, disconnections, and personal reflections (Maxwell, 1996).

In order to study the intricate relationship of teacher beliefs and classroom practice this research used multiple methods, which involved the collection, analysis and integration of quantitative and qualitative data in a single study (Hanson, Creswell, Plano Clark, Petska, & Creswell, 2005). By utilizing both methods, strengths of each approach are emphasized and weaknesses are minimized (Johnson & Onweugbuzie, 2004). A complicated classroom phenomenon, such as the relationship between teachers’ practice and beliefs, requires a multipart research design that goes beyond a single method approach (Sandelowski, 2000).

By using both quantitative and qualitative data the study was enriched, as one method of data was complimentary to the other, contributing to the findings in ways that the other method did not provide. The focal-child data was a subset of data collected for a larger study in which children’s experiences and interactions with all social partners, including teachers and peers, across multiple settings was collected. From the child’s perspective, the observations provided details about each child’s interactions with his/her teacher.

Semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with teachers were conducted once all focal child observations were completed. The interview questions were constructed to gain insight into teachers’ decision-making and beliefs as well as themes that were arose from the focal-child observation data. The quantitative data were used to illuminate and
triangulate the emerging themes from the qualitative analysis of the interview data. While focal-child observations captured children’s perspectives and consumed the most data collection time, the teacher interviews and research journal provided detailed descriptions of vivid examples, themes, and identified alternative perspectives and were the predominant source of data regarding the experiences, perspectives, and roles of teachers as they engaged with focal children.

**Context**

All of the participants were recruited from a Head Start Center located in a metropolitan area in East Tennessee (see Figure 1. to reference center photo). According to the Head Start 2014-2015 annual report, this specific county in East Tennessee includes 5 centers and serves 1109 children, of these, 192 are children between 8 weeks and 2 years of age, 457 are 3 year olds and 460 are 4 year olds. The mission of the Head Start program is to promote the school readiness of low-income children. In doing so, Head Start provides a variety of services to meet the needs of the children and families. These include, but are not limited to, medical exams and flu vaccinations; breakfast, lunch and snacks; developmental assessments; dental exams; on-site services for children with a disability; daily transportation; and home visit conferences.

The center in which participants were recruited serves approximately 200 preschool children and 194 families. The Head Start center provides a variety of child care options; they offer 8-part day preschool classrooms, 4 of which provide care from 7:45-11:45 a.m. and another 4 classrooms which provide care from 12:00-4:00 p.m. All part day classrooms include daily transportation to- and from- school.
The center also offers 2 full day preschool classrooms, operating from 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. (see Figure 2 to reference a diagram of the center). All services and hours of care are based on the needs of the parent or guardian and follow the Head Start Program Performance Standards. The center employs approximately 10 preschool teachers and 12 preschool teacher assistants. According to the Office of Head Start Program Performance Standards (2015), each preschool classroom, serving children between the ages of 3 and 5, is required to staff a teacher and an aide or two teachers. The Office of Head Start (2015) also mandates that preschool classrooms should have an average group size of 15-20 children per class. During the completion of the study, classrooms typically had 15-18 children, one teacher and two teacher assistants on any given day.


**Setting.** Classroom A was led by Ms. Nancy. (Pseudonyms are used for all participants.) This classroom was set up with interest centers, that included: art/writing, library/cozy, dramatic play/house, science, blocks/cars, puzzles/manipulatives, and the larger group/circle time area. This classroom also had a water table with material and that was changed frequently. There was a total of 2 windows and 2 doors, one door leading into the center’s main hallway and the other door leading outside as an emergency exit. The classroom had a bathroom with two units, that was partially divided from the classroom and required supervision from the teachers. Classroom A also had two child-sized sinks, that were visible from all areas of the classroom. This classroom had three tables with 5-6 chairs at each table. In the large group circle time area there was a small shelf that housed a CD play, CDs, and storage compartment with books. The walls near...
circle time were filled with a calendar, weather chart, and classroom rules poster. Throughout the room, on the shelves and lower parts of the walls, children’s work and child-friendly posters decorated blank spaces. (See Figures 3 and 4 to reference Ms. Nancy’s classroom).
In classroom B with Ms. Kathryn, all of the classroom interest areas were the same except for two notable differences. This classroom included a Lego table and dollhouse, both of which could occupy 2 children. This classroom had 4 tables with 4-6 chairs at each table, as well as 2 windows and 2 doors. In classroom B’s circle time area there was no calendar or weather chart. However, there was a classroom rules poster and shelf where the CD play and CDs were stored. The walls at children’s eye level and higher were filled with children’s drawing, paintings, collage, etc., pictures, and child-friendly posters. (See Figure 5 and 6 to reference Ms. Kathryn’s classroom (B) photos).
Figure 5. Ms. Kathryn’s Classroom Photo 1

Figure 6. Ms. Nancy’s Classroom Photo 2
Participants

The participants were 40 preschool children and their lead teachers in two full day classrooms from one Head Start Center. Fifty percent of the children were in Ms. Nancy’s classroom (n= 20) and 50% were in Ms Kathryn’s classroom (n= 20). We were unable to receive demographic information on two of the participating children. Therefore, the child demographic information provided is reported on 38 children. The child participants ranged in age between 3 to 5 years (M = 54.97, SD = 7.86). Overall, the sample was 57.9% female (n= 22) and 42.1% male (n= 16). Of the children, 76.3% were Black (n=29), 21.1% were Caucasian (n=8), and 2.6% were Hispanic (n=1). English was the primary language for all of the participating children. Of the participants, 7.9% were diagnosed with special needs. The number of years in the Head Start program varied among the participants: 39.5% were in their first year, 44.7% were completing their second year, 10.5% were in their third year, and 5.3% had been enrolled for four years. Parents were those who identified themselves as the child’s primary caregiver. Thirty-one percent of parents were married and the remaining (66%) were single parents. Three percent of children were from families with different family arrangements. Child participants who had no siblings represented 21%, 45% had one sibling, 24% had two other siblings, and 10% had more than two siblings. Ninety-seven percent of parents spoke English and 3% spoke Nepali. There was a range in parents’ level of education: unknown (3%), some high school (13%), high school graduate (63%), GED (13%), some college (3%), associates (3%), and BA degree (2%).
Two full day lead preschool teachers also participated in this study. Nancy (aged 38) was Caucasian and Ms. Kathryn (50) was African American; neither of the teachers were bilingual. Ms. Nancy holds a Bachelor of Science in Human Ecology with a concentration in Child Development and has also completed a kindergarten-6th grade licensure program. She has been teaching preschool for 17 years, 8 of those years at Head Start. Ms. Kathryn has an Associates degree in Early Childhood Education. She has 28 years of experience teaching preschool aged children with 22 years teaching at Head Start. Both teachers complete at least 18 hours of in-service every year through the Head Start organization.

**Procedures**

This study was approved by the University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects. The Head Start administration also approved the study (Appendix A). A meeting with the Head Start Assistant Director, Head Start Center Manager, Project Principal Investigator, and graduate research assistants was held to discuss the project’s purpose, procedures, details, and individual roles. Thereafter, the Head Start Center Manager, with the help of the classroom teachers, took the lead on receiving informed parental consents (Appendix B). As informed parental consents were collected the research assistants began preparation and training to conduct the study.

**Preparation.** As this project was part of a larger study, the entire research team collaborated and created a protocol, observation system, codes of interest, and coding manual. The protocol for training the research assistants was established through collaborative discussion sessions with the research team and Principal Investigators.
After the protocol was finalized, research training began. Two graduate research assistants, including myself, were trained for approximately 6 hours per week over a 2-month period, beginning in mid-May. The training involved several steps. Beginning in the University of Tennessee Early Learning Center (ELC) laboratory school, the research assistants observed preschool aged children through a one-way mirror and listened to room microphones through headphones. With a draft of the coding manual, the research assistants discussed examples, and talked through definitions, rationales, and discrepancies. After reaching verbal agreement on definitions and examples, an observation coding sheet was established and trialed at the ELC. From this point, two research assistants simultaneously completed practice focal-child interval observations. After minor adjustments were made to the code sheet, the research assistants began the inter-rater reliability process at the ELC. During reliability, both graduate research assistants independently coded along side each other. Again, any discrepancies were resolved through discussion. Training at the ELC continued for approximately 4 weeks, until the research assistants reached 80% agreement.

At this point, in mid-June, the research assistants continued the reliability process by utilizing the finalized coding sheet in consented Head Start classroom A. This step had three significant purposes. First, it allowed the research assistants to learn the classroom routines and become familiar with the children. Secondly, it provided an adjustment period to reduce participant reactivity effect. And lastly, it provided time to gain higher reliability in the classroom setting the study would be completed. By the middle to late part of July, the research assistants reached 90-97% inter-rater reliability. The inter-rater
reliability was calculated by the percent of agreement. The following formula was applied: ‘number of agreements/ (number of agreements+ disagreements) x 100’ (Sackett 1978, as cited in Girolametto & Weitzman 2002, p. 272). Ongoing, double-coding sessions were conducted throughout the data collections to ensure that inter-rater reliability was sustained. Double coding sessions account for 19.5% of all the data collected for this study (n = 100). Reliability improved from training and stayed consistent at an average of 99.2%. The lowest reported reliability was 96.4 for the teacher direction and content variable and the highest calculated reliability was 100% for the refer to teacher variable.

**Data collection.** This research was a small study, utilizing multiple methods to examine the relationship of children’s experiences with teachers through focal-child observations and an exploration of teachers’ beliefs and perceptions expressed during semi-structured interviews. My research journal provided vivid examples and ongoing reflections to bridge possible themes and connections across the observation and interview data. The focal-child observations were part of a larger study that included children’s experiences with their teachers and peers. For the purposes of this study, only quantitative data concerning children’s experiences with teachers was utilized. Using a partial version of Neitzel’s (2014) focal-child observation measure the larger study’s research team, of which I was a member, further modified the observation measure tool to accommodate the needs of this study. Finally, the interviews were included for the purposes of this study, alone.
**Focal-child Observations.** The focal-child observation data were drawn from a subset of a larger dataset. Over a 25-week period, from the end of July to the beginning of January, two graduate research assistants, that included me, conducted focal-child time sampling observations on 64 children. Each observation was 10 minutes in length, with 15, 20-second intervals. Research assistants were prompted to “observe” for 20 seconds and then “record” for 20 seconds from an in-ear audio recording device. Each child was observed for 120 minutes (12 observations). Research assistants collected a total of 126 hours of observations for 64 participants. For the purposes of this study, data from two full day classrooms with 40 participants were used. It is important to note that of these 40 participants, five children withdrew early from the Head Start program, therefore, only 80-100 minutes were collected for these 5 children. This study utilized a total of 77 hours and 40 minutes of observational data.

Data collection resulted in the collection of 2 hours of observations for each child, one hour (6 observations) during less structured activities (free play) and another hour (6 more observations) during structured activities (teacher-directed activities). Less structured or free play was classified when children were playing during what teachers called “free play” or “centers”. Activities that were classified as structured or teacher-directed were typically large and/or small group activities that were- but not limited to teacher led, teacher planned, and/or implementation of part of a lesson plan.

Observation sessions were conducted 2 to 5 days per week. Each day, observations sessions would last for approximately 1 to 2.5 hours. During each session, research assistants rotated through 6-8 children and cycle back through, if applicable.
Consistent child rotations were continued and maintained with a number written at the top of the code sheet during each observation session. This was managed as accurately as possible, as children were often absent, arrived at different times, and were pulled from class for additional educational services. This process ensured that each participant was observed on different days and at different times during the day.

At the end of each 10-minute observation, research assistants would take field notes before rotating to the next child. Field notes consisted of recalled quotes, contextual information, relevant information pertaining to the interaction or activity taking place, and specifics that would provide sufficient details to help the data collectors recall each observation. No field notes were used for purposes of this study.

**Variables and Measures.** The focal child observations for the larger study involved watching each focal child and recording the interactions between that child and any other social partner. Social partners included peers and teachers. All social partners and social partners’ verbal interactions were noted and coded separately, during observations. Given the current study’s aim, only observations that included interactions with the teacher were used. A teacher would be coded as a social partner if she was interacting with a focal child and/or engaging in the same activity as the child, while in proximity. Selected portions of the observation-coding sheet, including specific variables, were derived from a version previously used by David & Neitzel (2011) titled, *Preschool Peer Interaction Scale*. Additional portions of the code sheet were created by the research team to accommodate the study goals (Appendix C to reference coding sheet).
During observations, teachers’ verbal interactions directed toward the focal child were coded during every interval through frequency tallies. Variables included: content and directions, basic and deep level questions, explanations, performance and mastery feedback, social interactions, behavior correction, accept input, follow lead, recast, perspective take, and referral. Variable definitions and examples can be referenced from Appendix D.

**Semi-structured Interviews.** Interviews were completed exclusively for the purpose of this study. A convenience sample was comprised of two participating teachers who were recruited from two of five classrooms that participated in the focal-child observations for the larger study. The teachers received a packet in their center mailboxes that included an invitation letter (Appendix E) and informed consent form (Appendix F). Teachers were requested to read through the material, sign and return the consent form to the Center Manager if they wished to participate.

Once consents were received, the teachers were contacted and interview location and times were scheduled. Two individual, semi-structured interviews were completed. The interview with Ms. Nancy was conducted on Thursday, March 24th, 2016 at 1:30 p.m. and lasted 56 minutes. Ms. Kathryn’s interview was conducted on Wednesday, May 4th, 2016 at 3:00 p.m. and lasted 1 hour and 7 minutes. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed, verbatim, along with field notes taken during the interviews.

The purpose of the semi-structured interviews was to pose questions aimed at uncovering teachers’ beliefs about their roles, how children learn, classroom decision-making, and practice. The teachers were asked to answer questions as to what influences
their decision-making and practice in the classroom. (Appendix G to reference interview questions).

**Reflective Research Journal.** The reflective research journal was a secondary source of data. While the journal was a space to free write and reflect, prompts and areas of focus were established (Appendix H). The purpose of the reflection journal was two-fold. First, it allowed the researcher to continuously consider the questions and thoughts that emerged to complete the next day’s tasks with a clear and focused mind. Secondly, the journal would contribute to understanding and situating the quantitative and qualitative data by providing vivid examples. See Appendix I to reference one journal entry example for each classroom. The research journal was started shortly after beginning focal-child data collection and was completed after data analysis during the study’s write-up. A total of 30 entries were completed over the course of 7 months. The journal entries were completed approximately 35% of the time collecting focal-child data and 4 % of the time completing interviews, analysis, and study write-up.

The journal was a space where documenting examples and recorded thoughts were encouraged, and more importantly, as Maxwell (1996) suggested, a space for reflection. The journal enabled me to make experiences, thoughts, and feelings noticeable and is an accepted and useful part of the research process. This was a process from which some ideas and discoveries emerged and were explored. In addition, the journal is an artifact of the researcher’s experiences throughout the project that were analyzed retrospectively. The journal created a sense of transparency in this research and across my experiences during the observations and interviews.
My Role as a Researcher

My role during this research was as a participant observer. While my initial role was a data collector, I soon realized my and stance was much broader. I became a part of the broader Head Start community as well as the communities established within each classroom. For example, as I would sign in before making my way into the classroom I would have teachers, administrators, and assistants share their weekend stories with me. I was a recognized face and someone with whom they wanted to share their everyday experiences. In the classrooms I felt like part of the community in a unique way; I felt like a “trusted” friend. As my research progressed, so did my relationship with each child and teacher. It started with simple exchanges from children, “What are you doing?”; “Will you help me put this dress on?”. Teachers would talk about weekend plans and UT football games. Soon, teachers and children were asking how my son was doing and giving me hugs as I left for the day.

As mentioned earlier, throughout this research I kept a research journal. During my time completing the focal child observation I recorded many questions, thoughts, opinions, and moments of wonder that were influenced from my subjectivity and time as a participant observer. I am not completely objective so being able write my subjective thoughts in a journal aided me in the continuing role as a participant observer as I built trusting relationships and completed data collection.

Data Analysis

Due to the multiple forms of data that were collected over the course of this project, data analyses took place in several ways. The first section is focused on the data
analysis plan for the quantitative data related to focal-child observations followed by a section devoted to the qualitative analysis of teacher interview data.

**Quantitative.** The quantitative data were collected through focal-child observations. To highlight teachers’ practices experienced by children, all data include when the teacher was the focal-child’s social partner.

After data were put into the SPSS (v. 22) statistical program, the analysis included descriptive statistics on teachers’ practice across both classrooms and teachers’ practice within each classroom. The constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was then utilized to analyze which observed practices supported and which practices contrasted with teachers’ reported beliefs.

**Qualitative.** The semi-structured interview questions were posed to uncover the teachers’ beliefs about how children learn and how they view their roles in the classroom. Scenarios from the focal-child observations were used as examples during the interviews, allowing the teachers to reference specific observed experiences and practices as they reflected and recalled their practice and thoughts about practice.

After both interviews were transcribed verbatim, the researcher utilized constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and content analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Analysis began with two free reads of the transcriptions, followed by two rounds of open class coding (Charmaz, 2000; Strauss & Corbin, 1990), where annotations and notes were taken during the third and fourth read (Appendix J). Once chunks of data were determined, a data display (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) was created to conceptualize the data. A chunk could be any size (phrase, sentence or expression), as long as the chunk
reflected a single theme (Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell, & Alexander, 1990). The data were then constantly compared and reduced through a series of several phases (Appendix K). From an original list of nine themes, three over-arching themes emerged. One theme was *image of young children*. This was defined as anything teachers mentioned that would reflect how they viewed children. Some examples included children’s abilities, histories, personalities and temperaments. A second theme was *respect for children*. This category was represented in many ways including (a) believing in children abilities, (b) valuing their capabilities, and (c) sending respectful messages both verbally and nonverbally to children. The third theme that emerged was *teachers’ role(s)* in the classroom. This was defined as any distinct position or responsibly teachers took as they implemented their practice. Some example included observing, listening, and reflecting.

To answer the study’s second research question, the emergence of themes were determined through iterative cycles of reading, writing and discussion regarding which beliefs appeared dominant for each teacher, using both content and comparative analyses. The qualitative data are the primary data with the quantitative data linked to findings as a secondary view of classroom teacher-child social partner dynamics. Salient themes and identified beliefs from teacher interviews were compared to teachers’ observed classroom practices to determine if there was a relationship between the two.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter described (a) the context, setting, and participants, (b) the rationale for using a mixed methods approach, (c) my role as a researcher and, (d) the data collection and analysis procedures. The purpose of this study was to examine teacher
interactions with preschool children in relation to teachers’ beliefs and perceptions regarding teachers’ decision-making and roles in the classroom. The goals of this study were to (a) document teachers’ verbal interactions with preschool children and (b) explore the relationship between teachers’ beliefs and their classroom practices. The following chapter describes the findings from this study.
Chapter 4

Findings

This chapter includes findings based on (a) children’s experiences (focal child observations) and (b) teachers’ dialogue (semi-structured interviews). Quantitative descriptive statistics are illustrated first followed by including findings from teachers’ observed practices. These are then used to inform the qualitative findings as I attempt to create individual teacher profiles. The purpose of the quantitative data was to illuminate the emerging themes from teachers’ reports during their interviews.

Quantitative Findings

The focal-child observations recorded teachers’ verbal interactions with children that included: content and directions, basic and deep level questions, explanations, performance and mastery feedback, social interactions, behavior corrections, accept input, follow lead, recast, perspective take, referred to teacher, and teacher refer (see appendix D to reference the coding manual). All teacher practices were scored using frequency tallies and children’s social partners were coded during each interval.

Descriptive Findings. Across all observations, both Ms. Nancy and Ms. Kathryn were coded as children’s social partners for approximately the same proportion of time. Ms. Nancy was the children’s social partner for 58.6% of all focal-child observations completed in her classroom. Similarly, Ms. Kathryn was the children’s social partner for 64.2% of all focal-child observations collected in her classroom. Because this study included focal-child observations and is interested in teachers’ interactions with children, only data of teachers as social partners were coded and analyzed for this study.
To gain an understanding of teachers’ verbal interactions with children, both teachers’ classroom practices were analyzed collectively and provided preliminary descriptive statistics. Table 1 illustrates frequencies and percentages for both teachers. The teachers were observed using all behaviors at various frequencies. For example, when teachers were social partners they gave directions and content 52.3% of the time. Basic level questions were the second most used practice (17.9%) by the teachers. Teachers provided explanations, accepted children’s input, and gave performance feedback to children for 6-8% of the time. Other practices such as: interacting with children, teachers following children’s leads, engaging in social conversations, receiving a response to behavior corrections, providing recasts and mastery level feedback, and asking deep level questions were implemented approximately 1-5% of the time. Three variables, (1) perspective taking, (2) teacher refers to focal-child, focal-child is referred to teacher, and (3) behavior correction without a response happened less than 1% of the time. Therefore, these three were removed and not included in the final analysis.

Table 1 also illustrates how often each practice occurred during each interval. For example, during multiple 20-second intervals, directions and content were given not only once, twice, but even three, four and five times to children. The majority of the variables occurred only once, twice, or were absent during every interval. However, the data also reveal that both teachers gave directions and content, asked basic level questions, and gave performance level feedback numerous times across multiple intervals, and yet there was some variation across the two teachers.
Table 1. Teacher Practice Frequencies and Percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Practices</th>
<th>Direction/Content</th>
<th>Basic Level Question</th>
<th>Performance Feedback</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N:</td>
<td>4301</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>4301</td>
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<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>2052</td>
<td>47.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1264</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>546</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>852</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>2</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deep Level Question</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Mastery Feedback</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N:</td>
<td>4301</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>4249</td>
<td>98.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Engagement</th>
<th>Behavior Correction w/ Response</th>
<th>Behavior Correction w/o Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N:</td>
<td>4301</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>4173</td>
<td>97.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accept Input</th>
<th>Follow Child’s Lead</th>
<th>Recast</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N:</td>
<td>4301</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>4028</td>
<td>93.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>266</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
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<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perspective Take</th>
<th>Teacher Refers Child to Social Partner</th>
<th>Social Partner Referred Child to Teacher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N:</td>
<td>4301</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>4297</td>
<td>99.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N represents the total number of intervals teachers were coded as children’s social partner.
Percent represents how often each practice was implemented.
The answer categories (0-5) represent the number of times a practice was observed during a 20 second interval.
In Table 2, Ms. Nancy’s observed practices are displayed in frequencies and percentages. The table illustrates Ms. Nancy’s practices as binary, with percentages representing the occurrence of each practice according to her total time as a social partner (N = 2076; N represents the total number of intervals). Ms. Nancy predominately gave children directions and content and asked basic level questions. Ordered according to the percentages displayed in Table 2, Ms. Nancy was also observed accepting children’s input, providing explanations, correcting children’s behaviors, offering performance level feedback, and following children’s lead. Other behaviors like engaging in social conversations, recasting children’s input, offering master level feedback and asking deep level questions were also observed, but with lower frequencies than other behaviors.

Table 2. Ms. Nancy’s Practice Percentages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direction/ Content</td>
<td>1013</td>
<td>48.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic Level Question</td>
<td>409</td>
<td>19.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deep Level Question</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explanation</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance Feedback</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mastery Feedback</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Engagement</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavior Correction w/ Response</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accept Input</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow Child’s Lead</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recast</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ms. Nancy was a social partner for N= 2076. N represents the number of observed/coded occurrences. This table illustrates practices as binary.
In table 3, Ms. Kathryn’s practices are illustrated as binary and displayed in frequencies and percentages. Percentages represent the occurrence of practices according to Ms. Kathryn’s total time as a social partner (N = 2225; N represents the total number of intervals). Ms. Kathryn primarily provided child with directions and content and asked children basic level questions. However, she was also observed offering children explanations and performance level feedback, each practice accounting for approximately 9% of her observed intervals as a social partner. Ms. Kathryn was observed accepting children’s input, following children’s lead, correcting behavior, engaging in social conversations, recasting children’s input, offering mastery level feedback and asking deep level questions, these practices each account for 5% or less of her observed behaviors as a social partner.

*Table 3. Ms. Kathryn’s Practice Percentages*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direction/ Content</td>
<td>1236</td>
<td>55.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic Level Question</td>
<td>361</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deep Level Question</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explanation</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance Feedback</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mastery Feedback</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Engagement</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavior Correction w/ Response</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accept Input</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow Child’s Lead</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recast</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ms. Kathryn was a social partner for N= 2225. N represents the number of observed/coded occurrences. This table illustrates practices as binary.
In summary, the descriptive statistics illustrate each teachers’ landscape of practices. With only slight variation in each teacher’s total observed time as a social partner, both teachers predominately provided children directions and content and asked basic level questions. Following these two dominate practices, the descriptive statistics of Ms. Nancy’s and Ms. Kathryn’s other observed practices seems to display percentages that illustrate the both teachers’ practices as more similar than different. Specific findings from the descriptive statistics will be interwoven into teacher’s profiles to illuminate how each teachers’ practices support and/or contrast their reported beliefs.

**Qualitative Findings**

Findings from teacher interviews revealed salient themes across both teachers regarding their personal and pedagogical knowledge and examples of the reciprocal nature of these two. Teacher profiles were created that first began with their beliefs about young children followed by examples of their practice as they related to their beliefs. Questions were posed to seek descriptions of the ways their decisions in the classroom were linked to their personal histories, their views on the capabilities and promise of young children’s learning, and their related decisions to act in the classrooms. Finally, their observed practices are interwoven across their reported classroom experiences.

**Ms. Nancy.**

*Theme 1: “They have so much potential, but if someone is not there to help them then the potential is wasted.”* Ms. Nancy shared many personal insights regarding her image of young children. Ms. Nancy believes that all children are individuals, different from the next. This was illustrated when she said, “Every single one of those
kids is different.” While discussing children’s learning in small group activities, Ms. Nancy pointed to each child’s classroom chair referencing what she knew each child needed from her and said, “I know you do this, so I expect this; I know I’m going to have to help you; I know you might need help on a few parts.” She continued to describe how each child was an individual; she expressed she was aware that each child has her own abilities and developmental level. This was portrayed when she said, “After you’ve been with them a while you just know what their developmental capabilities are.”

Ms. Nancy acknowledged that her knowledge about children’s home lives influenced her actions, in particular the ways in which she connected to their social-emotional selves while teaching. She recognized that many of her children were emotionally burdened and her approach to teaching was to nurture and guide the “whole child”. She remarked, “It makes me sad because, the thing is, what if I’m the only one giving them a hug today?” She continued to reflect, “Here they can be upset or happy or be whatever they are and its okay.” She described her actions to create a classroom environment that is safe, accepting, and nurturing because such safe place releases children’s potential and “causes them to not worry about school because they have to worry about so many other things”. Ms. Nancy’s quantitative findings seems to support this notion as she was observed accepting children’s input, including emotional states approximately 8% of her time interacting with children.

Across her interview, her image of children moved beyond her views of children as individuals and different from one another toward a deep understanding that all children are good and have great potential. She noted, “Even if they’re the one that
makes you want to pull your hair out there is something about that kids that is so (italics added) good.” This asset orientation to young children filtered her approach to each child, guiding her focus to deeply come to know each child’s innate needs, desires, and competencies. Examples continued to surface that influenced her stated responsibility to really get to know each child and ‘find the good’. She further noted that, “They want you to believe that they can learn, because they want that.” This seems to suggest that Ms. Nancy believes that children need adults to believe in them – to see their capabilities.

This perspective is the cornerstone of Ms. Nancy’s image of young children, one that informs her pedagogical decisions. She knows that it is not enough to acknowledge children’s innate goodness but also their range in developmental and learning needs. This aspect was further discussed when she remarked, “They have so much potential, but if someone is not there to help them then the potential is wasted.” Ms. Nancy further elaborated, “…whether they’re way down here on the developmental spectrum or way up here they can always learn something and I’m there to help them.” Ms. Nancy provided an example that implicitly highlighted how she moved in to reach children across their developmental spectrums when she recalled, “…and they’ll ‘write’ the words, but they’re not really [italics added] writing the words.” This illustrates her belief that even though the children are not writing words comprised of letters, they are making marks on paper that represent words. As young children’s potential to become emerging writers develops, this is an important step in the writing process. Reviewing my research journal entries, I noted another example that revealed Ms. Nancy’s belief in children’s capabilities and potentials when I wrote:
I see Ms. Nancy working side by side with 2 children. Two other children are working without help. She is helping one child with her hands over the child’s hands as they practice cutting magazines. Helping the child cut, I see Ms. Nancy looking around at the other children and I notice she notices another kid who needed help. She waited a while and then asked, “Can I give you a little help?” The child agreed. So, Ms. Nancy ripped the page out of the magazine. The child smiled ear to ear and went back to cutting.

These two instances illustrate Ms. Nancy’s belief that young children are individuals with varying abilities and all with great potential. As M.s Nancy stated, “…they will do it to the best of their ability”. Ms. Nancy’s observed practices endorse this orientation toward children’s potential as she was observed following children’s lead and asking basic level questions to allow children the opportunity to give input and requesting children’s approval to help them to their next level.

Theme 2: “If I believe in them and everybody else, like all the other teachers believe in them, then I feel like it helps them believe in themselves.” Ms. Nancy’s interview included many examples that alluded to her core ethic of trusting children as competent learners. For example, she described that through the course of the year and even across a week’s worth of planned activities, she slowly relinquishes control and shares the power of instruction and next steps with the children. Ms. Nancy described this process by saying, “I come from an instructor and then I’m a teammate and then I just kinda’ guide.” She continued to go into more detail in the following exchange by describing how she assumed the role of an instructor during a measurement activity:
S: I want to make sure I understand it completely. During more structured activities, after you pose a question, and after what you call, demonstrate, what would that look like?

N: Um, we did [this] thing where we were using our bodies and we were measuring. [pause] I think last year. We had flowers in the spring and I had different heights of them laying on the floor and they had to figure out where they went in the line up. So, I demonstrated myself by laying down in the line up and, ‘whoa!’ I am way bigger than this one. So I do that kind of stuff.

In this example, she provided a clear, observable, and simple demonstration in order to illustrate how to compare and contrast length by using her very tall body against less tall flower stems. Ms. Nancy’s practice supports this reported explanation of a demonstration as she was observed giving children directions and content approximately 49% of her time interacting with children. Through this rather dramatic demonstration (Ms. Nancy laying down on the floor among the flowers) she illustrated how to go about comparing lengths. Here, children had to first observe and then follow-up with similar attempts at comparison. Ms. Nancy said, “So they become the teachers and they decide where it’s going to go.” Ms. Nancy later described an example that depicted children taking the lead in a discussion about babies and eggs. During one large group discussion children asked the question, “What animals are in eggs and what animals are in Mommas’ bellys?”

N: That was the question. They had all kinds of answers and then they came up with other questions, such as “How do you know if that’s in the belly”? Because
they don’t know where a baby… [She stopped and smiled]. I mean like babies in the belly or in the egg? How do you determine which one?

Here, Ms. Nancy provided children an opportunity to wonder out loud, to pose questions that didn’t seem necessary to answer but were important at the time (as Ms. Nancy was quite pregnant.). In doing so, Ms. Nancy followed children’s lead which was an observed practice of hers. The quantitative findings standby Ms. Nancy’s orientation allowing children to take the lead.

In these examples, it seems evident that the learning process is not a top down approach, but rather one of a partnership. Ms. Nancy’s perspective is centered on her belief in children’s ability to observe demonstrations and then make them their own, and pose challenging questions. It seems she teaches children while purposefully also building trust among them as she slowly backs away from a more direct role into a more distant, supportive one. In fact, Ms. Nancy said, “I expect the children to be independent. I mean in the beginning of the school year—of course not. But like I teach them to be able to do things by themselves.” This core tenet of trust in young children’s competencies seems to lace seamlessly with her image of young children having innate potentials to learn. She supports this assumption by saying, “…because if they [the children] don’t think you believe they can do it, they’re not going to believe they can do it.”

Ms. Nancy created learning experiences in which children could learn from others as the year progressed. She valued the role that more experienced children offered to their younger and less developed peers. Ms. Nancy described how she paired a peer that was
more advanced regarding the alphabet with a peer that needed more practice. She said, “I probably could have done that activity with him, but like, I feel like it was more beneficial with a peer.” She went on to describe how she created small learning partnerships and groups so that children could learn from one another, with her guidance.

Her desire to support children’s beliefs in their own abilities was actualized when they experienced what it felt like to be a role model for peers. Ms. Nancy said, “…about half of them will learn how to do that and then the older ones can kinda’ do it with the younger ones, which helps (smile).” Thus, her role in the classroom is characterized by creating multiple ways for children to learn to take charge of their learning. From this vantage point Ms. Nancy is focused on ensuring the development of young children’s autonomy as she conveys to them her belief they are capable and competent and creating a sense of can-do-ness.

Across many examples within this theme Ms. Nancy’ can-do attitude is particularly important to her as she contemplates the future learning lives of her young children. For example, her belief about children losing their zest for learning is lamented when she noted,

N: I don’t know when this happens but it doesn’t usually happen in preschool – but something like in second or third grade kids shift and they all of a sudden don’t like school. Something happens during that time. I’d love to know what it is. But something happens and they don’t like school anymore. I just feel like if you give them the belief and good positive attitudes about learning and going to
school then maybe that will help them along those years that make them not like it.

From this vantage point, Ms. Nancy’s beliefs and practice are focused on the here-and-now as well as the future of young children’s school experiences. This dual view seems to inform her efforts to find a wide range of ways to instill a belief in children’s heads and hearts that they are competent and capable. Because as she notes, “You can be whatever you want, whether it be a trash man or a doctor. You gonna’ be a trash man, then you be the BEST trash man you can be!”

**Theme 3: “You just have to find out what makes each one of them tick”.** During Ms. Nancy’s interview, she shared many examples that unearthed her process of reflecting on her beliefs and practices to better meet the needs and interests of her students. For example, Ms. Nancy described an experience during snack time when she acted in the moment and later reflected on the decisions she made:

N: “…milk being spilt. I know don’t cry over spilt milk. But like, you don’t get upset, but your like ‘really? You just spilt that entire carton of milk?’…You say stuff like that and your like ‘they’re four, they’re going to spill milk’. …Its small and insignificant things, but, if you say stuff the wrong way, the kids [are] like ‘I just spilt this milk and I should have not spilt this milk. Why did I spill this milk?’…You just say stuff and your like, wait a minute why am I saying stuff like that?”

This example not only illustrated her acting and reflecting on her classroom decisions, but underlined this method with a consideration of the child and their emotions.
Continuing with the spilt milk example, Ms. Nancy described how she reflects about her decisions by considering other approaches that would be have been more positive and supportive when she recalled:

N: “Your like, ‘if I had just done this maybe she had gotten it, or if I had just said this maybe he wouldn’t have felt sad.’ You know what I’m saying? And its not like I go out and try to find a kid to make them sad, but sometimes, you’re in the moment and you just say stuff and they’re sad and you make them sad.”

These examples demonstrate how Ms. Nancy is aware that her actions have a reaction. By reflecting on this process it seems she utilizes this cause-and-effect information to redirect her approaches and practices with a primary focus on the child’s well-being.

Mindful that children have individual needs and interests, Ms. Nancy reflected on her practices that helps her learn how to better support children. This was illustrated by an experience she shared when she was working with a child who was trying to write the letters in her name. Ms. Nancy’s reflected,

N: I was working with Zia…bless her heart, she cannot write her name. She is a child that gets really frustrated. So I do a lot of one-on-one with her. We started making Z’s in the sand. We’ve done the gel inside the bag—just different things so she wasn’t just using a pencil. Cuz’ she knows her letters, so you think ‘oh you know your letters so you can write.’ Well she can’t…She just wasn’t ready to do it. So that’s why we do a lot of that stuff (writing in sand and gel). We’re to the point were she does Z’s on paper…I always say to her… ‘just try your best. Do your best, that’s all I want you to do. And you just do your best and I’ll be happy.’
So she is over there making her Z’s …and [then] she made a random A…and she [was] like, ‘See Ms. Nancy! You told me to do my best and I did my best and now I’m just doing my best!’… I reflect then. When I can tell they’ve made progress or they’re trying their best and you can tell they know they are trying their best [pause] that’s when I reflect a lot.’

In these examples it becomes evident that Ms. Nancy tries a range of practices, reflects on them and then adjusts her approach based on children’s learning. Specifically, in the example with Zia, as Ms. Nancy attempted various strategies she also gave the focal-child encouragement which seems to be supported by her observed practices by providing children performance level feedback. As Ms. Nancy encourages children’s efforts, to further help them to the next step, she noted, “You just have to figure out what makes each one of them tick.” Ms. She is aware of her beliefs and the role they have on her classroom practices. This was illustrated when she said, “… in the classroom, too, I know my beliefs are there because, I mean, I think about them in the decision making. I don’t think every decision I made all day long was the wrong one. So my beliefs are there.” Revisiting my reflective research journal, I noted a time when Ms. Nancy made a decision that illustrated her making an accommodation to meet a child’s interest. While observing her demonstrate a small group activity of crafting a bat, I wrote:

Ms. Nancy demonstrated making the bat. She was very detailed with her words. “I’m using the black paper and white crayon to draw a circle”, she showed them as she talked. She continued to describe her actions…. She had about 5 or 6 kids in her group and they all sat on the ground in a circle shape. It caught my attention
that all they did were sitting still and listening and watching her…. Ms. Nancy
and the kids were focused. After she demonstrated the whole activity she laid her
created bat on the floor and asked the children if they had any questions. One girl
asked if she could make a pink bat. Ms. Nancy said, ‘You all can make whatever
color of bat you want. Pick whatever color of paper we have.’

It seems some decisions to ensure children take the lead in their learning can be simple,
such as a change in paper color. This small decision continues to illustrate Ms. Nancy’s
intent when she engages in her process of reflection. In doing so, this example is also
well supported by many of Ms. Nancy’s observed practices. The demonstration of the
activity is accompanied by giving children directions and content, asking children for
their input and questions, and lastly accepting and following children lead when their
input is given. Her observed practice seems to shed light on recorded examples,
illuminating her aim to consider the children’s needs and interests.

Moments like the spilt milk example can be decisions that weigh more heavily on
her. As Ms. Nancy noted “…sometimes I know I make the wrong decisions (pause)
that’s the ones I think of when I’m driving home… And that’s when, like, when I feel
like my beliefs hit me hard.” Regardless of the decision or the moment being reflected,
Ms. Nancy reveals that she is purposeful in her practice. She uses reflection to orient her
practice to meet her personal beliefs and meet the needs of her children. As Ms. Nancy
affirmed “…you just have to find your niche with each child.”

In summary, Ms. Nancy attends to the social-emotional and learning lives of each
child that are far beyond a daily lesson plan. She seeks ways to create a safe and
nurturing environment, one in which children view themselves as active members in a classroom community. She demonstrates respect for children’s individual differences and sees children’s potentials. She values children’s efforts, she recognizes their challenges, and she finds ways to create successful experiences for all children regardless of their developmental capabilities. She views her role as one who teaches in the moment and for the next steps in children’s learning. Through this role, while an abundance of Ms. Nancy’s practices were observed, specific behaviors like: accepting children’s input, effort, and emotions, asking children questions to challenge their thinking, and allowing children to take charge of their learning by following their lead seem to illuminate many of her beliefs and orientations toward teaching. Other behaviors that were captured during focal-child observations like, providing explanation and correcting children’s inappropriate and off task behaviors were not emphasized through the examples and beliefs shared by Ms. Nancy. In general, she cultivates experiences for children to develop their beliefs they can succeed now and in the future. As Ms. Nancy referenced what she wanted for her own daughter she noted he “Just like my kid, I want her teachers to help her be the best she can be…so (pause), [I ask myself] do I want my child in my classroom?”

Ms. Kathryn.

Theme 1: “This 5-year-old was like, ‘I want to do this and this’, and my image is to make sure I provide ways for them all to learn.” During Ms. Kathryn’s interview she shared many insights and beliefs about young children and how they learn. One theme that emerged was her image of young children. The first understanding I gathered
from this theme is that she views children as individuals. “[Whether] They come from Beverly Hills or they can come from the slums. It doesn’t matter. I look at kids as individuals.” Ms. Kathryn has an awareness that children come from different places, but to her that is not a determining factor because all children are already different from one another. While viewing children as individuals, Ms. Kathryn is also mindful of their developmental levels. During the interview she said,

Because if you have a delay or don’t have a delay, I still want you to learn. So as a teacher I think it’s up to me to make sure that happens and if I didn’t know how to do it I would find the resources.

Ms. Kathryn not only is attentive to the fact that every child has different abilities and skills, but also a responsiveness to meet children’s needs. She continues, “You know that from day one. Because we ask the parents questions in the beginning, and I don’t red flag them, I jus’ pay attention.” This seems to highlight her belief that while children are individuals whose learning abilities vary, the differences deserve notice, thoughtfulness and her action by varying support and guidance.

Ms. Kathryn views young children as experts. This understanding began to emerge when she said, “I make decisions about activities on what I already know about them, what they like and what they can do and what they can’t do.” She continued to provide an example, “If I hear them say something about bugs then I’m thinking, ‘huh’. And if that’s important to them and it’s important for me to bring more about bugs.” It seems that as Ms. Kathryn pays attention to each individual child’s abilities, skills, and interests she plans and implements activities based on what she learned from the children.
This notion is supported by her quantitative findings, as Ms. Kathryn was observed following children’s lead while engaging with children. She later mentioned, “Talking with children helps me learn and helps them learn.” she seems to insinuate that children and Ms. Kathryn are in a reciprocal relationship of informing one another and creating a learning environment. This also suggests that Ms. Kathryn views young children as drivers of their learning and that she needs to attend to the messages, both verbal and non-verbal that they give her. Ms. Kathryn described,

When I make a decision in the moment, its in the moment (italics added). I listen to what the kid is telling me and what they are doing… If their heart is not in it because I feel I have to teach you this (italics added), I mean…who’s getting the glory out of it?

This appears to suggest that Ms. Kathryn believes that children have a right to influence her decisions to act in the classroom and she works to make sure to ensure this happens.

Children may be expressing their voice verbally or non-verbally, and Ms. Kathryn’s role is to pay attention, listen, and act on what they reveal through a myriad of behaviors. She later said, “This 5-year-old was like, ‘I want to do this and this’, and my image is to make sure I provide ways for them all to learn.” This statement seems to be the capstone of her multiple beliefs and views of young children; children are individuals with different abilities and interests, they are bright and well-informed experts of themselves, and have a voice and communicate important information that needs to be heard. This reported example is again endorsed by her observed practice of following children’s lead and accepting their input, which sheds light on her belief in children. She
recognizes that it is not the teacher that holds all the knowledge in a classroom but rather knowledge is shared with the children.

Ms. Kathryn listens to the children and provides an educational experience that is relevant and meaningful for each child. Also mindful and making peace with the ‘push-down, school readiness’ pressures, Ms. Kathryn acknowledges a lesson learned, that her “way is not always T-H-E way.” Children are in her classroom to learn and to gain more. Seeking to hold true to her beliefs and create a balanced curriculum to prepare children, Ms. Kathryn attempts to provide whatever more is. She noted, “These are the kids that are getting ready for the big K…I don’t want to set them up for failure” so she creates writing and reading experiences and spaces that “look” like kindergarten tables and chairs so they know, “when you leave Ms. K this is some of the things you are going to do.”

Theme 2: “I’m always on their level. I think it’s a form of respect to show them. If I feel like a giant and all they see is my shirt, how do they know I’m listening?” Ms. Kathryn exclaimed, “I respect people…and children are people…they’re just smaller. They’re little people.” As Ms. Kathryn spoke, her speech slowed and she paused between each complete thought, contemplating each word before she spoke. This global statement served as the foundation of many of her examples that referenced her strong belief related to her respect for children.

It seems Ms. Kathryn is mindful of the messages her body and her physical actions send to children. For example, she said, “I put my hand on the child just to tell them that, I see you here, but I am talking to this kid.” This is respectful in many ways. First, she recognizes the child that wants to say something, and secondly, she does so in a
way that is courteous to the child with whom she is engaged. Although only teachers’
verbal engagements with children were captured through the observations, as Ms.
Kathryn was often recorded accepting children’s input, this example illustrates her
accepting children’s input and effort respectfully in a nonverbal way. Later in the
interview she also reflects, “I’m always on their level. I think it’s a form of respect to
show them. If I feel like a giant and all they see is my shirt, how do they know I’m
listening?”

Through Ms. Kathryn’s practice it also appears she is respectful of children’s
capabilities and competencies and how she intervenes with caution and purpose. While
talking about conflict resolution, for example, she said, “I pay attention [to] the feel of
what’s going on. If I feel I need to intervene, I slide-in. I don’t slide-in saying, ‘Did you
hear?’ I slide-in in a way that includes them.” Ms. Kathryn later shared an example of
how she tends to intervene, “They have to see it from me also. If I see two children
playing, I don’t interrupt. I sit in and then, ‘hey I see you all playing with this, can Ms.
Kathryn join you?’” Here she assumes the role of entering into children’s play by seeking
their approval. Asking children questions and following their lead were practices
captured during Ms. Kathryn’s observations that endorsed respectful approaches while
engaging with children, like the previous reported examples. This is another example of
how she models appropriate behaviors. Further, it reveals how Ms. Kathryn observes and
listens to what the children are saying and doing, and tries to times her participation in a
way that supports children’s efforts without taking away their control. She continues
with the example by commenting, “When they’re ready I let them do it. Really, I just sit
back and watch…” When she perceives her guidance is needed she piggybacks off the children’s abilities. This notion is yielded by specific practices observed of Ms. Kathryn like, following children’s lead and offering feedback to help them to the next step. She continued, “We allow them time to fix it and if they can’t fix it that’s when we come in and sort’ve guide them and give them words and not necessarily fix it but try to assist them.”

Ms. Kathryn creates a sense of community in her classroom. There was one example she shared that embodied her sense of inclusive practice. She recalled, “So one kid might offer that we should use the timer to take turns and when the time is up that’s when you know it’s time to switch. So we asked the other kids if they liked that.” In this example, Ms. Kathryn illustrated she valued the child’s competence and validated her input, while also appreciating the other child’s thoughts and feelings by asking how the other child liked the solution. This is another example Ms. Kathryn shared that is supported by her observed practice to guide children by following children’s lead, asking children questions to gain their input and then accepting their input. In a second example, she reflected, “When you see one kid help another up when they fall…. you think, ahh they are (italics added) learning. I just want them to learn to listen and respect each other.” Here, she appears to suggest that building a sense of community, where teachers and children recognize, support, include, and appreciate each other is one of her goals.

The definition of learning is not just ABC’s and 123’s, but also about camaraderie, responsibility, and respecting one another. As Ms. Kathryn said, “When their families are
at work and they are my responsibility, I treat them like they’re my own kids. We are a family hear.”

**Theme 3:** “If I’m happy and enthusiastic to come to work, they’re going to be happy. If I walk in and I’m sad, they’re going to feel that. So you know, stay upbeat. My role is to stay upbeat and be a good role model.” The third theme that emerged for Ms. Kathryn was the emotional investment she makes in her role as the guide and facilitator of children’s everyday experiences. Many noticeable behaviors reflected her belief about young children as individuals, who are viewed as experts that know themselves well. She demonstrated her respect for them through recognition of their individual interests and abilities, inclusion in the classroom community, and appreciation of what children bring to the classroom each day. These perspectives guided her practice. She noted, “I think I use to meet certain [developmental/assessment] goals and now I just keep going. I keep giving what each individual child needs.” This acknowledges her belief in focusing more on the children’s everyday needs and learning experiences and less on outside assessment benchmarks and general program goals. She continued by saying, “…To help them, I just go from what they have taught me.” Here, Ms. Kathryn is open to learning from her children even as she shares her own knowledge about them. She continued, “Because we give them choices as to where they want to work and if I really want them to practice some writing skills then I beef it up just a little bit…. maybe add some wiggly pens or sparkly glue to get them over there.” She is aware that children have certain activities they dislike yet lead to skills they need to develop, so she improvises and continues to consider what the children would most find intriguing and
incorporates it in their everyday experiences. For example, she later mentioned, “I put
words up everywhere. I know they can’t read the words; a lot of time I have pictures, too,
because I want them to learn.” This decision to prompt children to consider themselves as
readers even before they can actually read words suggests that she is mindful of creating
an environment that models learning expectations. Another way Ms. Kathryn supports
children’s learning is through the formation of learning groups. For example, she said,
“…I try to pair the groups. Where I know these kids are just busy and they’re going back
and forth, and the ones that are shy, I might put them in a busy group…just so they can
see, its okay (italics added).” Here, again, she determines ways to create other forms of
modeling by using learning groups that include peer mentors to respond to children’s
range of needs and interests.

Ms. Kathryn purposefully enacts a “can do” attitude, an engagement in and
commitment to the everyday lives of her students and their families. She proclaimed that
“My obligation is to be here everyday so my children will see me everyday. I stay
consistent.” She recognizes that it is important that there is often unrest and a lack of
predictability in some of the children’s home lives. She assumes the responsibility of
ensuring consistency, to be present, to be dependable, for both the children’s learning
experiences but perhaps, more so, for children’s social emotional well-being. She models
how to approach each day at school with a “can do” attitude and one of joy for learning.
She recalled, “If I’m happy and enthusiastic to come to work, they’re going to be happy.
If I walk in and I’m sad, they’re going to feel that. So you know, stay upbeat. My role is
to stay upbeat and be a good role model.” She recognizes that her attitudes and
disposition send messages to children that may impact their own approach to developing relationships and learning.

Lastly, Ms. Kathryn is an engaged listener in the classroom and the halls of the center. It appears she listens to (a) be able to provide an interesting environment that supports children’s learning, and (b) ensure children feel heard. She noted, “I listen to what they like and I think that they will participate in what they want to learn. Because it becomes more important to them… helps me as a teacher to respect what they like.” This perspective doesn’t stop with the children; she also listens to children’s families as well. She reflected, “I try to notice everything outside of the classroom. Because you don’t know people’s situations.” For example, she described a time when she asked about how a child’s doctor appointment went and the mother mentioned the child needed glasses and didn’t know how they were going to afford them. Ms. Kathryn responded, “Well, I’m glad you told me. Let me talk to me specialist and see what we can do. We’re going to make sure that we can give you all the resources you need.”

In summary, Ms. Kathryn is a keen observer and engaged listener who embodies a teaching role characterized by mutual regard that recognizes all people, big and small, have a voice to be heard and respected. This orientation, which is highlighted across many examples shared by Ms. Kathryn is also illuminated by her observed practices. Her quantitative findings indicate she has a tendency to follow children’s lead, ask questions to gain children input, accept their input, and provide children with various forms of feedback. While many other practices like giving direction and content and providing children explanations were also observed, these practices were not captured in her
reported beliefs and shared examples. In general, she evidences a deep desire to enact an ethic of care that ensures children, and their families, can depend on her. She acknowledges that her everyday attitudes and behaviors impact how young children situate themselves in the classroom and in the bigger world outside her classroom. She strives to notice and be responsive to children’s families in the same way she takes care of their every day social, emotional and learning needs and experiences in the classroom. As Ms. Kathryn reflected about the children in her class, “I want them to grow up to be respectful adults. I want them to be in a society where they know they have a voice.”
Chapter 5

Discussion

Spodek (1988) claims that there is a need to understand the role of teachers’ pedagogic theories, those ideas about teaching and learning that are cultivated from experience and more formal knowledge. This study sought to understand Ms. Nancy’s and Ms. Kathryn’s practices and roles in the classroom. Through the semi-structured interviews, I was able to capture a glimpse into their individual perspectives related to their pedagogical decision-making. Additionally, through focal-child observations, both teachers’ constellation of practice were further analyzed to shed light on their beliefs. This discussion will illuminate how Ms. Nancy’s and Ms. Kathryn’s teaching stances are interlaced with similarities as well as discreet differences linked to their knowledges, actions, and beliefs. This chapter ends with implications for future research and practice and study limitations.

The confirmation of a person’s beliefs can be found in what they say, what they plan to do, and what they actually do (Levitt, 2001). The goals of this study included an examination of teachers’ interactions with children and an exploration of their beliefs regarding their teaching practice and children’s learning.

The study was guided by two questions and hypotheses. First, this study examined how teachers verbally engaged children during classroom activities as indicated when using a focal-child protocol? Secondly, this study strove to explore the question, in what ways do teachers’ reported beliefs influence their classroom practice? It was hypothesized that teachers’ practice would reflect teachers’ reported beliefs, which was
confirmed. Specifically, if teachers embraced a more top-down, teacher lead perspective, it was hypothesized their practices would mirror their orientation with practices such as: giving directions, using basic and deep level questions, providing explanations, offering feedback, and correcting off task or inappropriate behaviors. This hypothesis was denied as child-centered beliefs appeared to dominate pedagogical decisions.

On the other hand, if teachers had a child-centered orientation it was hypothesized their practices would reflect that orientation through the implementation of practices such as: engaging in social conversations with children, recasting children’s behavior to correct, expand, or question children’s input to gain understanding, accepting the child’s input, taking the child’s perspective, referring children to other social partners, and following children’s lead. The findings confirmed this hypothesis as teachers’ recollections of classroom experiences and observed practices were replete with references to the importance of creating a safe space for children’s learning attempts, to listen carefully for indications of their interests and needs and to remain flexible and poised for taking from and giving the lead to the children.

In the remaining discussion the connections between the findings and previous work in the areas of teacher beliefs and classroom practices will be woven into the new understandings brought to light by the experiences of Ms. Nancy and Ms. Kathryn.

**The Role of Varying Knowledges in the Teachers’ Practice**

**Personal-practical knowledge.** Based on the interview data, Ms. Nancy and Ms. Kathryn are clearly unique women who share a passion for teaching and a commitment to young children. Through the interviews both teachers’ referenced their personal life
views, providing a glimpse that undergirded and fueled their practice. For example, Ms. Nancy wants “children to be the best they could be”. As a mother figure, she wants to help these children, just like she helps her own two children. Ms. Kathryn believes strongly that some people don’t think children have voices because they are “small”. However, her life view is that “children [do] have voices” and “children are people”—“they are [just] little people”.

While their life views are merely a glimpse into Ms. Nancy’s and Kathryn’s personal knowledges, they do shed light on their pedagogical actions and function as “contextual filters” (Clark and Peterson, 1986). For example, when Ms. Nancy encouraged children to be the best they could be or when Ms. Kathryn lowered her giant body to the children’s level, they portray a stance of teacher who practices from her values, her convictions, and her mutual regard for the other. They take action, action that is informed by their lived lives and their knowledge of “best practices”. As Clandinin (1986) stated, “action is imbued by knowledge and knowledge with passion. Action and knowledge are united in the actor…” (p. 362).

**Pedagogical knowledges.** Both teachers value children as individuals and seek ways to calibrate their practice based on what knowledge, skills, and dispositions each child brings to a learning experience. The sociocultural perspective provides a unique cultural outlook of appreciating a classroom full of children with different experiences, histories, interests, and abilities. This orientation occurred across activities and supports their many teaching decisions. For example, Ms. Nancy guides children in a way that enables them to develop autonomy (e.g., scissor cutting). Her observed practice supports
this orientation. By asking both basic and deep level questions, giving directions and content, offering performance level feedback and following children’s lead, she appeared to be intentional and nuanced in teaching children, while also providing detailed explanations that children could internalize for future independent learning. Other research has found similar results during instructional activities. For instance, Cote (2011) found that teachers gave more directions and content with richer vocabulary, while Turnbull and colleagues (2009) found teachers asked open ended questions and offered elaborations during teacher lead activities.

Ms. Kathryn, on the other hand, values children’s opinions and recognizes their suggestions, acting on these by modeling, creating peer partnerships, and ensuring their interests in bugs, for example, is followed. Ms. Kathryn’s observed practices illuminated this position; such practices included: following children’s lead, accepting their input, and offering both performance and mastery level feedback which is a characteristics of classroom assessment practices (i.e., words up everywhere; praises on task behavior). Research has found that teachers’ assessment and various forms of feedback are critical during instruction activities (Pollard, 1990; Sadler, 1989; Tunstall & Gipps, 1996). Pollard stressed, “meaningful and appropriate guidance and extension…the child’s attempts to “make sense” and enables them to cross the zone of proximal development” (p. 251). Both teachers’ examples are characterized by children and teachers in relation who construct new skills and knowledge together (Trudge & Scrimsher, 2003), through “creating a dialectic relationship” (Vygotsky, 1978a, 1978b, 1981; Van Huizen, Van Oers, & Wubbels, 2005).
Ms. Nancy and Ms. Kathryn’s image of children includes a belief that children are competent and far more capable to voice their needs and take control of their actions than others may believe. The teachers focus remains on the child-centered approach, as a way to be ready to let children take charge of their learning. As Ms. Nancy has a strong belief in children’s potential now and into the future, she purposefully creates learning experiences that include basic skills and a disposition to work hard, work with others, and keep trying to reach one’s potential.

The school readiness movement has pressured many educators in the U.S., particularly those who teach young, poor, minority children, to move away from child-centered approaches. Both teachers feel this pressure to help prepare them for public schooling (Barbarian & Wasik, 2009; Pianta, Cox, & Snow, 2007), but their approaches are subtle. Ms. Nancy eases away from directing children early in the year and slowly turns over the control to children to make learning their own. Whereas, Ms. Kathryn reveals a difference in how she is making peace with the “push-down, school readiness pressures”. She noted, “These are the kids that are getting ready for the big K…I don’t want to set them up for failure” so she creates writing and reading experiences and spaces that “look” like kindergarten tables and chairs so they know, “when you leave Ms. K this is some of the things you are going to do.” She acknowledges that her “way is not always T-H-E way”, a lesson shared with all effective and responsive preschool teachers today who must continually walk the line between holding true to their beliefs and creating balanced curricula to prepare children “to be the best they can be”.
Summary

In conclusion, the present study has contributed to the literature on preschool teachers’ beliefs and classroom practices, confirming the two reflect one another. More specifically, Ms. Nancy’s and Ms. Kathryn’s observed practices illuminated many of their reported beliefs and examples. It is important for future research to examine both practice and beliefs when exploring teachers’ pedagogical practice. Secondly, the personal views that surfaced in the interviews shed some light on teachers’ observed practices and reported beliefs. This finding can be useful for future research and professional development initiatives. In particular, programs and studies focused on teachers’ instruction should include data on teachers’ personal-practical and pedagogical knowledges. Lastly, this study has contributed to the literature regarding the illustration of Head Start’s landscape. As both teachers’ profiles were similar this could be (a) due to the effect of the Head Start culture and influence, or be the reason (b) both teachers are employed at Head Start as a way to ensure integrity between their beliefs and practice. Lastly, this study has confirmed that teachers continue to hold a strong child centered, developmentally appropriate approach in the midst of state and program push downs toward an emphasis on school readiness.

Limitations

While this study added new understandings regarding the interplay between teachers’ practices and beliefs, several limitations are evident. The sample included two teachers and 40 children in two classrooms at one center. Although the sample was small it was somewhat diverse with each teacher representing different racial/ethnic
backgrounds, differing lengths of time in the field, and different ages. With only two teachers, the findings related to the teachers’ beliefs are not generalizable, however that was not the intent of this study. This study has revealed an approach to the creation of teacher profiles juxtaposed against focal-child observations of teachers as children’s social partners. Consequently, a multi-dimensional view of teacher’s personal-practical knowledge, beliefs, and pedagogical practices revealed nuances regarding their individual and shared experiences as Head Start teachers.

Perhaps the biggest limitation of this study comes from the method of data collection and coding. Although this study utilizes a two methods for recording classroom data, conducting focal-child observations for examining teachers’ interactions was limited. Teachers’ interactions with children were only captured when teachers interacted with a single focal child rather than recording their interactions across a range of teacher-child encounters. It is recommended that the use of focal child data and teacher interviews continue to be utilized, together, with the inclusion of broader classroom data of teacher-child exchanges.

Strengths

Although limitations were present, this study included many strengths. The first strength was the collection and analysis of data from multiple methods. By using both quantitative and qualitative data the study was enhanced, as each method complimented the other, contributing to the findings in ways one method might not allow. The teacher interviews and research journal entries provided detailed descriptions of vivid examples, themes, and pronounced alternative perspectives that the quantitative data would shed
light on. Whereas, the focal-child observations provided details about each child’s interactions with his/her teacher. Paired together, the relationship between teachers’ reported beliefs and observed practices were examined.

A second strength is the amount of time dedicated to the study. As one of the research assistants, I spent approximately 7 months in Ms. Nancy’s and Ms. Kathryn’s classrooms. Consequently, strong interpersonal relationships were formed. These relationships were built on both personal and professional level, strengthened by trust and mutual respect. Our formed friendships influenced each teacher’s level of comfort and willingness to share personal beliefs and precious examples during their interviews, allowing me to access some of their deep-rooted beliefs.

**Implications for Future Research and Practice**

The findings from this study provide some important knowledge for professionals working with and invested in Early Childhood Education and future research. This study points to a relationship between teachers’ reported beliefs and observed classroom practices, therefore, future research should consider teachers’ beliefs when focused on exploring teachers’ practices in the classroom. While practices may vary, the beliefs behind the practices may be harmonious. Thus, situating teaching in a purposeful way by acknowledging teachers’ personal-practical knowledge may inform teachers’ continued learning more about themselves and on-going professional development.

Focal-child data regarding the examination of teachers’ practices can provide important understandings regarding how children and teachers experience classroom environments (Katz, 1994). Consequently, due to the findings from this particular study a
benefit to the field would be to include methodologies that couple focal-teacher observations with qualitative data about teacher practice.

Lastly, one major implication from this study is regarding the professional development of teachers, both in-service and within teacher education programs. Examining one’s personal-practical knowledge through deep reflection has the potential to positively impact a teacher’s development of pedagogical and relational knowledge. To further advance teacher education, programs should create opportunities for pre-service teachers to explore, address, and reflect on their personal beliefs and relate these to their practice. Teacher education programs that include experiences for young teachers-in-the-making to revisit their heritages, explore who they are as individuals, and link values and beliefs to their pedagogical practice are likely to benefit the children’s learning experiences as teachers’ continue to develop their knowledge and practice.
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Appendices
Appendix A

Knoxville - Knox County Head Start/Early Head Start
2400 Piedmont Street · Knoxville, Tennessee 37921
Phone (865) 522-2193 · Fax (865) 522-2338 · kkchs@comcast.net

February 2, 2015

To Whom It May Concern,

I, Nancy Thomas, Assistant Director of Knoxville-Knox County Head Start/Early Head Start, give permission to the principle investigators, Dr. Carin Neitzel and Dr. Hillary Fouts to conduct their study “Preschoolers’ Peer Interactions, Social Construction Strategies, and Community Building in Culturally Diverse Classrooms” at North Ridge Crossing Head Start Center. I give her permission to look at language measures and test score information on file for all participating preschool children granted parent approval. Head Start will provide Drs. Neitzel and Fouts with birth dates of all participating children as well as provide parent response center-wide demographic information, such as race, education level, and income level. In addition, I give the researchers on the project access to classrooms of the participating children and access to the playground in order to collect observational data of all these children.

If there are any questions or concerns regarding this letter of permission, please contact Nancy Thomas at Head Start.

Sincerely,

Nancy Thomas
Nancy Thomas, Assistant Director
Knoxville-Knox County Head Start/EHS
Phone: (865) 522-2193
Email: kkchs@comcast.net

NT/bje
March 7, 2016

RE: Permission to Amend Research Study

Dear Stephani,

I, Nancy Thomas, Head Start Director, give my permission to Stephani Phelps, to add a teacher interview component to research study at North Ridge Crossing Head Start. This permission extends the study; Preschoolers’ Peer Interactions, Social Construction Strategies, and Community Building in Culturally Diverse Context. As described in your request, the study extension will include two separate one-hour, individual interviews with two teachers. The interviews will be audiotaped with notes taken. Each interview will be conducted in a private space at the Head Start Center. These interviews will be conducted at a time of the teachers choosing. Following the first interview, teachers will be given a questionnaire to be completed at their convenience. This questionnaire will be picked up at the time of their second interview.

The results of this research will provide information about teachers’ classroom practices across activities in relation to their beliefs about their roles.

This letter of support provides permission to:

1) Extend Dr. Neitzel’s previous study at the North Ridge Crossing Center
2) Complete two separate one-hour interviews with two teachers

Please feel free to contact me if additional information is necessary.

Nancy Thomas
Director
Knoxville-Knox County Head Start/Early Head Start
2400 Piedmont Street
Knoxville, TN 37921
kkchs@comcast.net
Phone: 865-522-2193

cc: Mary Jane Moran, PhD
Appendix B

Consent for Child’s Participation in Head Start Diverse Contexts Project

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Dr. Carin Neitzel and Dr. Hillary Fouts, professors in the Department of Child and Family Studies, will be doing a research study in your child’s classroom at Head Start. We would like to invite your child to take part in this research. The purpose of the research is to learn more about the ways young children develop and maintain friendships in diverse group settings in early childhood classrooms. This letter describes what we will do in the research and asks you to give permission for your child to take part in the research study.

What will my child be asked to do?
Your child will let us observe and record his/her regular activities in the classroom. During the study, a research assistant will observe and record your child’s learning and play experiences and interaction patterns with their teachers and peers who are like them and not like them. The research assistant will only be observing your child’s interactions; she will not be directing your child to do any specific activities in the classroom or on the playground. The researcher assistant will simply watch and write notes about the way your child participates, interacts, and plays in the classroom.

What will happen in the classroom?
A research assistant will come to your child’s classroom 3-4 mornings per week. All researchers involved are experienced in working with young children; however, the researchers will not interact with your child beyond common courtesies. The research assistant will not ask the teacher to alter the classroom schedule in any way. The research assistant will simply observe the usual activities planned by the teacher.

What other information do you want to collect about my child?
We would like your permission to see and record background information, developmental and language test scores from assessments that have already been given by the staff of Head Start and maintained in your child’s file at the Center.

Does my child have to do this?
No, your child does not have to take part in the research. Taking part in the research is completely voluntary. If you decide that you do not want your child to take part in the research it will not affect his/her enrollment or experiences at Head Start in any way.

If you say “yes” now but change your mind later, you can drop out at any time by contacting Dr. Carin Neitzel or Dr. Hillary Fouts or by telling the Director of your child’s Head Start program. If you withdraw from the study, data gathered to that point will be retained for analysis to the extent necessary for completing the research.

If your child does not want to be observed or becomes upset on one of the observation days, we will attempt to collect data on a different day. If your child does not want to participate or becomes upset again on three consecutive days, we will not attempt to observe again.

If your child does not participate, the researchers will not write down notes about any of his/her activities.

Does it cost me or my child anything to participate?
No, there is no cost to you or your child for participating.

Who will see the notes taken about my child’s activities?
Notes will be taken on all children who take part in this study. Only the researchers will be able to see the notes that are taken. Dr. Neitzel and Dr. Fouts will keep notes in locked storage.

IRB NUMBER: UTK IRB-15-02161-FB
IRB APPROVAL DATE: 06/09/2015
IRB EXPIRATION DATE: 03/25/2016
Will others know that my child is taking part in this research?
Your child’s teachers, the Head Start Director and staff will know your child is taking part in this research. We will do a number of things to try to keep people not involved in the research from knowing which children are participating. Your child will be referred to by id number only in all notes taken. If you agree to allow us to access background and test information from your child’s file, that data will not contain identifiable information and will be placed in a file containing only the assigned id number. Thus your child’s identity will be protected.

What are the risks and inconveniences of taking part in this research?
We do not believe this study presents any serious risks or inconveniences to your child. Because the research activities will occur in the classroom as part of the children’s usual activities, your child may not even be able to tell that he or she is part of a research study.

What are the benefits of taking part in this research?
Your child’s participation will provide us with important information about how young children develop and maintain peer relationships that will be invaluable for understanding how to best design early childhood educational environments.

If I want my child to participate, what do I have to do?
Please sign this consent form and return it to the sealed box located inside your child’s classroom or give it to the Center Director or your child’s teacher when you arrive with your child at the Center. Please keep a copy of the consent form for your records.

What if I have questions?
If you have any questions, please contact Dr. Carin Neitzel (615) 957-5872, cneitzel@utk.edu or Dr. Hillary Fouts hfouts@utk.edu. If you have questions regarding this research or about giving consent to participate in the research, please call the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, Office of Research Compliance Officer at (865) 974-7697.

Thank you very much!

Sincerely,
Carin Neitzel, Ph.D. and Hillary N. Fouts, Ph.D.,
Department of Child & Family Studies, University of Tennessee

STATEMENT BY PARENT/GUARDIAN AGREEING TO CHILD’S RESEARCH PARTICIPATION
I have read or have had read to me the description of the research study. The investigator or her representative has explained the study to me and has answered all of the questions I have at this time, and I freely and voluntarily choose to allow my child's to participate in this research. I agree to allow my child to be observed for research purposes. I agree to allow the researchers to look at information from my child’s Head Start file. I understand that this research is voluntary and that I may withdraw my consent at any time.

Printed name of child ___________________________ Child’s Birth date ___________________________

Printed name of Parent/guardian ___________________________ Today’s Date ___________________________

Parent/guardian’s signature ___________________________

IRB NUMBER: UTK IRB-15-02161-FB
IRB APPROVAL DATE: 06/09/2015
IRB EXPIRATION DATE: 03/25/2016
Appendix C

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1. INTERACTION

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2. ROLES / CONSTRUCTION

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<td>Normative appeals</td>
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<td>Disruptive</td>
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3. INTERACTION FUNCTION

1. Information share (Tally)
   - Inform
   - elaborate– extend
   - meta talk: performance strategies

2. Regulate. (Tally)
   - Command
   - Corrective
   - Affection

3. Instrumental (get something) (Tally)
   - Want/Need
   - Help Seek

4. Heuristic (ask questions) (Tally)
   - Added Info
   - Task-Process
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### 4. PARTNER

#### PARTNER INFORMATION EXCHANGE (Tally)

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#### PARTNER RESPONSIVENESS

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<td>3. Recast</td>
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<td>4. Perspective take</td>
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<td>5. Refer to Other</td>
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<td>6. Antagonism</td>
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#### PARTNER INSTRUCTION CHARACTERISTIC

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<td>2</td>
<td>Peer 0 1 2</td>
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Context: I P
Appendix D

Head Start Coding Manual (Summer/Fall 2015)

1. INTERACTION:

Partner: If number of partners changes throughout the interval, choose the option with the highest number (e.g. child goes from playing in dyad to small group- choose small group)

Teacher: Focal child is in proximity to teacher either interacting with the teacher (formally or informally) or engaging in the same activity (can choose teacher as partner as well as different group sizes; i.e. child is playing with 1 peer and the teacher- select dyad and teacher).

2. CONTEXT:

Choose either “play” or “instruction”. Play or less structured contexts are activities children create, lead, and choose. Teachers may be a social partner during a play activity. Instruction contexts are structured activities that teachers create, implement, lead, and demonstrate. Structured activities can be based on curriculum, lesson plans, and program and state goals. If the context changes throughout the interval, choose the activity the focal-child was in for the most amount of time. Code the context every interval.

3. PARTNER INFORMATION EXCHANGE: Social partner’s actions towards the focal child

1. Content/Directions: Partner provides content information or basic directions to the focal child. Code who the child’s partner is providing the content or directions (English-speaking peer, immigrant/other peer, or teacher). This code is used often, and may happen more than once during an interval. If the teacher is providing content information or directions to the whole class, then the focal child is included. However, if the teacher is providing content information/directions to someone other than the focal child, do not code. An example of content information from the teacher is “Today we are making fire trucks in art.” An example of content information from a peer is “My favorite color is blue.” Basic directions from the teacher includes “Hands up, stand up,” “I need all the boys to go wash their hands,” “Joey, go pick a center.” Basic directions from a peer include “I’ll be the daddy and you be the mommy,” “Give me that block.” Code for the number of instances of content/directions by each type of social partner. We do not distinguish between content information and directions, so a 2 coded for the teacher may mean that she provided 1 content information and 1 basic direction (or 2 of each).
2. **Explanation:** Partner provides strategy and procedural information or reasoning. Code who the child’s partner is providing the explanation (English-speaking peer, immigrant/other peer, or teacher). Explanation from the teacher often happens during bookreading (“He’s afraid because he heard something under his bed”) or explaining curriculum (“Today we will be making hot air balloons because we read that book about them yesterday”). Like content information/directions, an explanation provided by the teacher to the whole class is coded. Explanation will often follow content information, in which the social partner elaborates on what was previously stated. Code for the number of times each social partner provides an explanation during that interval.

3. **Basic questions:** Partner asks the focal child a basic-level question requiring a simple answer. Code who the child’s partner is asking the basic question (English-speaking peer, immigrant/other peer, or teacher). Can be a yes or no question, or one which requires little elaboration. For example (“What letter is this?” “Can I have a turn?” “What center would you like to go to?”) Code for the number of basic questions asked by each type of social partner.

4. **Higher-order questions:** Higher-order questions require children to provide deeper level answers, and go beyond just simple responses. Code who the child’s partner is asking the higher-order question (English-speaking peer, immigrant/other peer, or teacher). These questions children’s thinking more, and are found often during book reading or instruction. For example “Why was the little boy afraid?” “How do you think that made home feel?” Code for the number of higher-order questions asked by each type of social partner.

5. **Performance feedback:** Partner is corrective or evaluative of the focal child. Code who the child’s partner is providing the performance feedback (English-speaking peer, immigrant/other peer, or teacher). Partner provides basic feedback without offering any suggestion for how to improve. For example “Good job,” “Your picture is beautiful,” “That’s not the color of a stoplight.” Code for the number of times each type of social partner provides performance feedback to the focal child.

6. **Mastery feedback:** Partner provides feedback to focal child including information about how to improve. Code who the child’s partner is providing the mastery feedback (English-speaking peer, immigrant/other peer, or teacher). Examples include “Remember, crisscross the laces first (tying shoes),” “Make your S like this (handwriting)” “You have to put the glue on the paper first so that the glitter can stick,” “You’re going to have to speak louder if you want everyone to hear you.” Teachers will more often provide mastery feedback than peers, but
we have seen some incidences where peers offer mastery feedback as well (“make the shell and then the turtle,” one boy instructing another on how to draw a ninja turtle). Code for the number of times each type of social partner offers mastery feedback to the focal child.

7. **Social**: Partner engages the focal child in interaction that is informal and personal; no other motivation for the interaction besides being social (E.g. Peer says “hi” to focal child; child recollects about previous experience with peer- “Remember when we took our shoes off? That was fun!”; Teacher talks to child about what they did over the weekend). Code who the child’s partner is initiating the social interaction (English-speaking peer, immigrant/other peer, or teacher). Also, giggling or laughing with a peer or teacher is coded as social. Only code social if there is no other purpose for the partner’s language (a.k.a. they are not using language to inform, elaborate, etc.). Code for the number of times each type of social partner initiates the social exchange.

8. **Corrective**: Partner corrects focal child’s behavior. Code who the child’s partner is (English-speaking peer, immigrant/other peer, or teacher). For example “Keep your hands to yourself,” “Get back on your yellow rectangle,” “I told you before, go wash your hands.” Corrective behavior goes beyond simply providing directions, and is meant to change a child’s behavior, or reinforce directions that have already been given. Code for who corrects the child, and whether or not the child accepts or rejects the correction. There may be instances in which the child initially ignored the correction, the partner corrected them again, and then the child accepts the correction the second time. In this situation, you would code the focal child as both accepting and rejecting the correction.

9. **Accept input**: Social partner simply acknowledges child’s input. Partner may say in response to child “Uhuh,” “It could be that,” “Okay.” They accept what the child says without providing any further information or their own input. Code for who is accepting the focal child’s input (English-speaking peer, immigrant/other peer, or teacher) and how many times each type of social partner accepts input.

10. **Follow lead**: Social partner elaborates or builds on the focal child’s input. Child might offer information such as “dinosaurs are really big,” and a teacher or peer may elaborate saying “Yeah, and they’re really fast too.” Although the social partner is likely accepting the focal child’s input in order to follow lead, we do not double code these. In other words, the follow lead code supersedes the accept input code since it is more specific. Unless two separate incidences occur, only code the partner’s response as follow lead. Code for who is following the focal child’s lead (English-speaking peer, immigrant/other peer, or teacher) and how many times each type of social partner follows the focal child’s lead.
11. **Recast**: Social partner rephrases what the child says or reframes the child’s input to correct, expand, or question to gain a better understanding. Code for who recasts the focal child’s input (English-speaking peer, immigrant/other peer, or teacher) and how many times each type of social partner recasts the focal child’s input.

12. **Perspective take**: Social partner takes on focal child’s perspective. For example, “I understand that your feelings are hurt,” “I bet you’re excited for your birthday.” This code does not occur frequently, and we have not seen a peer take on the focal child’s perspective yet. Code for who is taking on the focal child’s perspective (English-speaking peer, immigrant/other peer, or teacher) and how many times each type of social partner takes on the focal child’s perspective.

13. **Refer to other**: Social partner refers focal child to another social partner. For example, “Brandon will show you how to make a tree,” “Show your new friend how we sit criss-cross applesauce,” “Ask your friend to help you.” Code for who is referring the focal child and to which social partner (English-speaking peer, immigrant/other peer, teacher). A teacher can refer the focal child to another teacher or peer, and a peer can refer to the focal child to another peer or a teacher.

14. **Anatagonism**: Social partner purposively provokes the focal child (ex: hits, steals toy). Be strict when using this code. The partner must have intention behind the action; they are not accidentally causing the other child discomfort, but are doing it on purpose. Also, the “victim” or focal child reacts negatively to the action. Therefore, if the social partner accidentally hits the focal child and they say “I’m sorry,” it is not antagonism. Likewise, if the social partner takes a toy away from the focal child, and the focal child does not care, it is also not considered antagonizing. Code for which social partner is antagonizing the focal child (English-speaking peer or immigrant/other peer) and how many times.
Appendix E

Study Invitation

Preschoolers’ Peer Interactions, Social Construction Strategies, and Community Building in Culturally Diverse Contexts

January 28, 2016

Dear Head Start Teacher,

My name is Stephani Phelps. I am a Masters student in the Child and Family Studies Department at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. I am conducting a research study as part of the requirements of my degree in Child and Family Studies, and would like to invite you to participate.

As you know, I have been a research assistant collecting data for the Preschoolers’ Peer Interactions, Social Construction Strategies, and Community Building in Culturally Diverse Contexts study since July of 2015. I am inviting you to participate in this study that would allow me to understand more about your own beliefs related to your classroom practice. The purpose of my study is to learn more about your beliefs and perceptions about why you do what you do in the classroom.

The consent form included in this packet will describe the details of this research study. Please sign and complete the attached consent form, whether you decide to participate or not, and return it to your Center Manager within one week. I appreciate your time and thank you for your consideration.

With kind regards,
(Signature)

Stephani Phelps
Child and Family Studies
1215 West Cumberland Ave.
115 Jessie Harris Bldg.
Knoxville, TN 37996
865-974-6274
sphelps4@vols.utk.edu
Appendix F

Informed Consent Statement
Preschoolers' Peer Interactions, Social Construction Strategies, and Community Building in Culturally Diverse Contexts

Dear Head Start Teacher,

Ms. Stephani Phelps, a Masters student in the Department of Child and Family Studies at The University of Tennessee, has invited you to participate in a research study being conducted at your Head Start Center. The purpose of this study is to examine your beliefs related to your classroom practices as you interact with children. This consent form describes what you would be doing with Ms. Phelps and asks you to give your permission to take part in the research study, if you decide to participate.

Ms. Phelps will conduct two separate one-hour, individual interviews with you and administer one questionnaire at the conclusion of the first interview session. You will be compensated for your time by receiving a $25.00 gift card at the close of each interview. Should you discontinue an interview for any reason, you will still be given the gift card. In both interviews you will be asked to answer some questions as to what influences your decision-making and practice in the classroom. The interviews will be audiotaped and Ms. Phelps may take notes during the interviews. Each interview will be conducted in a private space or over the telephone, whichever is convenient for you. These interviews will be conducted after scheduled teaching hours, at a time of your choosing. Following the first interview, you will be given a questionnaire to be completed at your convenience. This questionnaire will be picked up at the time of your second interview.

Participation in the interviews is completely voluntary. If you decide to participate please sign in the signature section. During the interviews if there are any questions you would rather not answer or you do not feel comfortable answering, please say so and the interview will be stopped or you may move on to the next questions, whichever you prefer. If you withdraw from this part of the study before data collection is complete you have the option to request your data be destroyed.

Your confidentiality will be protected throughout the study. The audiotape of the interviews will not include any identifying information and will only be accessible to key study/project personnel listed in the research study. All audiotapes and transcriptions will be stored in a locked file drawer and on a password protected computer in a research lab on the university campus. The transcriptions will be destroyed at the end of the study, but no later than 3 years, from the end of the study.

There are no foreseeable risks to you as a participant, other than those encountered in everyday day life. Your participation will benefit the field of teacher education and research by providing a deeper understanding of teachers’ beliefs about their classroom practice.

If you have any questions at anytime about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Ms. Phelps, at sphelps4@vols.utk.edu and 865-974-6274 or her supervisor, Dr.

1

_______ initial

IRB NUMBER: UTK IRB-15-02161-FB
IRB APPROVAL DATE: 03/22/2016
IRB EXPIRATION DATE: 03/25/2016
Neitzel, at 865-974-5316. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact the University of Tennessee IRB Compliance Officer at utkirb@utk.edu or (865) 974-7697.

You will be provided a copy of this consent form that you may keep for your own reference.

By signing below, you agree that you have read and understood the above information. If you agree to participate please sign below.

_____ Yes, I agree to participate.

Participant’s Name (printed)

Participant’s Signature   Date

When you have completed your review of this form and signed it, please place it in the manila envelope provided to you, seal it, and turn it into your Center Manager.
Appendix G

Semi-structured Interview Questions

Thank you for participating. I want you to know this is completely voluntary, if at anytime you want to skip a question or stop, please let me know. Any and all names mentioned will be removed and all confidentiality will be protected. I will be recording our conversation and might take a few notes. The format will be that of a typical interview; I will ask questions and listen. The questions are about your teaching practice and your personal beliefs about your practice, teaching and children’s learning.

1. Tell me a little bit about who you are in the classroom. For example, if someone asked you to describe what they might see when they visit your classroom what would you tell them?
   a. Probe: How does your practice vary from large group to small group and one-on-one; from free play time to center time? Etc.
      1. Probe: What would I see and/or hear?
   b. Probe: How does your role vary from large group to small group and one-on-one; from free play time to center time? Etc.
      1. Probe: Give me an/some example(s)?

2. Talk to me about how your practice has evolved since you started teaching.
   a. Probe: Give me an/some example(s)?

3. I am interested in you sharing the beliefs that inform your practice.
   a. Probe: What are these beliefs? Example?

4. In what ways do some of these beliefs influence your decision-making?
   a. Probe: Examples?

5. While I was taking my focal child data I noticed you (e.g., you follow the children’s lead during large group; making bats in literacy groups you allowed the children to work through their project and any struggles; you let the children work out a big disagreement without intervening, etc.). Explain what goes through your mind when you make these decisions to act or not act, to move in or not, to intervene or not.
   a. Probe: I would like you to share more examples about how this process of deciding what to do, when to do it, etc.

6. Overall, what is your image of young children?
   a. Probe: Can you tell me more about this?

7. Now that I know how you see young children, tell me a little bit about why you do what you do?
   a. Probe: Can you tell me more about this? Examples?

8. Talk to me about how you vary (or not vary) your practice depending on your perceptions of a child or children?
a. Probe: Give me an/some example(s)?

2. Talk to me about how you vary (or not vary) your practice depending on the classroom activity (small group, large group, one-on-one, centers or free play)?
   a. Probe: Give me an/some example(s)?

3. During a conflict between two children, what do you typically do?
   a. What are your beliefs that inform your practice and decision-making?

4. If you could describe what kind of affection is shared in your classroom, what would I see? (What are typical ways you show children affection?)
   a. Probe: Examples?
   b. What are your beliefs that drive this practice?
Appendix H

Reflective Research Journal

1. Report challenges, issues, and concerns related to methodology and procedures.
2. Notice what the teachers is doing. Recall any patterns, exchanges, and events that stand out to me.
3. How do the teachers, classroom, and children seem?
4. What am I wondering?
Thursday Nov. 12th

Ms. Nicole was working with her literacy group. She had paper, crayons, scissors, materials to make bats and cut them out. She had the children watch her make and cut the bats out then had the children make their own with her bat on display.

When she demonstrated making the bat she was very detailed with her words. “I’m using the black paper and a white crayon to draw a circle.” She showed them as she talked. She continued to describe her actions.

“Now I’m using the scissors to cut out the circle. She had about 5 or 6 kids in her group and they all sat on the ground in a circular shape. It caught my attention that all the kids were sitting still and listening & watching her. I didn’t hear one “I can’t see”. Ms. N & the kids were focused.

After she demonstrated the whole activity she layed her craft on the floor and asked the
Children if they had any questions. One girl asked if she could make a pink bat. Ms. N said "you all can make whatever color of bat you want. Pick whatever color of paper we have."

I found this interesting that Ms. N demonstrated how to make the bat correctly but didn't care if it represented a "real" bat color. This made me think that she demonstrated to show the kids the process and not the "correct way" to make a bat.

Another child asked if he could finish his picture. Ms. N said she was happy he wanted to finish his picture but right now they were focusing on nocturnal animals so we are making bats. She continued, "If you want you can finish the picture of you at the park during free play." The child said "OK."
Appendix J

everything but I just supervise and catch what I see. I try to see what they have learned through all the sessions... I just watch them and I feel as a teacher if I need to step in I feel a child may be getting to aggressive or kids might not be respecting what someone is saying. So...I pay attention to the feel of what is going on— if feel I need to intervene. I slide in... I don’t slide in saying “did you hear...?!!?” I slide-in in a way that include them in what’s going on with the situation. So I just... really observe and knowing their temperaments. Some kids have a temperament are real shy... and slow to warm... then you have some that are just feisty (laugh). And the ones that are feisty you have to really watch and make sure that the slow to warm up kids are not intimidated. You know that from day one... because we ask the parents questions in the beginning. And I don’t like red flag them I just pay attention. And in the classroom setting you put them out there and you just see how they interact and if the interact appropriate... you know I just say “Yeah! I saw that you helped your friend over there when he was having a hard time” so I’m always recognizing what their doing to say what they just did is really important to MS. K so if its important to me how do you think their friend feels. I’m always trying to catch the positive stuff...not just the negative but they positive and encourage them. Just by observing and knowing their temperament.

I: Over all what is your image of young children?

K: [0:19:45:50] Precious little people. People think because there little they don’t have a voice. Children have voices. Even if their infants. I mean if there breathing... then I just feel that all children should be able to express themselves... and even if its the “wrong” (air quotes) way then that’s my role to teach them... because it might just be what they know...(p) they might know... they might be a taught you scream when someone does something... (p) So I think they have a voice but you just have to sort of redirect them. They are human beings and they matter. You think you can tell them “you go over there and your doing this and this...” Well N-O. They have feelings also. (p) I mean there just precious ... little precious cargo and the ones that come to school who have never been in a child care setting... first of all you have to reassure ...I tell them-- I have a picture schedule and I show them how “this is you coming to school... this is you eating...”
Appendix K

Interview Themes and Reduction Phases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme Reduction Phases</th>
<th>Ms. Nancy</th>
<th>Ms. Kathryn</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Initial themes:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Role model</td>
<td>1. Role</td>
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<td>2. Belief</td>
<td>2. Belief</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Differentiated Instruction</td>
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<td>4. Respect</td>
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<td>5. Child-centered</td>
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<td>6. Resources</td>
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<td>7. Collaboration</td>
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<td>8. Motivation</td>
<td>8. Expectations</td>
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<td><strong>Reduced themes:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Role</td>
<td>1. Pedagogy</td>
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<td>2. Respect</td>
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<td>3. Individual child</td>
<td>3. Individual child</td>
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<td>4. Resources</td>
<td>4. Belief</td>
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<td>5. Continuous learning</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Final themes:</strong></td>
<td>1. Image of children</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. Respect</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Role</td>
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</tbody>
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Vita

Stephani Phelps is a Masters student in the Department of Child and Families Studies at University of Tennessee. She received her Bachelors or Arts in Child Development from California State University, Stanislaus in May 2012.

Her primary research interests include working with early childhood educators and young children. Stephani has worked as a graduate research assistant for Dr. Jaye Thiel for two years assisting with both teaching and research duties. Stephani is currently the President of the Graduate Student Organization (GSO) and a member of the student-governed organization UTKCFR, a student affiliate of the National Council on Family Relations. After completing her Masters, Stephani looks forward to working with children, families, and teachers in an applied setting.