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**Early Childhood Teacher Education:
Examining the Perceptions of Graduates
of Three Preservice Programs**

by

Mary Jane Harkins

**Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

at

**Dalhousie University
Halifax, Nova Scotia
October, 1997**

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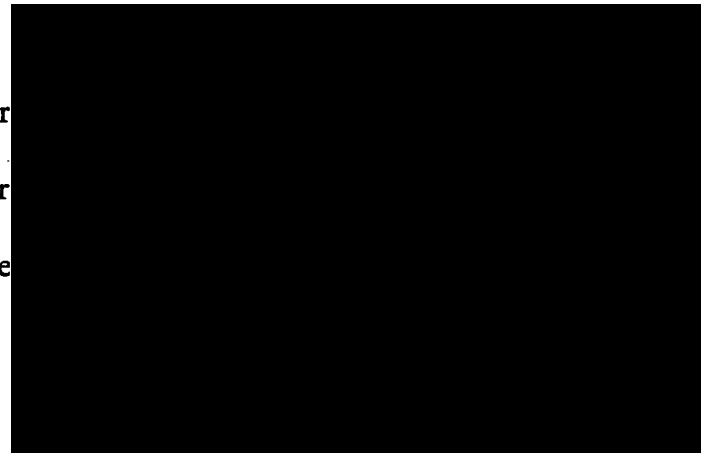
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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Dated: August 11, 1997

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DEDICATION

I want to extend my deep appreciation to my daughter, Heather-Anne, for her endless patience, caring, and support during my years as a doctoral student. Special thanks to my mother, Lillian MacMillan, and my father, the late Dr. Duncan MacMillan, for my wonderful early childhood years, their encouragement of my educational endeavours, as well as their lifelong commitment to the care and education of happy, healthy children in our society.

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ABSTRACT

Professional child care has become an increasingly integral part of life for Canadian families with young children. Because child care teachers have been identified as a key indicator of the quality of child care provided to young children, it is important to explore the issue of how best to prepare early childhood professionals. The purpose of the study was to examine the nature of the relationship between early childhood teacher preservice preparation and teaching practices. The significance of the study related to the value placed on experienced preschool teachers' perceptions of their preservice teacher preparation and its impact on their present teaching practices.

The design of the study was based on an ecological framework and the methodology involved a qualitative case study. Data was collected from 6 preschool teachers through structured interviews, naturalistic observations, informal interviews, and teaching artifacts. These 6 preschool teachers had from 2 to 6 years of teaching experience in a day care centre. Two of the participants graduated from a 4-year baccalaureate degree program in early childhood education; two participants completed a 2-year competency-based teacher education program; and the final two graduated from a 1-year thematic early childhood teacher training program.

In the analysis of the study five themes were identified among the preschool teachers' perceptions of the preservice teacher education program: understanding the nature of the child, integration of theory and practice, the nature of the classroom teaching, practicum experiences, and the overall atmosphere. Their present teaching practices were explored under the following headings: teacher-initiated small group activities, routines, and teacher-child interactions.

There were no definitive interpretations, as the preschool teachers' perceptions were complex and, at times, dependent on many other variables. The results of the study supported and recognized the complex issues involved in preparing early childhood professionals for the care and education of young children. The richness of the teachers' perceptions and the identified conceptualizations of the findings added to the existing knowledge and supported other research findings about the relationship between teacher preparation and teaching practices. Implications of the study are delineated as well as suggestions for further research. This approach invites the reader to use the discussions in the dissertation in a heuristic manner for further inquiry into early childhood teacher education and the role of the preschool teacher in the day care environment.

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CHAPTER I

A PRELUDE TO THE STUDY

The secret of teaching is to be found in the local detail and the everyday life of teachers; teachers can be the richest and most useful source of knowledge about teaching; those who hope to understand teaching must turn at some point to teachers themselves. (Ayers, 1992, p. v)

In Canada, centre-based child care has become an important part of child-rearing for an increasing number of families. In recent decades, there has been a 19-fold increase in day care spaces. In 1971, there were 17,391 spaces, and in 1991, there were 330,082 spaces (National Child Care Information Centre, 1993). Coupled with this increase in the use of professional child care has been a growing concern about the educational qualifications of teachers who work in day care centres. Part of this concern relates to the historical separation of the custodial care and education of young children (Day & Goffin, 1994) which has contributed to a fragmented system of teacher licensing.

The public pressure for custodial child care is based on the belief that the requirements for child care teachers are personal characteristics such as caring, flexibility, and patience. Teachers viewed as providers of care for young children, therefore, are expected to provide for children's basic needs in a safe, healthy environment. Other programs are based on the need to enhance the care and education of the whole child, but they vary in their philosophical orientations as well as the way in which they meet their goals. There is a developing body of research that demonstrates the existence of a positive relationship between teacher

qualifications and quality child care which, in turn, supports reform in early childhood teacher preparation (Bredenkamp & Willer, 1992). This lack of uniformity regarding teacher qualifications involves conflicts over how best to educate early childhood teachers as well as the goals and objectives of preservice preparation programs. However, provincial licensing requirements range from little or no formal training to a diploma in early childhood education.

In the United States, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) have issued guidelines for the preparation of early childhood teachers (NAEYC, CEC, NBPTS, 1996). In Canada, a national professional organization has also established guidelines for early childhood teacher education, and provincial governments are beginning to establish standards for programs in post-secondary education institutions (British Columbia Ministry of Health, 1996; Canadian Child Care Federation, 1994; Ontario Ministry of Education, 1996). Peters (1981) states that support for enhanced educational requirements for child care professionals is based on the following assumptions:

1. There is a base of knowledge concerning the relationship of prior education and training to current teaching performance.
2. Methods exist for providing new entrants with the information, attitudes, and behaviour that are necessary for qualified performance.

3. There are appropriate and valid means for assessing whether a person has the information, attitudes, and skills necessary for qualified performance. (p. 7)

In the area of early childhood teacher preparation, two controversial issues related to these assumptions include: (a) the amount and type of training needed, and (b) how training is reflected in on-the-job performance. A lack of consensus concerning these issues is evident in the fact that day care practitioners' training backgrounds range from little or no formal training to graduate level work in early childhood education and related areas. These issues also involve an important criticism of research on teacher training in general, one which questions the assumption that more or improved training results in effective and appropriate teaching practices.

With these controversies in mind, an important area for research is the exploration of different approaches to early childhood teacher preservice preparation and the resulting impact, if any, on the graduates' teaching practices. There are those who argue that traditional teacher training has very little influence on teacher practices. Jones (1984) stated "it is common knowledge that teachers rarely teach as they were taught to teach; that is ivory tower thinking. They are more likely to teach as they themselves were taught and as the old hands in the classroom next to them teach" (p. 186). Studies in teacher education have stressed the powerful influences of prospective teachers' prior perceptions about teachers and teaching as well as how they filter new concepts through these established values and beliefs (Bowman, 1989;

Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1989; Goodman, 1988; Gorman, 1993; Jones, 1984; Lortie, 1975). Prospective teachers also have a concern for survival skills such as procedures, routines, and prescriptions for practices that can take precedence over developing an understanding of the rationale underlying the teaching (Feimer-Nemser & Buchmann; Gorman; Kagan, 1992; McAninch, 1993). This suggestion, that teacher training is, at best, a weak intervention in affecting how teachers teach, concerns those responsible for the professional preparation of teachers. Other important elements that affect what teachers do include contextual factors in the overall environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bruner, 1996; Harms & Clifford, 1980; Spodek, 1988; Whitebook, Howes, & Phillips, 1989). For example, variables that have been identified include the support of co-workers and centre administrators (Cassidy, Buell, Pugh-Hoese, & Russell, 1995; Lyon & Canning, 1995), physical structure (Phyte-Perkins, 1980), adult-child interaction (Arnett, 1986; Howes & Olenick, 1986; Vandell, Henderson, & Wilson, 1988; Vandell & Powers, 1983), overall size of the centre (Prescott, Jones, & Kritchevsky, 1972), caregiver turnover (Whitebook et al.), and the interactions between the child care centre and the family (Goelman & Pence, 1987).

Other researchers, however, suggest that the nature of child care professionals' overall education and child care specific training can make a difference in the quality of care provided for young children. Support for a positive relationship between levels of early childhood preparation and teacher behaviours as well as attitudes is provided by Arnett (1989), Berk (1985), Bredekamp (1989), Powell and Strummel

(1989), Scarr, Eisenberg, and Deater-Decker (1994), and Whitebook, Howes, and Phillips (1989). Researchers have also demonstrated that a broad base of theoretical and practical knowledge is important for providing developmentally appropriate practice (Foreman & Kuscher, 1983; Kamii & DeVries, 1978; National Association for the Education of Young Children, NAEYC, 1982; Wien, 1995). Knowledge of developmentally appropriate practice has been related to course work in child care and supervised practical experience (Cassidy, Buell, Pugh-Hoese, & Russell, 1995; Snider & Fu, 1990).

The findings in this body of research, however, give limited, if any, information concerning the actual content and process of the participants' training/educational background. These researchers refer to the amount of training and/or general type of training, but often group people of different types and levels of background training into the same category (Arnett, 1989; Whitebook et al., 1989). One notable exception is the qualitative work of McLanahan (1992) who examined the perceptions of preschool teachers concerning the sources of their pedagogical content knowledge. The 6 teachers in McLanahan's study had trained in five, different 2-year associate degree (A.S.) programs and were in their first or second year of teaching. This study is limited in descriptions of the actual programs, but the findings identified links between the teachers' formal training and what and how they teach. McLanahan identified a need for further research on early childhood teacher preparation with teachers from different levels of formal training and at a later stage in their teaching experience. My study, in part, expands on the research in this area, by examining the

perceptions of experienced early childhood teachers concerning their preservice preparation and its impact on their teaching practices.

Gaining Insights from the Practitioner

This study explored the relationship between formal teacher preparation and teaching practices from the perspectives of experienced early childhood teachers. In light of such an examination, early childhood educators can begin to be responsive, not only to the cognitive development of teachers, but also in helping them to gain a greater understanding of the contextual factors that impact on the implementation process of one's professional preparation. Fuqua and Greenman (1982) supported the position that, "until we know more about the processes and outcome of training, benefits due to child care training cannot be maximized for children" (p. 321).

McAninch's (1993) study of teachers' thinking demonstrated how teachers learn about teaching and what they believe to be the sources of their knowledge base are important issues for teacher educators. The purpose of my study was to explore preschool teachers' perceptions of their preservice preparation as a source of their teaching knowledge and how they process as well as transfer this knowledge to their present teaching practices in day care centres. The study used an ecological approach which contextualized the participants' perceptions within the overall environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Merriam (1988) asserted that, "Research focussed on discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied offers the greatest promise of making significant contributions to the knowledge base and practice of education" (p. 3).

The early childhood education field has produced a substantial body of research that valued the personal practical knowledge of teachers (Ayers, 1989; Clandinin, 1986; Paley, 1992; Wein, 1995; Yonemura, 1986). The practitioners involved in these studies have provided valuable insights into teachers' thinking and the complexities of teaching young children. Wien also found that as teachers were given the opportunity to name their experience they began to see the degree of congruency between their stated beliefs and actual practice which encourages them to become active agents of self-initiated change in their practice.

Recognizing the importance of the "voices of practitioners," Goffin and Day (1994) invited practitioners, with varying amounts of experience in different programs for children from birth to age 8 years, to write essays on what is needed to begin work in an early childhood classroom and how early childhood teachers can continue to grow in their competence. These essays confirm the need for continued dialogue with practitioners for insights and suggestions regarding early childhood teacher education. They stressed that practitioners can contribute to the debate on what preparation is needed for teachers of young children as well as the integration of objective and subjective knowledge about teaching.

Schultz (1994) valued the practitioners' use of examples from their work, "This inclination for using narrative examples gives their writing special credibility and power" (p. 67). Practitioners have a holistic view of teaching and include such variables as the teachers' personal characteristics in addition to issues related to formal knowledge. Attention to personal characteristics is sometimes avoided in the

research of teacher educators because of the need to enhance the status of the field by defining a distinctive body of professional knowledge and skills. Subjective aspects, such as personal qualities, are difficult to assess and enhance in teacher education programs (Schultz). Yet, personal characteristics, such as warmth, sensitivity, and responsiveness are important aspects of teachers' interactions with young children (Arnett, 1989).

Yonemura (1991), a teacher educator, also stressed the need for a holistic approach to teacher education. She argued that prospective teachers need to be given support and opportunities to learn how to provide the type of program that we hope they will provide to young children by involving them with active learning experiences. She described an early childhood program in the following way: "holistic education directed toward fostering children's development as thinking, feeling, and acting beings whose minds and bodies work together in an active search to make meaning of their lives" (p. 400). Jones (1986) also stressed the need for teacher candidates to engage in learning experiences in which they recall and describe feelings from personal experiences, prior to their preservice training, which help them to identify the feelings and values that may be related to the rationale underlying their teaching behaviours. In this way they learn to recognize how their own feelings affect their work and help them to identify as well as respect young children's perspectives. Ayers (1989), in his study of teachers' lives, demonstrated how academic issues are affected by "emotions, values, intentions and attitudes" (p.2). This approach does not negate the importance of knowledgeable and competent

teachers but supports a holistic approach to teaching that respects the teachers' personal practical knowledge (Yonemura, 1991). In the early childhood field, where there is such a wide range of requirements for teacher licensing, a broad scope of teacher responsibilities, limited resources, and a lack of national standards, "the voices of teachers need to be amplified and orchestrated" (Daniel, 1994, p. 71). Teachers' voices can help us to ground our goals and objectives for early childhood teacher preparation in the nature of the work as we begin to examine the "interdependence among initial teacher preparation, ongoing teacher development, and the realities of daily practices" (Goffin & Day, 1994, p. 2).

This study explored early childhood teachers' perceptions by examining the following research questions:

1. What are the similarities and differences among preschool teachers' perceptions of their different preservice teacher preparation programs? This question examines the nature and value of early childhood preservice preparation.
2. How and why does a teacher's preservice preparation influence her or his teaching practices? This question seeks to identify links, even tentative ones, between the teachers' preservice programs and their teaching practices as well as to consider the reasonings underlying such links.
3. What do the participants perceive to be the relative influences on their teaching practices in their early childhood settings? This question seeks to locate the perceived supports and challenges in the realities of day care. It stresses the importance of contextual factors in the teachers' early childhood settings.

This study provides useful insights regarding how preschool teachers perceive their preservice preparation and implement their training within complex classroom situations. I examined these questions through the use of in-depth interviews, naturalistic observations, and a series of ongoing, informal interviews with the participants in the study. Spodek and Saracho (1990) stressed the “need to identify a knowledge base of practice for early childhood education and for the preparation of early childhood practitioners” (p. x). Gorman (1993) also emphasized the importance of the subjective experiences of teachers and how teachers’ perceptions affect their actions. As Carter and Doyle (1987) asserted, “a better picture of how teachers comprehend the events that unfold in classroom environments would seem to provide a valuable intellectual context for understanding the character and outcomes of initial teacher preparation and staff development programs” (p. 159). Participants’ stated perceptions and detailed descriptions of work in a day care setting also contribute to our understanding of the relationship between formal, academic knowledge and teaching practices.

The findings of the present study have implications for early childhood preservice preparation programs, administrators of day care centres, early childhood practitioners, and prospective teachers as it examined the content of preservice preparation. It also demonstrated the importance of providing support for teachers’ professional development on their journey of learning how to teach young children. This is certainly significant in a field where teacher educational requirements are minimal; professional status is low; and teacher turnover is high. For the participants

in the study, it provided an opportunity to reflect on their formal preparation and present teaching practices; to become active participants in making self-initiated changes in their own practices (Wien, 1995); and to offer comments and suggestions on how best to prepare teachers of young children. The attention which this study devoted to the perceptions of early childhood teachers gives dignity and respect to those professionals as it recognized them as a “rich and worthy source of knowledge about teaching” (Ayers, 1989, p. ix).

CHAPTER II

EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHER PREPARATION

In the past 20 years, there has been an increasing need for centre-based, quality child care for children under the age of 6 years (Friendly, 1994). This concern for quality child care recognizes the early childhood teacher as one of the important variables in providing high quality care to young children. However, there is a great deal of controversy concerning the amount and type of preservice preparation required, if any, by early childhood teachers. This issue will be explored through an examination of the following three areas: professional child care, preservice early childhood teacher preparation, and the impact of early childhood teacher training on teaching practices. The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview which will serve as a contextual framework for interpreting the perceptions of preschool teachers about their preservice preparation and its impact on their teaching practices.

Professional Child Care

Professional child care for young children has become an important part of life for many Canadian families. Friendly (1994) asserted that two key factors that have influenced the increased need for child care relate to (a) the fact that the participation of mothers of young children in the labour market has increased substantively; and (b) the growing body of research in early childhood education that has demonstrated the positive developmental outcomes of quality child care and the detrimental effects of poor care on young children. Changing social demographics in our society have also

affected the types of child care programs that are needed for young children. Recent changes in social demographics include the increased need for infant and toddler care, the integration of special needs children in child care centres, and an increasingly diverse population necessitating provision of a more inclusive, multicultural early education which recognizes the need for a broader understanding of families and cultures, as well as a greater range of services available to children through inter-agency work (Peters & Klinzing, 1990).

The care and education of young children is intricately interrelated, as the education of such young children is dependent on their overall development in areas including the physical, social, emotional, psychological, and cognitive. However, in the past, custodial care and early childhood education have had distinct and separate histories. This historical separation of the custodial care and the education of young children has resulted in differences in conceptualizations of early childhood education, purposes of programs, types of programs offered, as well as auspices under which they are offered (Goffin & Day, 1994). The implications of the separation of the care and education for young children are reflected in the diversity of services available within the early childhood field. This separation has had a significant impact on the type and amount of preservice teacher programs that are available and recognized as state approved preservice programs (Goffin & Day).

When early childhood education is conceptualized as basic custodial care, it is based on the belief that there is little need for professional expertise. It becomes a job that is “no different from what any well-intentioned mother with a little

experience could do” (Goodnow & Burns, 1984, p. 196). Personal characteristics of child care practitioners such as a love of children, then, become the basis of teacher qualifications (Almy, 1975). Other programs, such as Project Head Start, are based on the educational value of early intervention and preparation for later schooling is stressed. However, the programs do emphasize a broad interpretation of preparation for schooling as they were designed “to improve the children’s social, nutritional, physical and affective development” (Hauser-Cram, Pierson, Walker, & Tivnan, 1991, p. 15). This approach has resulted in some preschool programs being developed for children believed to be at-risk in later schooling. These programs may or may not require the same level of educational qualifications for teachers as do the other programs in the school system. There are other programs that may involve a theoretically eclectic approach to programming or may follow a specific approach such as the Montessori Method, Reggio Emilia or the High Scope model. Programs can vary widely in their philosophical orientation to the care and education of young children. If state subsidized care is available, the centre must be a nonprofit organization, licensed under the jurisdiction of the provincial social services. These various conceptualizations of the goals and purposes of early childhood education have led to different purposes and types of programs for young children. Goffin and Day (1994) stated these differences in early childhood settings influence the “content and design” of preservice preparation programs (p. 220).

Difficulties presented by these diversities are further demonstrated by the lack of an accepted nomenclature for practitioners and their role in the care and education

of young children. Are they day care workers, preschool teachers, early childhood educators, child care providers, or caregivers? Moreover, regardless of the nomenclature used, auspice, purpose, or type of programs offered, early childhood education is a field in which there is low professional status (Silin, 1988), low compensation for practitioners (Friendly, 1994), minimal requirements for staff qualifications, and a lack of standards for preservice preparation (Province of Nova Scotia, 1990). There is a wide range of teacher responsibilities within the learning environment of the child care centre, as young children are dependent on their teachers to meet their social, emotional, physical, and psychological needs, as well as their cognitive development. Yet, there is very little agreement on what qualifications teachers should have and whether all teachers should have the same level of education (Powell & Dunn, 1990). In the area of this study, provincial training requirements for staff in child care centres only require that two-thirds of the staff be trained. To be considered trained one must have completed a 1-year early childhood program, or have 2 years experience plus one course in human development or curriculum development and 25 hours in workshops (Province of Nova Scotia). As a result, preservice preparation programs vary greatly in their auspices, locations, and in the amount and type of early childhood preparation they provide for prospective teachers in early childhood settings.

Preservice Early Childhood Teacher Preparation

Early childhood education is a unique field in the teaching profession, but there is little research on preparation programs for early childhood teachers (Spodek & Saracho, 1990). All prospective teachers are in the process of being prepared to help children “acquire certain knowledge, skills, dispositions and feelings” (Katz & Goffin, 1990, p. 192). However, early childhood teacher education differs significantly from elementary teacher preparation, because of the emphasis on the growth and development of “the whole child” and the multidisciplinary nature of early childhood education (Goffin & Day, 1994). The diverse settings, purposes, and sponsorships of preservice programs make it difficult to generalize about early childhood teacher preparation.

Early childhood teacher preparation programs are located in diverse settings, such as community colleges, training institutions that are specifically designed for training in early childhood education, university departments of education, human ecology, psychology, child study, youth and child study, or early childhood education. Many of the programs are alternative routes that do not require a traditional baccalaureate degree. This practice leads to questions about the benefits of a pragmatic, child care specific training versus a more broad-based, formal early childhood degree that involves a liberal education. Almy (1975) described training as “concentration on the particular skills needed to fit a person for a specified role” (p. 196). A formal degree program provides a broader perspective to the preparation of early childhood teachers that includes general education, professional foundations,

instructional knowledge, and a practical component conducted in early childhood settings (Spodek & Saracho, 1990). Graduates of a baccalaureate degree are expected to be “well-educated” (Spodek & Saracho, p. 25) individuals, in addition to having specialized knowledge in early childhood education.

In the United States, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) have established guidelines for all early childhood professionals. These guidelines recommend that all early childhood professional education address the following need for: (a) a written, well-articulated, regularly evaluated conceptual framework; (b) general studies in multidisciplinary subject matter that promotes a multicultural and global perspective; (c) content studies that include child development and learning, curriculum development and implementation, family and community relationships, assessment, professionalism, and field experiences; (d) quality teaching and learning that: integrates theories of child development, family systems, learning, early childhood curriculum and pedagogy; is consistent with the program’s conceptual framework; attention to students’ individual and cultural backgrounds; uses of a variety of teaching methods; reflection and the active involvement of the learner; continuous evaluation of the program; and adaptations for the special needs candidate; and (e) field experiences in high quality placements that are consistent with the program’s conceptual framework. Practicum experience needs to include: supervision by program faculty members; a variety of settings with children from diverse populations

and of varying ages, needs and stages of development; opportunities to work with children and their families; and time to reflect on their experiences in collaboration with other professionals (NAEYC, CEC, NBPTS, 1996, 5-6; 14-16).

Various programs address these needs in different ways and with varying degrees of breadth and depth in the learning content. I have separated the programs into two areas, the baccalaureate degree and the non-baccalaureate degree programs. However, discussions under the different headings in the baccalaureate degree program would apply to the non-baccalaureate degree program if these areas are included in their program. For example, all early childhood teacher programs include a practicum component, and although the discussion is included under the baccalaureate degree it would also apply to the other programs. The discussion of the non-baccalaureate degree programs has been limited to two general, philosophical approaches that related to the programs from which the participants in the study graduated. Discussions in this section could also relate to the early childhood degree programs. For example, a degree program may use a theoretically thematic approach but this area is discussed under the heading of non-baccalaureate degree programs. The participants in the study graduated from a 4-year baccalaureate degree program, a 1-year thematic program and a 2-year competency-based education program.

Baccalaureate Degree in Early Childhood Education

Although the content and structure of early childhood degree programs vary, they tend to follow general guidelines based on the “knowledge, attitudes, skills, and

ethics required of a teacher of young children” (Spodek & Saracho, 1990, p. 25).

The four basic components of a professional degree program in Early Childhood Education are: general education, professional foundations, instructional knowledge, and practica (Spodek & Saracho; Saracho, 1993).

General Education

In the baccalaureate degree program, general education is undertaken in interdisciplinary subject matter and is generally completed in the first 2 years of the program. General education is viewed as a foundation for later studies. One source of support for the general education component of teacher preparation programs is the Holmes Group’s (1986) report which stated that, “creating and sustaining a communal setting respectful of individual differences and group membership, where learning is valued, engagement is nurtured, and interests are encouraged requires more than a set of identifiable skills” (p. 54). It is written in the report that a liberal education is an important foundation for teachers because:

The reform of undergraduate education toward greater coherence and dedication to the historic tenets of liberal education is thus essential to improving teacher education. Teachers must lead a life of the mind. They must be reflective and thoughtful; persons who seek to understand so they may clarify for others, persons who can go to the heart of the matter. (Holmes Group, p. 47)

Saracho (1993) stressed that “knowledge must be integrated and understood to create a broad perspective and should be made relevant to the general conditions of

human life” (p. 415). This knowledge can inform the teacher candidate of “what ought to be taught,” as it can provide teacher candidates with a foundation for a critical examination of cultural values and beliefs. Bruner (1996) asserted that it is the culture that “provides the tools for organizing and understanding our worlds in communicable ways” (p. 3). He stressed the importance of contextual knowledge:

Without specification of resources and settings required, a theory of mind is all “inside-out” and of limited applicability to education. It becomes interesting only when it becomes more “outside-in,” indicating the kind of world needed to make it possible to use mind (or heart!) effectively -- what kinds of symbol systems, what kinds of accounts of the past, what arts and sciences, and so on. (p. 9).

Professional Foundations

A second area in baccalaureate degree programs is the professional foundations which is about education rather than technical procedures (Spodek & Saracho, 1990). Professional foundation learning content can provide an opportunity for teacher candidates to “examine and appreciate the aims, ideas, values, influences and assumptions” of educating young children (Saracho, 1993, p. 416). In early childhood education the majority of the course content is usually related to child development as young children’s learning is dependent on their overall development (Spodek & Saracho). Theories of child development are an essential part of learning to teach young children as they provide an understanding of the rationale underlying teachers’ behaviour. Regarding the importance of an understanding of child

development, VanArsdell (1994) declared, “my understanding of child development has served as a map for setting my direction as a teacher. And I continue to learn new routes from the children with whom I work” (p. 88). Peters and Klinzing (1990) stated that two essential methods for learning about child development are: observation and direct experiences with young children. Young children are in a rapid stage of overall development, and observation of the children’s interests, needs, and development can assist the teacher in planning an emergent curriculum. Knowledge of child development can also help the teacher to identify exceptional patterns of development so that adaptations can be made for the special needs of individual children. However, as Bowman and Stott (1994) pointed out, “child development principles operate in a tangle of ontological, personal, and social meanings” (p. 131). Bowman (1992) also stressed the need for early childhood teachers to be sensitive to the sociocultural context of the child’s family:

The challenge for teachers is to overcome the tendency to see their own individual and cultural perspectives as the norm and others’ cultural perspectives as deviations. The appropriateness of a program is determined by the experience of the children in the program, not by conformity to a teacher’s own cultural definition of what is appropriate. (p. 130)

Child development is a crucial part of early childhood teacher education and can inform teaching practice, but other areas of study are also important. For example, a philosophy of early childhood education is important if students are to become aware of and to discuss the aims of early childhood education. Sociology,

history, political science, multicultural and gender studies all contribute to broadening the teacher candidates' perspectives of early education. Bredekamp (1997), in writing about the role of context in developmentally appropriate practice for young children, asserted:

Early childhood programs exist in contexts. Those contexts are influenced by many factors -- among them are parents' preferences, community values, societal expectations, demands of institutions at the next level of education, and broadly defined values of American culture, such as personal freedom and individual responsibility.... Decisions about how to care for and educate young children -- decisions about developmentally appropriate practice -- cannot be made without knowledge of that context in relation to knowledge about child development and learning and knowledge of individual children. (p. 43)

A broad base of general and professional knowledge is needed if teacher candidates are to broaden and contextualize their knowledge of how young children grow, develop, and learn within the influences of the overall environment.

Instructional Knowledge

A third area of the degree program is instructional knowledge. Saracho (1993) described instructional knowledge as "knowledge that teachers use in planning, implementing, and evaluating classroom practice" (p. 417). Instructional knowledge is drawn from curriculum theory, instructional theory, developmental and learning theory. Three kinds of information are used to develop developmentally appropriate curricula for young children:

What is known about child development and learning... ; what is known about the strengths, interests, and needs of each individual child in the group... ; and knowledge of the social and cultural context in which children live to ensure that learning experiences are meaningful, relevant, and respectful for the participating children and their families. (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997, p. 9)

Jones (1984) stressed that instructional methods used by teacher educators in teacher education programs must respect the teacher candidate and his/her present knowledge and life experiences. She stated, “training should build on their [the students’] existing competence, enabling them to broaden their repertoire, increase their confidence, as well as stimulate them to think critically about their values, their goals for children and children’s developmental needs” (p. 201). It is only through examining and making explicit their own values and beliefs that they can begin to reconstruct their own conceptual framework as well as gain a better understanding of the “why” of their practice. Then, even unsatisfactory consequences can be educative as they provide insights for future action.

Spodek and Saracho (1990) reported that instructional knowledge can also draw from the personal practical knowledge of early childhood teachers as “no theory or set of theories can adequately justify classroom practice” (Spodek & Saracho, p. 29). Early childhood education is developing a body of research that examines the knowledge of teachers (Ayers, 1989; McLanahan, 1992; Wien, 1991; Yonemura, 1986). Yonemura stressed the influences of personal values and beliefs as well as the situational factors in contributing to teachers’ practical knowledge. She explained:

The disciplines neither separately nor together make claim to give the answers to the complexity of teaching. The teacher draws on a reservoir of experiences woven into strategies for responding to the new scenarios provided everyday in the classroom. It is the values and beliefs of the teacher that play an important part in which strategies out of many possible are selected. (p. 5)

Clandinin (1986) stressed the importance of teacher images. She conceptualized image as a “central construct for understanding teachers’ personal practical knowledge and for linking such knowledge to past experiences and ongoing practical expressions” (p. 19). A teacher’s image “embodies a person’s experience; finds expression in practice; and is the perspective from which new experience is taken” (p. 166). Ayers (1989) pointed out that although teachers are an important resource for understanding teaching, it is important to recognize the educational setting:

... It is to individual teachers that we ultimately turn in order to understand teaching. It is true of course that no teacher is an island, or a perfectly free agent. Teachers, in common with the rest of us, are shaped by powerful social and economic forces, which coerce and constrain, prod and bombard, push and pull. Teachers particularly are formed by their relationships to power and their role in a bureaucracy geared to reproducing the societal relations in general. (p. 5)

It is important to recognize the impact of the educational setting on teachers’ teaching practices (Bronfenbrenner, 1989/1992).

Fenstermacher (1994) referred to two of the epistemological types of teacher knowledge as formal and practical. “The first is propositional or informational knowledge; the second is knowing-how or competent performance” (p. 21). An important point is that “one cannot opt for performance knowledge without also understanding that one has ‘acquired’ propositional knowledge in the bargain and vice versa” (p. 27). Formal knowledge requires justification in a “range beyond the immediate context, situation, or slice of time” (p. 28) whereas practical knowledge “is bounded by time, place, or situation” (p. 28). Schön (1983) identified practical knowledge with knowing in our actions. This acknowledges the important relationship between knowing and doing. It also acknowledges practical knowledge as an inclusive concept and stresses the importance of learning from reflective practice. However, Schön stated that the knowledge of practice is often tacit and difficult to make explicit.

When someone reflects-in-action, he becomes a researcher in the practice context. He is not dependent on the categories of established theory and technique, but constructs a new theory of the unique case. His inquiry is not limited to a deliberation about means which depends on a prior agreement about ends. He does not keep means and ends separate, but defines them interactively as he frames a problematic situation. (Schön, p. 68)

Yonemura (1986) believed that much of teachers’ implicit knowledge can be recognized and explained through reflection on teaching practices. Dewey (1904/1965) also emphasized the importance of reflective practice if teachers are to

learn from experience. This reflection can reveal to teachers the relationship between their espoused beliefs and actual practices (Wien, 1991; Yonemura). Ayers (1992) stated teachers in the process of reflecting on their teaching became “more intentional – freer – more able to endorse or reject aspects of their own teaching that they found hopeful or contrary, more able to author their own teaching scripts” (p. 150).

Shulman’s (1987) categories of knowledge provide a way of conceptualizing teachers’ knowledge. He stated that his list is minimal and includes:

- content knowledge;
- general pedagogical knowledge;
- curriculum knowledge;
- pedagogical content knowledge;
- knowledge of learners and their characteristics;
- knowledge of educational contexts;
- knowledge of educational ends, purposes, and values, and their philosophical and historical grounds. (p. 8)

Ayers (1992) was critical of this list as he maintained that it is “rational and technical” rather than “multidimensional and intersubjective” (p.149). He further stated that important areas are missing such as self knowledge and the need for “a compassionate and caring attitude” (p. 149). A search for a specific knowledge base in teaching is limiting, intimidating, and will not uncover the “heart of teaching” (Ayers, 1992, p. 149). Nevertheless, as Grossman (1990) stated, general pedagogical knowledge, subject matter knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, and knowledge

of context are “the cornerstones of the emerging work on professional knowledge for teaching” (p. 5). She described these four areas as follows:

1. **General Pedagogical Knowledge:** knowledge and skills about learners and learning, classroom management, curriculum and instruction, and the aims as well as purposes of education.
2. **Subject Matter Knowledge:** knowledge of content as well as substantive and syntactic structures.
3. **Pedagogical Content Knowledge:** conceptions of purposes for teaching subject matter, knowledge of students’ understanding, curricular knowledge, and knowledge of instructional strategies.
4. **Knowledge of Context:** knowledge of students, parents, school, community, district, and other contextual factors that affect teaching. (p. 5-9)

Shulman (1987) indicated that pedagogical content knowledge is the most important area for identifying types of teaching knowledge. “It represents the blending of content and pedagogy into an understanding of how particular topics, problems, or issues are organized, represented, and adapted to the diverse interests and abilities of learners, and presented for instruction” (p. 8). When studying the knowledge base in early childhood education, subject specific methods courses can be included in the pedagogical content area, for as McLanahan (1992) pointed out, “often the materials are the content or vice versa” (p. 33). It is recognized that this separation of knowledge into categories is for organization purposes, and in teaching situations the many parts of teachings “fuse into a synergetic whole” (Yonemura,

1986, p. 3). Collaborative research with practicing teachers “provides valuable insights into the interrelationships of theory and practice” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990, p. 3). Working with practicing teachers is an major part of the fourth component of preservice preparation programs which is referred to as the practicum experiences.

Practica

Teachers, regardless of the type or amount of preservice preparation they have completed, agree that the fourth aspect of teacher preparation, the practica, is a vital part of any program (McAninch, 1993). McAninch related this emphasis on the practical to Friedson’s (1970) medical research on clinicians who also deal with complex situations. Friedson (cited in McAninch) found that clinicians’ views were characterised by the following five elements:

1. An orientation of action;
2. Faith in the efficacy of one’s actions;
3. Reliance on first hand experience in decision making;
4. A crudely pragmatic approach to solving problems; and
5. Distrust for generalisations. (p. 2)

Ohanian (1988, cited in Hare & Portelli, 1993) referred to this demand for the practical among teachers as a need for “carry-out formulae, materials with the immediate application of scratch-and-sniff stickers... as though each of us were heading to operate a fast-food franchise” (p. 4).

Practitioners tend to value personal experience and that of experienced teachers but express doubt and mistrust of theory and textbook knowledge, which they feel hinders the intuitive “gut reactions” of the art of teaching (McAninch, 1993).

McAninch related this reaction to women’s ways of knowing (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986) which describes five basic epistemological categories:

Silence, a position in which women experience themselves as mindless and voiceless and subject to the whims of external authority; received knowledge, a perspective from which women conceive of themselves as capable of receiving, even reproducing, knowledge from the all-knowing external authorities but not capable of creating knowledge on their own; subjective knowledge, a perspective from which truth and knowledge are conceived of as personal, private, and subjectively known or intuited; procedural knowledge, a position in which women are invested in learning and applying objective procedures for obtaining and communicating knowledge; and constructed knowledge, a position in which women view all knowledge as contextual, experience themselves as creators of knowledge, and value both subjective and objective strategies for knowing. (p. 15)

These researchers noted that women have an interest in “the everyday, the practical and the interpersonal” which is “typically devalued by men and women alike” (p. 17).

Ideally, the practicum can be “the primary source of all inquiry and reflection because it sets the problems, and tests, modifies, confirms or refutes the conclusions

of intellectual investigation” (Dewey, 1929, p.56). However, as Dewey (1938/1963) explained, experiences are mis-educative if they are “arresting or distorting to the growth of further experience” (p. 25). Practica can result in a reductive situation that may be referred to as “sit by Nellie” and copy what she does (Arnstein, 1975, cited in Kennedy, 1987, p. 154). Those who become proficient at this mimicry can be praised and rewarded with wonderful evaluations. The student learns “what works” or the “tricks-of-the-trade,” instead of the “why” of a well-developed rationale. Technical procedures become the ends rather than part of the means to an educational goal (Feimer-Nemser & Buchmann, 1985, p. 63). This could produce a distorted image of the student teachers’ abilities as a teacher because the experience may not be an indicator of future teaching; it is more of an indication of a student teacher’s ability to follow the direction of the classroom teacher than developing and implementing student teacher-initiated activities. The practicum can arrest students’ learning if it becomes a socializing experience in present practices rather than an inquiry into what can and should be appropriate teaching practices (Feimer-Nemser & Buchmann). Student teachers need to reflect on their practice with classroom teachers and program faculty supervision as they learn to integrate academic, theoretical knowledge with personal teaching experiences (Dewey, 1904/1965).

Another challenge to learning in the practicum is the “two worlds pitfall” (Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1985, p. 54). This refers to student teachers’ belief that course work is irrelevant to their future work as teachers. Student teachers often are unable to see how academic learning can shape their thoughts and actions as well

as contribute to their teaching perspective. Feiman-Nemser and Buchmann used the example of a student being asked to complete a written observation task on three children. The student believed that he or she could be learning so much more by actively working with children and so was unable to see the connection between observing children and planning educational strategies for use with the children. The student teacher valued the direct involvement with children over the observation of children. However, further information is needed on the types of observations that were required to determine whether they were presented in a manner that had relevance for the student teacher. Britzman (1991) stated that often teacher candidates' experiences in teacher education programs are fragmented. Fragmentation can occur by the separation of knowledge from contextual factors; the separation of content from pedagogy; the separation of knowledge from interests; and the separation of theory and practice. All these aspects of the preparation program could impact on the meaning and relevancy a student may associate with their practicum experiences.

Saracho (1993) referred to the following aspects of a practicum placement that can result in a difficult practicum experience for student teachers: poor quality placements that are not consistent with the conceptual framework of the teacher preparation program; a central focus on the procedural aspects on teaching such as classroom management; lack of constructive feedback for the student teachers; and unclear roles for those involved in the placement such as the student teacher, the classroom teacher and the faculty supervisor.

Non-baccalaureate Early Childhood Teacher Education

Non-baccalaureate preparation programs vary greatly as to type and amount of preservice preparation candidates receive. These programs tend to focus on the pragmatic features of teaching rather than theories of teaching and learning (Stoddart & Floden, 1996). Programs could address the areas discussed previously under the heading of baccalaureate degree program but may vary in the breadth and depth of content. Peters and Klinzing (1990) described the ways in which textbooks on child development vary in content and organizational structure. This discussion provides an interesting approach to examining how learning content among the different, early childhood teacher programs, both baccalaureate or non-baccalaureate degree programs could vary:

1. The structure, usually whether a topical (e.g., cognitive development, physical development, or social development) or a chronological or stage orientation (infancy, toddlerhood, and so on) is taken;
2. Breadth or comprehensiveness (including both the age span included and the disciplinary knowledge represented or emphasized);
3. Depth or detail of coverage (with some providing only generalized principles and others providing considerable detail of classical and contemporary research);
4. The adherence to a single theoretical perspective or advocacy for an eclectic approach. (p. 68)

In the area of this study, provincial training requirements for staff in child care centres requires that two-thirds of the staff be trained (Province of Nova Scotia,

1980). The average hourly wage for teachers in child care centres is \$6.22. No specialty training is required for working with children with special needs (Friendly, 1994). Based on this minimal training requirement for early childhood teachers and the number of child care teachers with non-baccalaureate training, this approach is a “principle vehicle” for improving the quality of child care in early childhood settings (Powell & Dunn, 1990, p. 46). Within the alternate routes in preservice training programs, there are a variety of approaches that vary in their purpose and content. Two approaches, that relate to the preservice early childhood teacher preparation programs in the area of this study, are the competency-based education and the theoretically thematic programs.

Competency-based education is an approach in which the required skills are determined by the actual tasks that practitioners perform in their teaching position. A series of competencies, which vary in importance, complexity, and in the ability to be validated, are identified. The amount and type of courses provided varies among the different programs. Usually competencies are grouped into different modules. Student teachers are placed into a variety of settings and are evaluated on their performance of these competencies. This orientation assumes “that the constituent skills can be identified; that the skills can be transmitted to prospective practitioners; and that they can be appropriately drawn upon in practice” (Kennedy, 1987, p. 135). The emphasis is on performance of specified skills rather than theoretical knowledge or generalized principles. Doyle (1990) referred to this orientation as “the good employee” (p. 5), since it stresses socialization within present practices. Graduates of

this orientation to training would be able to take charge of a classroom using existing technical procedures for instruction and maintaining discipline. Doyle asserted that it has a “remote control to teaching” as its application of predetermined skills is “unidirectional and mechanistic” (13). Broudy (1974) responded to performance-based teacher education as “transubstantiation by semantic incantation” (p. 64). He argued that, “If the right words will relieve the pressure, win certification and grants, then the right words will be forthcoming – by the yard, at so much a yard. As to the performance, that remains to be seen” (p. 65).

There are few empirical studies on a competency-based approach (Powell & Dunn, 1990), but some positive outcomes have been identified. There was an increase in self-confidence and graduates felt that the experience affected their work in a positive manner (Powell & Dunn). These programs are practice-based and provide practitioners with generalized abilities which have been evaluated and applied within the realities of working in a day care. Kennedy (1987) pointed out however, that competency-based training is a very “fragmented” and “instrumental” view of teaching and misses important situational aspects. She provided an exaggerated view of this approach when she referred to Sganarelle, a doctor in Molière’s play, Le médecin, who, when presented with a dying child asserts, “She mustn’t do anything of the kind. She mustn’t die without a doctor’s prescription” (p. 136). Kennedy referred to this training as “expertise as technical skill” (134). Teacher preparation focuses on a collection of skills for working with young children.

Kennedy (1987) stressed that what is missing with this behaviouristic orientation is the knowledge and application of theory and generalized principles. This need for theory applies to all preservice teacher preparation programs. Dewey (1929) stated that theory can add to the practitioners' knowledge and understanding. Theory can "render his practice more intelligent, more flexible and better adapted to deal effectively with concrete phenomena of practice" (p. 20). However, knowledge of theory or theories is not meant to be prescriptive, but a means for making predictions, generating alternatives, exploring explanations, and reflecting on one's practice (Regan, 1992). Teaching at any level is "a highly complex, context-specific interactive activity" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990, p. 3). Dewey (1929) stated that:

Education is a mode of life, of action. As an act it is wider than science. The latter, however, renders those who engage in the act more intelligent, more thoughtful, more aware of what they are about, and thus rectify and enrich in the future what they have been doing in the past. (pp. 75-76)

Doyle (1990) referred to analytic knowledge as "knowledge lifted up from but not stripped of its particulars" (p.14). The concern for educators in teacher education programs then becomes one of how to develop prospective teachers' abilities to apply theory so that they can critically examine the "how" and "why" of situations from an objective, analytical base. Thus, it involves a reflection on one's actions and their consequences. Dewey (1991/1910) used the term reflective thinking and defined it as: "active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to

which it tends” (p. 6). This need for reflective thought recognizes the importance of both practitioners’ insights and knowledge of theoretical constructs. Dewey (1904/1965) stated:

only a teacher thoroughly trained in the higher levels of intellectual method and who thus has constantly in his [her] own mind a sense of what adequate and genuine intellectual activity means, will be likely, in deed and not mere word, to respect the mental integrity and force of children. (pp. 160-161).

Powell and Dunn (1990) argued that in order for early childhood teachers to be reflective, they need time to review their daily experiences, to dialogue with others, to examine related reading materials, and to develop curriculum. These researchers stressed the need for a “strong commitment to professional development” (p. 63) which is an area that is continuously ignored in the early childhood profession. However, as evidenced by the low status and low compensation of child care teachers, these issues are embedded in the political, social and economical aspects of the society.

A second non-baccalaureate preservice early childhood teacher program which will be examined is the theoretically, thematic approach in which all the courses are based on one overarching philosophy. Barnes (1987) pointed out that the cornerstone of the thematic approach is the development of a well-defined conceptual framework. This framework is provided by a consistent philosophy in course work, practicums, and management strategies. It is based on a belief that by helping teachers to develop a framework rooted in a deep knowledge base of one theoretical perspective, it is

possible to impact on teachers' actions, even under the pressures of their beginning years of teaching. This thematic approach assumes the goal of preservice preparation is to "launch experienced, knowledgeable novices, not inexperienced 'experts'" (Michigan State University Office of Program Evaluation, 1985, cited in Barnes, 1987, p. 14). Learning to teach is considered to be a lifelong endeavour, and the thematic approach is based on the belief that with a good beginning "prospective teachers thus will be empowered to take charge of their own learning" (Barnes, p. 14).

Katz and Goffin (1990), however, pointed out that the thematic versus the eclectic approach presents a dilemma in teacher education programs. They asked the question, "on one hand, should the preparation program be organized around a particular coherent approach to early childhood education, or, on the other, should candidates be exposed to all the available competing approaches?" (p. 198). They stated that a thematic, theoretical approach gives teacher candidates "concordant messages from all instructors" resulting in a "clear message about how to proceed and what is 'good' or 'bad,' 'right' or 'wrong' in teaching" (p. 198). However, this prescriptive approach is "antithetical to the norms and ethos of higher education institutions that prize openness to alternative points of view" (p.199). Floden and Buchmann (1990) argued that to view teaching from one ideological position can hinder teachers from gaining valuable insights from other perspectives and from recognising the limits within one theoretical approach. Evans (1982) asserted that the wide range of program models of Project Head Start demonstrated that in a pluralistic

society “no one best way exists to educate all children in all social contexts” (p. 108). Support for an eclectic rather than a thematic approach is also provided by Schubert (1989), who asserted that knowledge of different paradigms can be a “sign of conceptual richness, diversity, and pluralism of inquiry and thus symbolise maturity that recognises the complexity of a field of study” (p. 27).

Another issue in early childhood teacher preparation relates to the debate of child care specific training only versus overall general education for all teachers. One approach to this dilemma is demonstrated by the Teacher Education Council of Ontario (TECO) project. This project created an early childhood preservice program involving a community college offering a diploma in early childhood education, a degree granting institution, and a faculty of education. Doxey (1993) stated that the project proposed a ‘wedge shaped’ curriculum as this “reflected a position that a program must educate the person first before training the professional” (p. 33). In this way, the foundation of a general education would inform the child care specific courses. However, in the field of early childhood education there is no consensus on the balance between professional and general education courses within preservice programs or if general education courses are even needed (Powell & Dunn, 1990). Part of this lack of consensus appears to be related to the lack of research on the content and process of early childhood teacher preparation programs as well as the resulting impact on graduates teaching practices.

Katz (1984) suggested that another challenge in teacher preparation, which affects the impact of preservice programs, is the “feed-forward” problem (Katz et al.,

1981, cited in Katz, 1984, p. 212). This relates to “the fact that preservice training consists largely of giving students answers to questions that have not yet been asked, or of providing students with methods for dealing with eventualities rather than actualities” (p. 212). Katz also recommended that teachers receive more training after they begin employment than before they do, because of the pressures of on-the-job socialization. The following section will examine the research on the impact of early childhood teachers’ training and overall education on their teaching practices.

Impact of Early Childhood Training on Teaching Practice

Researchers who have studied teachers in various child care settings have found that early childhood teacher training and/or formal education positively related to teacher behaviour and quality child care. Ruopp, Travers, Glantz, and Coolen (1979), in their National Day Care Study in the United States, concluded that child care-related training, not formal education per se, had a definite relationship to the quality of child care. Lead teachers with child care-related training spent 28% more time in social interaction with children, while the children showed more cooperation, greater task persistence and were less frequently uninvolved in tasks or activities. Tizard, Philps, and Plewis’ (1976) observations of teachers of young children found that the overall level of verbal interaction with children and the cognitive content of teachers’ speech was higher for those teachers with more training. These increased levels of verbal interaction resulted in improved language skills for the children. However, results on teacher qualifications in Clarke-Stewart and Gruber’s (1984) Chicago Study were mixed. Children scored higher on tests of cognitive abilities but

were less independent and less sociable when under the care of teachers who were older, had been in the centre longer, and were knowledgeable about child development. The children's social competence was positively related to having a teacher with a higher general education and less specific training in child development.

Further evidence that some type of teacher training/education does make a difference in teacher behaviour is provided by the following studies. Finkelstein (1982) introduced an in-service training program with teachers working with preschoolers preparing to enter kindergarten. The aim of the program was to train teachers in behaviour management techniques so as to reduce aggressive behaviour and enhance prosocial behaviour in preschoolers. The subsequent behaviour of the children showed a decrease in aggressive behaviour of nearly 75%. Arnett (1986), in his review of Finkelstein's study, cautioned that the training of the teachers was only a part of the program and that the curriculum of the classroom was also altered. He stated that these factors made it difficult to determine how much of the change in the children's aggressive behaviour was actually due to the caregivers' behaviour. Kaplan and Conn (1984) studied 17 day care teachers who completed 20 hours of professional training in the Michigan Day Care Provider Training Project. The training stimulated the teachers to improve the quality of the child care setting and to increase teacher involvement with children in the areas of social development as well as physical care. The researchers acknowledged, however, that the training was very limited and may have emphasised nurturing as opposed to verbal and teaching behaviour.

Furthermore, these studies do not provide any insights into the process of how the teachers were able to acquire and apply the knowledge and/or skills gained through the training programs.

The role of formal education per se, in teachers' behaviour and the developmental outcomes for children, has been more difficult to determine. Using the observational system of Prescott, Jones, and Kritchevsky (1972), Berk (1985) coded descriptions of the behaviours of 37 centre-based teachers responsible for 3- to 5-year old children. Her findings indicated that the teachers with at least 2 years of college engaged in a set of behaviours that was more educationally oriented, providing young children with greater social and intellectual stimulation as well as fewer restrictions than teachers with a high school diploma. When college educated teachers with and without child care-related courses were compared, those with child care-related courses tended to be more encouraging of children's independence and verbal abilities, but not to a statistically significant level. It should be noted, however, that only 5 of the 29 college educated teachers in this study did not have child care-related course work. Thus, it is difficult to generalize about teachers with a general education background based on this study.

In 1986, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Accreditation Academy staff completed the report of the first 95 accreditation decisions. The accreditation procedure requires centres to agree on a voluntary basis to be involved and to have their quality assessed by trained accreditors. The NAEYC staff reported:

where staff are not trained or minimally trained in early childhood/child development, we tend to see inappropriate interactions and/or curriculum.

Where staff are trained at other levels of education (e.g., elementary education), we are less likely to see negative interactions but more likely to see inappropriate curriculum expectations (Bredekamp, 1989, p. 5).

Arnett (1986) studied the caregiver-child interactions of caregivers in 22 of the 23 child care centres in Bermuda. He developed the Caregiver Interaction Scale, an observational rating scale which examines four areas of caregiver interactions with children: positive interaction (e.g., warmth, enthusiasm, and developmentally appropriate communication); punitiveness (e.g., hostile, threatening, harsh, and highly critical); detachment (e.g., low levels of involvement and interaction); and permissiveness (e.g., a lax approach). Training categories were as follows: (a) no training; (b) completion of two courses, namely, Communication and Child Development, within the first year of the Bermuda College training programme; (c) completion of the final two courses, namely, Children's Health and Nutrition and Preschool Activities, in the second year of the Bermuda College training programme; (d) a degree in Early Childhood Education or a similar program completed in either the United States or England. Subjects in the fourth category of training engaged in more positive interactions with the children, were less punitive and less detached than subjects in other categories. There were no significant differences between the second and the third levels, but care givers did rate higher in positive interactions and lower on punitiveness as well as detachment than those with no training. However, this is a

comparison of teachers of a training program designed to provide a “modest level of knowledge and skill” (Arnett, p. 543) with those who have a degree in Early Childhood Education or a similar programme. The range is very broad between the third and fourth levels, and no details are given about the training programs of teachers in the fourth level. Yet, the study does demonstrate the impact of courses in Child Development and Communication as well as the value of a degree program for encouraging positive teacher behaviour in interactions with young children but there is no examination of the reasons behind the findings. The indicators of positive teacher interactions in the Arnett Scale (1986) were related to the caregivers’ warmth, responsiveness, sensitivity, appropriateness in verbal responses, encouragement of new experiences and promotion of prosocial behaviour.

The results of Arnett’s findings were supported by the findings of the National Child Care Staffing Study in the United States (Whitebook, Howes, & Phillips, 1989) which also used Arnett’s (1989) Caregiver Interaction Scale. This study involved 643 classrooms in 227 child care centres in Atlanta, Boston, Detroit, Phoenix, and Seattle. Whitebook et al. demonstrated that teachers with a bachelor’s degree were more sensitive, less harsh, and less detached. The findings also indicated that “a teacher’s amount of formal education was the strongest predictor of appropriate caregiving” (p. 40) for preschoolers. Appropriate caregiving was determined using a factor analysis of the subscales of the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (Harms & Clifford, 1980). Items used in the factor analysis pertained to child-adult interactions, supervision, discipline, materials, schedule, and activities. Preschool teachers with a

bachelor's degree, with or without child care specific training, and teachers with child care specific training at the college level provided more appropriate caregiving than teachers with child care specific training at the vocational and high school level or those who had no training. Whitebook et al. concluded that "both formal education and very high levels of specialised training prepare teachers to be effective in the classroom; most of the teachers with bachelor's degrees also had college-level early childhood education training" (Whitebook et al., p. 47). There was, however, no detailed information on the type of general education or child care specific training that had been completed by the subjects in the study.

Researchers have shown that a broad base of theoretical and practical knowledge is important for providing developmentally appropriate practice (Foreman & Kuscher, 1983; Kamii & DeVries, 1978; NAEYC, 1982). Knowledge of developmentally appropriate practice is related to course work in child care and supervised practical experience (Snider & Fu, 1990). Snider and Fu presented 73 preschool teachers with vignettes involving a range of children's behaviours. Based on the teachers' responses, the researchers found that content areas that were of "crucial importance" (p. 77) were:

- (a) planning, implementing, and evaluation developmentally appropriate content;
- (b) creating, evaluating, and selecting materials;
- (c) creating learning environments;
- (d) curriculum models; and
- (e) observing and recording behaviours. (p. 77)

Formal child development training and supervised practical experience were found to have a positive relationship with preschool teachers' knowledge of developmentally appropriate practice (Snider & Fu, 1990). Further studies are necessary to determine if the teachers were able to transfer this knowledge to the actual classroom situation.

McLanahan (1992) examined 6 preschool teachers' perceptions regarding the content and sources of their teaching knowledge. The teachers were in their first 2 years of teaching and had graduated from a 2-year college program with an associate degree in early childhood education. McLanahan provided descriptive data on the different sources of teachers' knowledge including early personal experiences, early schooling, teacher education, and work experiences. There was little detail on the actual teacher education program, but the teachers in her study identified key areas in teacher preparation. Curriculum areas provided activities to use with young children and how to plan an integrated, theme-based curriculum. The practica provided opportunities to learn from classroom teachers and direct experiences with young children. They learned instructional strategies, such as planning the physical environment, guidance techniques, as well as the use of calendar/weather charts and other teacher-made materials. McLanahan concluded that "other similar studies promise to offer much needed insights into the content and process of teacher education programs" (p. 242). She suggested that further research is needed to examine teachers in later stages of their teaching experiences and from different educational programs.

On balance, teacher training and/or education has been shown to make some difference in the quality of care provided, especially in the area of teachers' behaviours and attitudes as well as their ability to provide developmentally appropriate practice. However, further study is needed on **how** and **why** different levels and specific types of training programs impact on teaching practices, particularly from the perspective of the caregivers. The present study, in part, addresses this important area by examining the nature of specific preservice teacher preparation programs from the perspective of experienced preschool teachers. Interviews with and observations of practitioners can enrich and deepen insights concerning **what** knowledge was acquired in preservice programs as well as **how** this knowledge is used in teaching practice. The teachers' perspectives are valuable for, as Bronfenbrenner (1979) emphasized, "what is perceived, desired, feared, thought about, or acquired as knowledge" (p. 9) influences our actions. Ayers (1992) also stressed the importance of the perceptions of individual teachers and the early childhood settings if we are to gain a better understanding of the complex process of teaching young children:

The secret of teaching is to be found in the local detail and the everyday life of teachers; teachers can be the richest and most useful source of knowledge about teaching; those who hope to understand teaching must turn at some point to the teachers themselves. (p. v)

Conclusion

Changing societal demographics and recent research in early childhood education have led to an increasing need for professional child care for children under

the age of 6 years. This, in turn, has resulted in the need for and recognition of the role of the early childhood teacher. However, realities in the child care field, such as low compensation, low professional status, and lack of teacher training program standards, have resulted in a variety of preservice preparation programs that have been approved by state licensing agencies. There is also a lack of research in the areas of early childhood teacher education that examines the different programs and their impact on graduates' teaching practices.

Early childhood teacher preservice programs vary greatly in the amount and type of programs that they offer. In the United States national guidelines for the preparation of early childhood professionals have identified the following components of professional early childhood preparation: the preservice program's conceptual framework, general studies, content areas, quality of teaching and learning, as well as field experiences. For organizational purposes, I have explored early childhood teacher programs under the headings of baccalaureate and non-baccalaureate degree programs. However, the areas examined overlap, and discussions under one heading may directly relate to the programs under the second heading. Key components that were discussed under the baccalaureate degree program were: general education, professional foundations, instructional knowledge, and practica. These areas, in varying degrees, also relate to components of the non-baccalaureate programs. The non-baccalaureate degree programs were reviewed by examining two philosophical orientations: competency-based education and theoretically thematic programs. Discussions under these two headings provide the beginning of a framework for

organizing, understanding, and interpreting the participants' perceptions of their preservice preparation as well as its impact on their teaching practice.

Researchers in early childhood education have shown that training can have a positive impact on teachers' teaching practice and the developmental outcomes for children. The research on overall formal education versus child care specific training requires further study. Teachers' perceptions about their preservice preparation and teaching practices have been showed to be a valuable source of knowledge about the relationship between teachers' acquired knowledge and teaching practices. However, further research is needed on the content and process of early childhood teacher preparation. The present study was a response to this identified need. It examined early childhood teachers' perceptions about their preservice preparation and its impact on their present teaching practices in day care centres.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study explored 6 experienced preschool teachers' perceptions of: (a) their formal preservice teacher preparation programs; (b) how the experiences of this program impacted on their teaching practices over time; and (c) identifiable supports and constraints of the day care setting. Based on an ecological approach (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1989/1992), the exploration involved formal, in-depth interviews, naturalistic observations, and informal conferencing throughout the study. The resulting case study provides detailed descriptions of preschool teachers' preservice preparation and the impact of their preservice preparation on their practice. This chapter describes the theoretical framework and methodology of the study. The methodology includes an overview of the case study approach, the selection of participants, descriptions of participants, as well as procedures for data collection and analysis.

Theoretical Orientation

The theoretical framework of the study is based on Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1989/1992) ecological analysis of the educative process. His major thesis is that "human abilities and their realization depend in significant degree on the larger social and institutional context of individual activities" (p. xv). This theoretical perspective defines development as "a lasting change in the way a person perceives and deals with his [sic] environment" (p. 3). Individual development is placed within the environmental context. The purpose of this approach is to study the process and

outcomes of individual development as a “joint function of the person and the environment” (Bronfenbrenner, 1989/1992, p. 188). The capacity of a setting to function effectively as a context for development is seen to depend on not only the nature of the interactions within one setting, but also the nature of the interactions among different settings.

This approach describes the ecological environment as “a nested arrangement of concentric structures” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 22) that influence human development. The spheres that are embedded within each other are referred to as the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, and the macrosystem. At the centre of the context is the microsystem that contains the developing person and her or his immediate environment which in this study, is the day care classroom. A microsystem is:

A pattern of activities, roles and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given face-to-face setting with particular physical and material features, and containing other persons with distinctive characteristics of temperament, personality, and systems of belief. (Bronfenbrenner, 1989/1992, p. 227)

The developing person is viewed as an active participant in the environment – affecting and being affected by the environment. In this study, the microsystem would involve studying the preschool teacher, her perceptions of her preservice preparation, and her educational setting.

The second sphere is the mesosystem which “comprises the linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings containing the developing person. ...In other words, a mesosystem is a system of microsystems” (Bronfenbrenner, 1989/1992, p. 227). In this study it could involve areas such as professional support networks, family situations, opportunities for continuing education, membership in other organizations, as well as the organization and policies of the child care centre.

Beyond this is the exosystem which Bronfenbrenner described as:

The linkage and processes taking place between two or more settings, at least one of which does not ordinarily contain the developing person, but in which events occur that influence processes within the immediate setting that does contain that person. (Bronfenbrenner, 1989/1992, p. 227)

In this study the exosystem would represent the social and organizational structures that influence the day care environment, such as the board of directors of the day care centre, state licensing regulations, sources of funding, sociocultural context of the children’s families, the general economic base, and community resources.

The macrosystem consists of:

the overarching pattern of micro-, meso-, and exosystems characteristic of a given culture, subculture, or other broader social context, with particular reference to the developmentally-investigative belief systems, resources, hazards, life styles, opportunity structures, life course options, and patterns of social interchange that are embedded in each of the systems. The macrosystem may

be thought of as a blueprint for a particular culture, subculture, or other broader social context. (Bronfenbrenner, 1989/1992, p. 228)

The macrosystem encircles all the systems. In this study, it encompasses the broader societal influences such as attitudes about the role of day care in the life of the family, responsibilities for day care, the value society places on teachers in child care, political systems, the general economic base, and cultural belief systems.

This ecological approach stresses the importance of appropriate environmental stimulation and factors external to the immediate environment. However, as stated, the primary focus in this study was on the microsystem -- participants, their perceptions of their preservice preparation, and the educational settings in which they work.

Overall, Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1989/1992) placed a great emphasis on the role of the adult in the micro-setting and the importance of how different environmental systems interact and influence her or his development. Not to acknowledge this can result in a “narrow and distorted” understanding of the “determinants, processes, and potential of human development” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 18). So, although this naturalistic inquiry focuses on the participants in their present day care settings, at the microsystem level it acknowledges the influences from other levels of the ecosystem that affect the teachers’ perceptions and practices (see Figure 1).

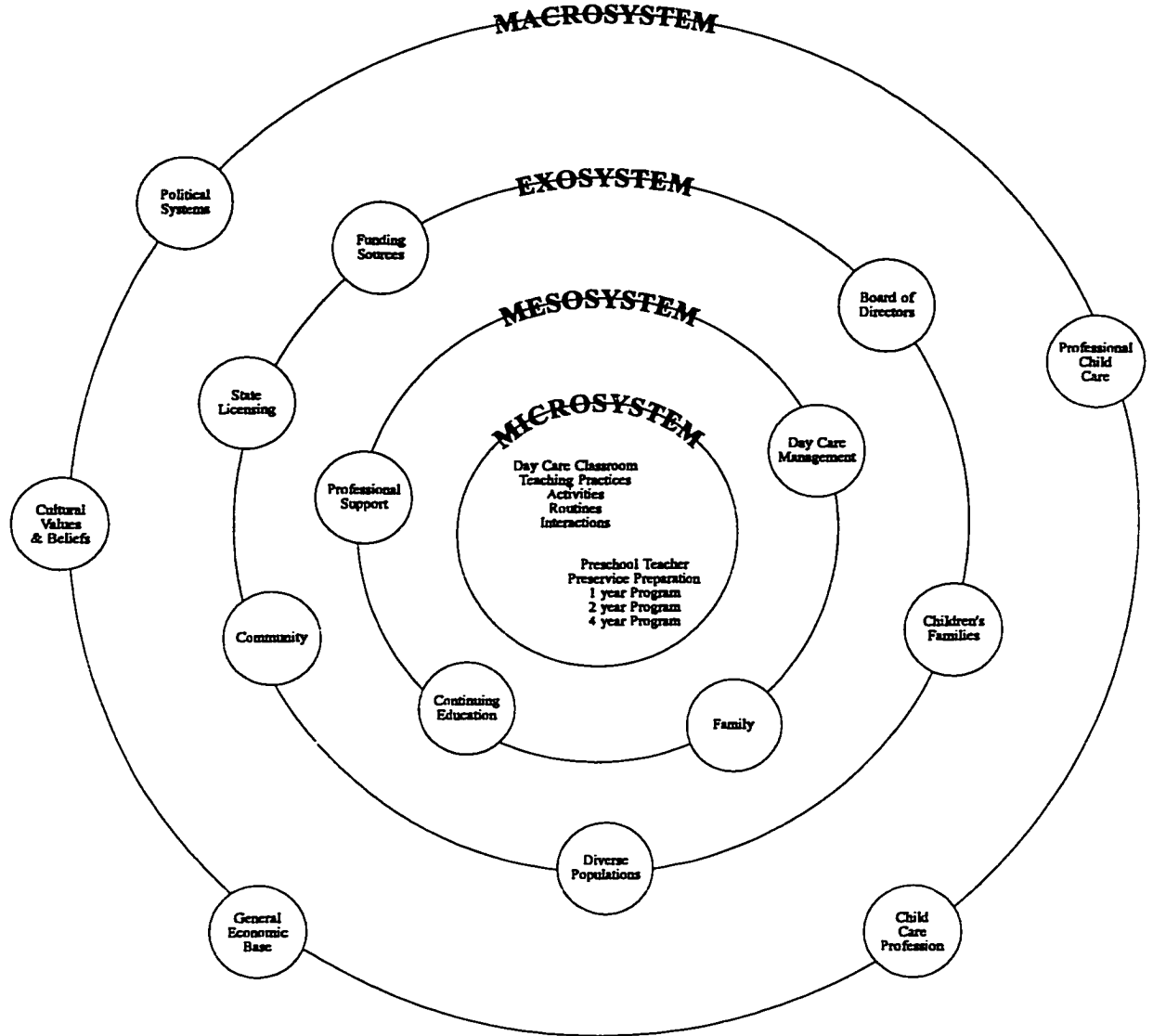


Figure 1. Ecological Framework for Participants' Classroom

Methodology

The research questions in this study were concerned with preschool teachers' perceptions of their preservice teacher preparation as well as "how" and "why" this experience impacts on their teaching practices. As the nature of questions was to examine processes and subjective meanings, a qualitative case study was the most appropriate research approach (Merriam, 1988). A case study methodology "allow[s] an investigation to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events" (Yin, 1989, p.14).

Qualitative Case Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to provide an in-depth case study of 6 preschool teachers, the meaning they gave to their preservice preparation experience, and its impact on their present teaching practices. My interest in this area was biographical in nature and based on my years as a teacher, a director of a child care centre, as well as a teacher educator. I have always believed that the key to quality education is the teacher, particularly, the relationship between formal theoretical knowledge and teaching practice, as well as the teachers' development of personal, practical theory. However, the actual research questions grew out of a review of the literature and many discussions with my research committee. This case study examined the participants' perceptions for, as Merriam (1988) stated, "the world is not an objective thing out there but a function of personal interaction and perception" (p. 17).

The main characteristics of a case study are that it is: particularistic, descriptive, heuristic, and inductive (Merriam, 1988, p. 11). This study was particularistic in that it examined particular preschool teachers' perceptions of their own preservice training experiences and their daily practices at the time of the study. As Wolcott (1990) stated, "it occurred in a particular place, at a particular time, and under particular circumstances" (p. 30).

The descriptive nature of the study recognized the importance of the individual and her or his environment. The study examined complex processes related to preservice teacher education and the act of teaching in a day care centre. There are many factors involved, such as personal characteristics, present working conditions, and the passage of time. Experienced day care teachers have the advantage of hindsight and knowledge of the daily realities of teaching in a day care centre. They can provide an in-depth understanding of the knowledge and skills needed in their work. The description of their perceptions was thick as it examined the participants' "intentional states: desires, beliefs, knowledge, intentions, commitments" (Bruner, 1996, p. 123). This aspect of the case study relates to the cornerstone of the ecology of human development described by Bronfenbrenner (1989/1992) as:

the progressive, mutual accommodation, throughout the life course, between an active, growing human being, and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by the relations between these settings, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded. (p. 188)

The focus of this study, however, was on teacher preservice preparation and its impact on participants' teaching practices, in their present day care settings. It should be noted that the participants were not representatives of any type of preservice preparation programs or of teachers in day care programs.

The heuristic aspect of this case study explored the "what" and "why" of the processes as well as the relationship between teacher education and teaching practices. What are the beneficial aspects of a preservice program? Why? How and why does the program impact on one's daily practices? The participants' perceptions of their experiences in these areas offer implications to "bring about the discovery of new meaning, extend the reader's experience, or confirm what is known" (Merriam, 1988, p. 13), thus increasing the potential to identify ways to examine and improve preservice early childhood teacher programs as well as day care teaching practices. The case study was therefore an appropriate methodology to capture the various influences on the processes of teacher education and teaching practices. As Merriam (1988) emphasized, ". . . in a qualitative approach to research the paramount objective is to understand the **meaning** of an experience" (p. 16). My concern was to gain this meaning through "insight, discovery, and interpretation" (Merriam, p. 10) on different levels and from multiple perspectives. This opens the possibilities to the discussion of many interpretations.

The research was inductive as the analysis developed from the participants' stated values, beliefs, and knowledge, accompanied by actual observations of their teaching practices. The study explored the way preschool teachers perceived their

preservice preparation and understood its impact on their teaching practices. Merriam (1988) asserted that, “research focussed on discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied offers the greatest promise of making significant contributions to the knowledge base and practice of education” (p. 3). The participants in the study were practising teachers who had completed different preservice teacher programs and were working in different day care centres. They examined their preservice preparation retrospectively, but with an understanding of the roles and responsibilities of a teacher within the daily realities of day care work. The use of illustrations and examples drawn from the participants’ responses to interview questions provided detailed accounts of the content as well as the process of their preservice preparation. This process involved “reconstructions of experiences in light of the present” (Ayres, 1989, p. 20). The naturalistic observations contextualized this information within the teachers’ daily teaching practices, thus strengthening the potential for understanding and interpreting their experiences. This attention to the contextual factors gave recognition to the importance of the overall environment, thereby broadening the interpretations for, as Bruner (1996) explained, narrative is “both a mode of thought and an expression of a culture’s world view” (p. xiv).

Issues and Concerns Related to Reliability and Validity

One of the strengths of the case study methodology is that it enables the researcher to examine complex social situations and to explore the many interrelating variables that exist in real-life situations (Yin, 1989). Descriptions of preschool

teachers' professional lives can provide valuable insights into the understanding and meaning of their experiences. These insights can expand our understanding of teachers' knowledge and practices. The purpose of the study was to gain an understanding of the participants' construction of meaning. "Understanding is the outcome of organizing and contextualizing essentially contestable, incompletely verifiable propositions in a disciplined way" (Bruner, 1996, p. 90).

Goodwin and Goodwin (1996) reported that there are general differences in the theoretical and operational definitions of reliability and validity in qualitative and quantitative research. Qualitative research, unlike quantitative research, is not concerned with measurement per se (Goodwin & Goodwin). The authors stated that external and internal reliability "correspond roughly" to the overall research design and the data collection. They referred to reliability as the "reproducibility" of the study which relates to "the extent to which independent researchers would discover the same phenomena, describe the findings similarly, and agree with participants about their meaning" (Goodwin & Goodwin, p. 138). Internal and external validity refers to the accuracy or the "reality of the situation" (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, p. 324) and generalizability of the findings (Goodwin & Goodwin). Reliability and validity are closely interconnected in a case study since reliability is considered a "precondition" (Goodwin & Goodwin, p. 140) for validity.

Bronfenbrenner (1977) questioned the definition of reliability in traditional quantitative research, and he referred to it as "the science of the strange behaviour of children in strange situations with strange adults for the briefest possible periods of

time” (p. 513). The issue of reliability is an important aspect of qualitative research. Data collection in this study involved formal, structured interviews, naturalistic observations, informal interviews, and a variety of artifacts. In the formal interviews, the open-ended questions were based on a structured framework, thus enhancing the reproducibility of the study and strengthening its reliability. Interviewing is “particularly useful for ascertaining respondents’ thoughts, perceptions, feelings, and retrospective accounts” (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1996, p. 134). The interview structure was flexible and allowed for modifications as well as changes based on the participants’ responses. However, this flexibility during the interviews and conferencing had the potential to direct the thoughts of the participants. I was aware of this, so I recorded and transcribed all the formal interviews. At times, the dialogue during informal interviews was also recorded, thus providing an opportunity for me to reflect on the discourse. All the transcripts of the interviews and my typed field notes were reviewed by the participants so as to achieve credibility or “trustworthiness” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290) of my data collection. For each participant this meant different involvements, such as looking at different artifacts, additional observations, and engaging in ongoing discussions. I kept detailed notes on each aspect of the data collection (Lincoln & Guba, p. 319).

The reliability and internal validity of the study are also dependent on the researcher as he or she “generates theory, description, or understanding” (Bogdan & Bliklen, 1982, p. 42). How accurate is the portrayal of the people and their experiences? Ayers (1989) stated that, “we do not, of course, end up with the truth,

but perhaps more modestly with a burgeoning sense of meaning and knowing grounded in real people and concrete practices” (p. 4). Achieving this meaning requires including as many aspects of the participants’ perspectives as possible and being sensitive to contextual factors. Bruner (1990) informed us that “we interpret stories by their verisimilitude, their ‘truth likeness,’ or more accurately, their ‘lifelikeness’” (p. 61). He stated that, “there is a sense in which a story can be true *to* life without being true *of* life” (Bruner, 1996, p. 122). Guba and Lincoln (1981) also cautioned that a case study can, at best, give only a part of the whole: “They [case studies] tend to masquerade as a whole when in fact they are but a part -- a slice of life” (p. 377). Researchers have referred to the writing as “a sliver of the totality of any experience” (Schulz, 1997, p. 94) or “a pinprick in time” (Lubeck, 1985, p. vi). Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) referred to the aim of qualitative research as discovery rather than verification or prediction. Issues of external validity or the generalizability of the case study, therefore, need to be redefined in a manner that is more in keeping with the aims of qualitative studies (Donmoyer, 1990, p. 183).

Bruner (1996) stressed that, “meaning, according to the classical mantra, cannot be explained causally” (p. 102). The findings of the study, therefore, do not allow us to predict future behaviours of preschool teachers or causal outcomes from any particular early childhood preservice teacher programs. The value of the study is its contribution to the conceptualization of preschool teachers’ knowledge and their teaching practices, which does provide for naturalistic generalizations. Lincoln and Guba (1985) described these naturalistic generalizations as “more intuitive, empirical,

based on personal direct and vicarious experience” (p. 120). The data analysis can provide valuable insights into preschool teachers’ perceptions of their preservice preparation and its impact on their classroom practice. The illumination of the influences on the processes involved in the participants’ construction of meaning can be generalized beyond the particulars of a specific situation. This is based on the assumption that there are generic aspects of teachers’ preservice preparation and teaching practices that will generalize and apply to other preservice programs and teaching situations. Merriam (1988) stressed that insights gained in case studies are also tied, in part, to what the reader is able to gain from the study. Clandinin (1993) referred to an earlier writing which deals with the application of case studies to other readers:

Narrative inquiries are shared in ways that help readers question their own stories, raise their own questions about practice and see in the narrative accounts stories of their own stories. The intent is to foster reflection, storying and restorying for readers (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990, p. 20).

One implication of this view is that the greater the detail and clarity of the description, the greater the opportunity for reader transferability of data. This is dependent on the abilities and sensitivities of the researcher, who is the main research instrument for the study. The researcher selects passages to use and interprets the meanings participants give to their lived situations (Merriam). The details of the participants’ perceptions also involve the rationales underlying their thoughts and actions, which can be a source of discussion as well as analysis. Schulz (1997) noted

that teachers' narratives "lead to a situation revealed, an open-ended instance that invites questioning and further dialogue on confirming ways in which we can learn through teachers' stories. It is a text to be continued . . ." (p. 141). Yin (1989) stated that case studies are also "generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universe" (p. 21). The findings of the study, if supported by other research, can therefore be generalized based on the theories of other researchers.

Despite the limitations of case studies, Merriam (1988) pointed out, "All reports of personal experiences are not necessarily unreliable any more than all reports of events witnessed by large numbers of people are reliable" (p. 171). The following strategies suggested by Merriam were employed to depict the participants' meanings and the "lifelikeness" (Bruner, 1990, p. 61) of their lived situations:

(a) A triangulation of findings. The study involved different methods of gaining information, such as in-depth interviews, observations, conferences, and artifacts such as course notes, bulletin boards, children's records, or teachers' planning books.

Also, there were two graduates of each of the three preservice programs. This strategy assisted in the triangulation of the findings. The use of recording and transcribing the formal interviews as well as some of the informal interviews provided verbatim accounts of the participants' words.

(b) Member checks. Discussions were ongoing with the participants throughout the study. Transcripts of all the interviews and typed field notes on the observations were reviewed by the participants as they were completed.

(c) Repeated observations at different times and during several months. The data was collected over a 6-month period. However, informal conferences were ongoing. This span of time allows for observation of the different components of the teachers' practices and engaging in ongoing dialogue with the participant.

(d) Constantly monitoring one's own reactions for biases and writing descriptively about subjective meaning while "limiting," not "eliminating," biases (Bogdan & Bliklen, 1982, p. 43). My discussions with my research committee members concerning my descriptions, coding, and interpretations provided the needed monitoring to help me become aware of my own biases. All the interviews were audio taped, as were some verbal exchanges during the informal conferences, so this allowed for reflection on the dialogue. An important aspect of the data analysis was that I felt I had a commitment to portray the meaning of the participants' experiences, based on the knowledge which I had gained through a relationship of mutual respect and trust.

Donmoyer (1990) stated that the three key strengths of case studies are:

(a) The accessibility to knowledge about individuals' conceptualizations and contextual factors to "be able to see different things and to see differently things he [she] has seen before" (p. 193). The heuristic aspect is viewed as an asset not a liability (Donmoyer).

(b) The depth of understanding of a particular meaning can expand and enrich one's theoretical understanding. McCracken (1988) asserted that "qualitative research does not survey the terrain, it mines it" (p. 17).

(c) There is a reduction in participants' defensiveness to participating in the research and learning as they are asked to reflect on their existing knowledge and to construct personal meaning.

The overall value of employing a qualitative research paradigm, such as the case study methodology, is:

to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and its meaning for those involved. The interest is in process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation. Such insights into aspects of educational practice can have a direct influence on policy, practice, and future research. (Merriam, 1988, p. xii)

The research questions in this study examined the nature of teachers' perceptions of their teaching preparation program and its impact on their teaching practices. I wanted to describe the meaning that participants attributed to their preservice teacher preparation and its impact on their teaching practices. This search for meaning "originates with the individual, is shaped through social interaction and mediated by language" (Britzman, 1991, p. 23). Getting at this meaning can involve descriptions of influences of personal experiences, values and beliefs, events, relationships with significant others, contextual factors, and all that "contributed to the creation of the teacher she finds herself today" (Ayers, 1989, p. 8). The nature of my questions was to explore the construction of this meaning and was therefore suited to the characteristics of a qualitative case study. Issues related to the reliability

and validity were addressed to ensure that the design of the study involved a disciplined and principled approach.

Selection of Participants

The preschool teachers who participated in the study are referred to as participants. I chose this word because it “captures both the sense of active involvement that occurs in an in-depth interview and the sense of equity that we try to build in our interviewing relationships“ (Seidman, 1991, p. 8). I also referred to the participants as teachers. I use this term based on the description of a teacher used by Ayers (1989): “I mean it in the broadest sense of someone who engages whole people -- mind, body, emotion, culture, spirit -- in learning” (p. 40). The criterion for selection of the 6 preschool teachers included the following: (a) the participant was employed full-time in a nonprofit, child care centre; (b) the participant worked with preschool-aged children and had completed an early childhood preservice teacher preparation program; (c) the participant had from 2 to 7 years of teaching experience; (d) the participant was willing, able, and interested in participating in the study; and (e) the director of the centre was knowledgeable about and supportive of the preschool teachers’ participation. These criteria were chosen in an attempt to keep participants’ working situations and years of experience as similar as possible, as the “teaching context and type of preparation are confounded” (Grossman, 1990, p. 152). I also placed a quota of no more than two graduates from each preservice program, in order to include preschool teachers from a variety of preservice programs. Having two participants from the same program helped to illuminate new information and to

reconsider the first participants' responses about their preservice program. Their input helped me to plan and formulate additional questions in my quest for descriptive narrative.

Initially, I had decided to locate participants who had 3 to 5 years of experience. This range of years of experience is related to the teacher developmental stage of "renewal" (Katz, 1981, p. 480). At this time, the teacher is ready to take a closer look at her or his curriculum and to value new opportunities to explore issues related to her or his practice. However, I was unable to locate enough teachers in this stage of development, so I changed the years of experience to 2 to 7 years. This covered a wide range of developmental stages such as: consolidation (approximately 2-4 years) where the teacher is beginning to go beyond the survival stage and to explore more developmental aspects of individual children and looking for new resources; renewal (as related above); and maturity (approximately 3-5 years and beyond) where the teacher is looking for opportunities for continuing education to address the more advanced concerns about the larger issues related to the profession (Katz). This inability to locate teachers may be related to: few new job openings; the high turnover rate in child care; the number of teachers who have no formal early childhood preservice preparation program; or directors who were reluctant to have teachers in their centres participate in the study.

Using the provincial directory of preschool centres in the area, eligible participants were located by randomly telephoning directors of nonprofit, child care centres. If the director was supportive of the research, she informed me as to

whether or not she employed eligible preschool teachers. After the director expressed her verbal interest in the study, depending on the director's choice, one of the following steps was undertaken: (a) I personally delivered copies of a letter, which introduced my study and provided information on how to contact me, to the director who then distributed them to her staff; or (b) the director spoke with eligible teachers and found out if they were interested in meeting with me; or (c) I met with the director and the eligible preschool teacher to discuss the study. Directors who were supportive of the teachers' participation signed consent forms (see Appendix A). I personally met with the interested preschool teachers, checked their eligibility, and confirmed their interest in committing their time to the study. The preschool teachers with whom I spoke were very willing to become involved. I also interviewed three other preschool teachers who were willing to become involved at a later date, in case one of the original participants withdrew from the study. At the initial meeting with individual participants, they asked relevant questions, but expressed no hesitancy about becoming involved in the study. At the end of each meeting, a time and date was set for the first interview, at which time the consent form (see Appendix B) was signed.

The Participants

The participants, using names that I have given to them, are listed in the order that I met them and began the interviews:

Participants	EC Preservice Preparation	Graduated	Experience
#1: Lee	1-Year Certificate	1989	4 Years
#2: Veronica	4-Year Degree	1991	3 Years

#3: Victoria	4-Year Degree	1991	3 Years
#4: Suzanne	2-Year Diploma	1987	6 Years
#5: Samantha	3-Year Diploma	1990	3 Years
#6: Liz	1-Year Certificate	1991	2 Years

During the 2½ years of my data collection, analysis, and thesis writing, I spent much time with the participants, getting to know them as individuals as well as early childhood preschool teachers. There were major changes in their personal lives which involved marriages, new living arrangements, and, for one participant, the birth of a daughter. In their work environments, each of the participants was working with preschool-aged children. Lee, Liz, Veronica, and Victoria worked in classrooms with 21 preschoolers and in a team of three teachers; Suzanne worked with 11 preschoolers and one other teacher; and Samantha worked with 14 preschoolers, 4 school-aged children that attended at lunch time and after school, and one other teacher. All the participants were hard working, dedicated child care professionals. They were always willing to answer yet another question or to allow another observation.

The following is a brief description of the participants of the study.

Lee

Lee is an energetic, friendly preschool teacher who becomes animated when she describes events related to her teaching. She has stated that she is committed to providing developmentally appropriate practice for the preschoolers in her classroom. She began her teaching career just before formally graduating from her preservice program in June of 1989. Her responses to the interview questions were always

spontaneous and very detailed. I was amazed at her recall of so many specific incidents from her preservice preparation program. However, she was hesitant to respond to the question that asked her to describe herself as a preschool teacher. She replied, "I am . . . well, I am fun . . . I'm particular, easygoing, cooperative (pauses and looks at me) . . . this is a hard question . . . Calm, reliable, and trustworthy" (1/3/5). To this I added, "bright, conscientious, caring, enthusiastic and knowledgeable" (personal notes, 1/31/95). Lee had an active lifestyle that involves travelling in her truck with her dogs, motorcycling, playing baseball, and bowling.

Lee worked in a classroom where the children are from very diverse populations. There were children from seven different countries, so providing an antibias, multicultural curriculum was an important concern for her. This was evident in the materials, posters, pictures, and wall displays of her classroom. She was also very concerned about the violence in society and noted that the aggressive level of pre-school-aged children has risen, in the years that she has been teaching. Concerning her decision to become a teacher of young children, she asserted, "I wanted to make a difference, like they [her favourite teachers] did for me" (1/1/3). The children bring joy into her life, and she excitedly remarked, "I always go home with a story" (1/3/6). Her caring, compassionate nature is illustrated in the fact that one of her most important goals for herself as a teacher is to enhance the children's positive self-esteem. She would like for the children in her classroom to learn to:

Treat each other fairly, with respect and to always be thinking. To have peaceful feelings toward each other and not hurt each other. And that's what I model to them. (1/3/102)

Veronica

Veronica was experiencing an interesting time in her life when she began the interviews, as she was pregnant with her first child. She is quick in her thinking and very direct in her comments. When asked about supervisory feedback in her centre she replied, "If you do something wrong, you hear about it" (2/3a/2). When asked about bringing new suggestions to a staff meeting she stated, "Well, you can bring it up. Let's put it that way" (2/3a/5). This quick, dry wit was always followed with a wonderful smile, and her many interests included painting, photography, as well as scuba diving. Veronica described herself in the following manner:

I try to keep a sense of humour. I'll say patient, although some days you may be able to challenge me on that one. Respectful of children as people. I'd have to say fairly strict because I have certain things that I expect and I don't think that's necessarily a bad thing. And sometimes, a little silly, which comes in handy, too. (2/3a/5)

She remarked, "I wouldn't be who I am today if I didn't have the crazy, nutty family that I have now. But a very supportive, loving family as well. We're there for each other . . . and I'm able to give some of that back to the kids, (she smiles and adds) at least on the good days" (2/1/11). As her pregnancy progressed, I had concerns for Veronica. She had long days that involved lifting the children, bending to tie shoe

laces, putting out children's cots, sitting in a child-sized chair, and almost a 1½ hour one-way commute to work in the cold, often snowy, Canadian weather. Yet her temperament was always pleasant even when I could see the tiredness in her body.

She stated her concern for children who direct their parents and have a "feeling of entitlement" (2/3a/6) for material possessions. She wondered about this attitude when the children grow older and the parents are unable to meet their needs. Her goals for young children include a "respect that children can do a lot of things for themselves. ...I think that it's really important to a child to feel a sense of accomplishment in their own abilities" (2/3a/10).

Veronica was certainly committed to this research. The evening before our last scheduled observation, Veronica gave birth to a beautiful little girl, who has been named after a very special grandmother. Calling from the hospital, she exclaimed, "I hope this isn't going to upset your study" (personal notes, 2/95).

Victoria

Victoria was a very quiet and mild mannered individual, but would always arrive at our meetings with thought provoking, tough questions. They would relate to issues that she had been exploring from different perspectives and would involve an intriguing dilemma. She had strong convictions about her moral role as an early childhood teacher and was determined to see that the children in her centre were provided with quality child care. She was constantly reflecting on her teaching practices and her responsibility to the children in our society. During one of my visits, she was involved in a fundraiser for children with terminal illnesses. Last

year, she raised more than \$1,000.00. Victoria was also completing a local certification process while we were conducting the study, so it was interesting to hear her comments on that process.

Victoria's workplace involved a unique home setting and multigenerational programming. The space was designed like a home environment, which meant that there were different rooms, so the space was divided into small areas. However, this restricted the types of activities that could be performed and limited the access to large, gross motor materials during part of the day. The teachers in this centre operated somewhat independently of each other, as they each worked in different rooms. However, it was a warm and friendly atmosphere. The children all knew each other and all the teachers. Victoria referred to her "warm heart" (3/1/9) and how she enjoys observing and working with preschoolers: "When you're working with children, every day is different because they're always learning new things. I think that's why it's really different. And I'm a kid at heart" (3/1/8).

Suzanne

Suzanne is one of those people who has a way of making everyone feel special. She has a wonderful sense of humour and a distinctive personality, so that every quotation in this thesis that belongs to her will be recognizable to those who know Suzanne. For example, a person in the child care field who is known for her "sweet manner" she has characterised as, "she's so sweet, she's toothbrush material!" She also has a talent for imitating distinguishing characteristics of the people around her. Suzanne is a kind, conscientious teacher whose classroom is filled with love,

laughter and music. She described herself as, “energetic, fun, caring, professional and conscientious” (4/3/5).

When I first met Suzanne, I was very concerned, as I noticed her hesitancy to expand on her responses. Her answers were always very clear and concise, but I sensed an uneasiness on her part. At the beginning of the second interview, she wanted to address some of the questions from the first interview. She has a phenomenal memory, so I felt that this approach meant that she was beginning to trust me and was ready to discuss the questions about her early childhood. During that interview, her sense of humour began to emerge and that was our connection. Since then, we have spent many hours conferencing about this study and discussing early childhood education, in general.

Suzanne’s concerns for today’s children relate to the violence in society and children’s ability to interpret negative influences to which they are exposed, such as certain television shows. One of her main goals as a teacher of young children is “to help the children through those little things in life, to have fun . . . they are children, so to like what they do and to have fun” (4/3/10). Suzanne grew up in a large family on a farm. She talked lovingly of her large family, and, as a preschool teacher, she stresses the need for children “to enjoy their time playing and learning that way, to learn to work with other people, to work with their peers in getting something done, to learn to tidy up after you play, and to role play” (4/3/8). A final question in the interviews asks the participants where they think they will be in 5 years. Suzanne replied, “There could be an opening where I could bump up to supervisor . . . I like

where I'm at and I don't think there's any better than where I am" (4/3/59). Suzanne is now a supervisor!

Samantha

At my introductory meeting, I found Samantha in the staff room, using her lunch hour to contact people about a fund raiser at her centre. As I listened to her responses, I was impressed with her style, finesse, and savoir faire. This use of her breaks and/or lunch hour to continue to work on matters related to her job proved to be characteristic of Samantha. She is a focused, creative individual. It was interesting to observe her when she would go into an interest area and rearrange a few items, making it so much more attractive. Her classroom is situated on the bottom floor of a building, so there was limited lighting, especially with a painting on the window. On my first visit, I asked about the lighting and the fresh air. When I called to confirm my next visit, she said she was anxious for me to see her room. When I arrived at her classroom, the first thing I noticed was the sparkling clean window. I looked over at Samantha, who had been watching me, and she smiled. Later in the study, the whole room was restructured and a second window was added.

Samantha often took the children on nature walks. It seemed to relate to her own childhood. As she talked about the joy of her early years, there was a sadness in her voice. Samantha moved away from her childhood home when she was in junior high school. She referred to her early year as an idyllic past, "I never wanted to move . . . I loved being in the country, in the woods, you know. When I was younger, you'd go and play games in the woods behind the house . . . you'd see the

horses in the field, across the street . . . across the dirt road. It was a really comfortable place to live” (5/1/1). Samantha talked about her early life like an artist describing a favourite painting, with vividness and strong, compassionate feeling.

Liz

Although all the participants described their early childhood in rural, close-knit communities, Liz grew up in an isolated rural area that was accessible only by water. She was born at home, and the first time she left the area was when she enrolled in her preservice program. She recalled traditional, very stern, early schooling experiences that still made her feel uncomfortable. However, in her own home, she was allowed to explore her environment and to freely express her ideas, so this approach has become an important aspect of her teaching. She told of the inner struggle to leave her island home. “We were Islanders to the bone, you know, all our families were, both sides of the family, my mom’s family and my dad’s, all from the island . . . How can you leave? You know you want to, but how . . . it’s so hard” (6/1/11). She credited her father’s love and support as an influential factor in being able to leave the only place she had ever known.

Liz was the youngest in the group of participants, and had just completed two years of teaching. Her respect for young children is very evident in her interactions with them, as she tries to find a way for them to discover the answers to their questions and to help them gain an understanding of the “the why” of different situations. She had a special interest in the parents of the children in her centre and had recently started a newsletter for parents. One of Liz’s concerns for the children

in today's society is the different family situations, where parents have to work so hard.

As she described herself, she stated, "Easygoing, busy, funny. This is tough . . . receptive . . . How many words are there for busy?" (6/3/6-7). She enjoys the children whose "approach to everything is just so innocent. They get excited over the smallest details" (6/3/8). Her philosophy of teaching, she explained, has evolved and changed since her preservice program. She emphasized the need to observe children to try to understand the reasons for their behaviour and of the children's need for realistic choices based on the teacher's understanding of the child. She noted that a key to teaching young children is "to think from the child's perspective. ...you have to look at the children's behaviour developmentally" (6/3/14).

Summary

In sum, all the participants in this study entered their preservice preparation program with rich, diverse histories, personal values, and beliefs about young children. However, one aspect that was common to all was their love of children. This was the common denominator that served as the motivator for entering the field of early childhood education. The children are their greatest source of satisfaction in their jobs.

Data Collection

Initially, the research questions were explored through three structured, in-depth interviews and, secondly, through classroom observations with pre- and post-observation conferences. Artifacts used in the study were presented by the

participants or were contained within the classrooms, such as the children's assessments, bulletin boards, and so forth. Interviews and observations were conducted over a 6-month period. The informal conferences continued during the long writing process.

Interviews

Focused, in-depth interviews were the first method of data collection. Each interview was conducted in approximately 45 to 90 minutes. They were completed within a 7-week time frame and transcriptions were made of each interview.

The first interview (see Appendix C) focused on the participants' early childhood and personal schooling experiences. The rationale behind this interview was based on research that stressed that teaching practices are influenced more by teachers' childhood experiences than by what they are taught in their preservice preparation programs (Dickinson, 1987; Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1985; Goodman, 1988; Gorman, 1993; Lortie, 1975). Lortie referred to prospective teachers' "apprenticeship of observation" (p. 61) which alludes to the fact that the average student spends approximately 13,000 hours in classrooms with a teacher. Lortie also found that students who went into teaching had very positive feelings about their schooling experiences and were not looking to change the teaching situation. The students' views, however, were described as limited and related more to personality characteristics rather than pedagogical issues (Lortie). Carter (1990) stressed that, "familiarity and school-based socialization, it is argued, account for the

stability of classroom practices, the conservatism of teachers, and the low impact of teacher education” (p. 293).

However, Gorman (1993) argued that teachers’ prior beliefs may not be an impediment to changes in beliefs but, rather, that the training programs they undergo are ineffective. He found that the students in his study did not accept the ideas and theories presented in class because: (a) they did not understand the work in the manner that it was presented; (b) those who gained a “surface understanding” (p. 21) of the concepts, were unsure of how and when to apply it in practice; and (c) they expressed a reluctance to implement new methods, more out of a desire for security in the familiar than for resistance to new ideas. Students expressed the need for more practical experiences and did not seem to see the relevance of knowledge that conflicted with their established values and beliefs about teaching. Jones (1984) also suggested that the type of instruction used by faculty, one which relies on direct teaching of skills and concepts rather than encouraging the students to be active learners, may contribute to the apparent ineffectiveness of teacher education programs.

The first interview provided me with an opportunity to learn about the participants’ early childhood and schooling. Hearing about their early childhood memories also helped to identify values and beliefs that may be related to their families’ child rearing practices. As Cuffaro (1995) asserted:

Shaping and colouring our stories and our aims are our values and beliefs.

How we see, what we select, and what we find meaningful are rooted in our

histories – the people we have known, the places we have passed and lived in, the textures we have touched and tasted. (p. 15)

The second interview (see Appendix D), which took place approximately 5 to 10 days following the first interview, focused on the experienced preschool teachers' perceptions of their preservice teacher preparation. The purpose was to help participants reconstruct their experiences, and to provide the opportunity for them to reflect on the rationale underlying their perceptions. The questions related to course work, practicum experiences (Grossman, 1990), and the teachers' values and beliefs about what it means to be prepared to work with young children in a day care centre.

The third interview (see Appendix E), which was conducted in the next week, was given to 5 of the participants. The sixth participant was interviewed several weeks later. During the first part of the interview participants were asked to give a general description of their day care program, the organizational structure of the centre, as well as their relationships with the children, co-workers, supervisors, parents, and the community. The second part of the interview involved details on what participants do in their teaching practices and the rationale for their behaviour. By asking the participants to reflect on the rationale behind their thoughts and actions, I wanted to identify learning content or formal theories that could be linked to their formal teacher preparation.

Observations

Four to six naturalistic observations of each participant were conducted during a 6-month period. Prior to these observations, I conducted a pre-observation

conference (see appendix F). The observations took place at various times of the day and during different components of the program schedule. At the end of the observation period, the full day's schedule was observed. During one of the observations, I completed the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS, Harms & Clifford, 1980). The ECERS was used to examine the quality of the overall environment. The results of the ECERS were analyzed. The subscales demonstrated different strengths and weaknesses in the overall program and helped to confirm or expand on some of my other findings. However, my interest was in the impact of the participants' preservice preparation on their teaching practice, and the global, overall scores involved so many issues that did not directly relate to the focus of my study. Therefore, I decided not to use the results on the quality of the overall environment, as the additional data which it supplied was difficult to relate to the impact of preservice preparation programs. It expanded on areas to be explored rather than extending on the existing themes drawn from the participants' perceptions. Nevertheless, the results can be used by the participants to inform them of the overall quality of care provided.

The naturalistic observations of the participants allowed me to be "more personally and environmentally sensitive" (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, p. 129) and to draw questions during the informal interviews from actual classroom episodes. Patton (1980) pointed out that observations provide: (a) a better understanding of the program context; (b) an inductive exploratory approach; (c) an opportunity to observe conditions which may have become routine for the daily participants within

the setting; (d) an opportunity to observe areas that participants may be unwilling to talk about in an interview; (e) a view of the program that can add to the perspective of the participant; and (f) a direct experience that allows for my own impressions, feelings, and interpretations of the program (pp. 124-125). Observations of teaching practices also demonstrate “how the different things that a teacher knows and believes come together in making decisions and pedagogical moves” (Kennedy, Ball, & McDiarmid, 1993, p. 103). Observation notes (see Appendix G) were used to support, challenge, or illuminate comments in the interviews by providing concrete illustrations from the teachers’ actual work. Following the observations, there was a post-observation conference.

Once the transcripts of the interviews were prepared and the observation notes formally written, the participants were asked to read the material, to write an initial reaction to it in order to determine the accuracy of the writings, and to add their own comments. All the participants made comments relating to the content of the material.

Data Analysis

The first unit of analysis was the transcripts of open-ended, structured interviews. They were viewed as individual case studies in which I coded the responses. The initial coding was related to the content requested in the question (for a list of headings for each interview, see Appendix H). I created and/or added comments to these headings based on my observation notes. Next, I did a cross-case analysis using large chart paper. I colour coded the different responses from

individuals to identify the significant areas that related to individuals, and then grouped the individuals according to their preservice program. By reworking and rewriting the data, I moved from 6 individual case studies to 3 case studies of preservice programs, based on the individual case studies. I then contacted the participants to check my information or lack of information in the different areas. Using the information located under these headings, I searched for patterns and themes common to each program, and then to all the programs. Five main themes emerged from the data collection that related to their perceptions of their preservice program: the nature of the child, integration of theory and practice, the nature of the classroom teaching, practicum experiences, and overall atmosphere. Then these three case studies were merged into one case study as the data related to each of the preservice programs was compared and contrasted.

In the second part of the data analysis, I explored the impact of the participants' preservice preparation on their teaching practices by coding my observation notes, conferencing notes, and integrating pertinent information from the interviews. This data, which explored the nature of the individuals' curriculum, identified links, even tentative ones, that supported or challenged the participants' perceptions of their preservice program and its impact on their teaching practice. The data, which formed three case studies related to the preservice programs, was organized under the following headings: activities, routines, and interactions. These areas are key components in quality early childhood programs (Harms & Clifford, 1993). Then, a cross-case analysis of the three programs was developed into one

case study. The discussion of these findings was written in relation to the research questions. In the final chapter of the thesis, implications of the study and suggestions for future research areas are explored.

Reflecting on the Research Process

There are many positive aspects of developing a case study from the perspective of the early childhood practitioner. One aspect is the value it places on experience in a naturalistic context. This approach provides an opportunity for practitioners to add to the growing body of research in early childhood education. The use of an ecological theoretical approach provided a holistic means to study early childhood teacher education and viewed teaching within the context of the larger environment. Another aspect is the methodology which involved structured, open-ended interview questions and naturalistic observations. This approach allowed me to focus attention on the areas emphasized by the teachers' perceptions. Ongoing discourses with the participants enhanced the depth of this exploration. The case study approach has the potential to make the "local knowledge" (Geertz, 1984) a vehicle to support collaboration and change amongst policy makers, teacher educators, child care administrators, and child care practitioners. As Geertz (1984) indicated, this local knowledge is an important part of theoretical research but difficult to capture and understand:

To grasp concepts which, for another person, are experience-near, and to do so well enough to place them in illuminating connection with experience-distant concepts theorists have fashioned to capture the general features of

social life, is clearly a task at least as delicate, if a bit less magical, as putting oneself into someone else's skin. (p. 125)

As this case study developed, I became much more cognizant of the importance of this local or situated knowledge and of how the knowledge of practitioners needs to be acknowledged as a notable source in reforming teacher education. The study helped to fill a void in the existing research in early childhood teacher education by exploring the process involved in the content of learning about teaching and its contextual influences as preschool teachers implement their knowledge acquired in preservice preparation. Based on the benefits of preservice teacher preparation as perceived by the participants in the study and through my own naturalistic observations, I chose different areas to examine and discuss. As I attempted conscientiously to provide necessary details in these areas, there were many revisits to the centres to meet with the participants. It was a very demanding task. At the beginning of the study, I had tried to explain the time commitment for the participants, but the study became much more involved and time consuming than I had anticipated. Yet, the participants were very understanding of the added time needed to complete the thesis and were always willing to meet with me to discuss any area of the study. This underscored the importance of being as open and honest as possible about the work that can be involved in a qualitative case study.

I have worked in the field of early childhood education for many years in many different roles. However, this study has imparted to me a renewed admiration and deeper appreciation of the work of preschool teachers. There were so many

issues that began to emerge as the study progressed and often, I was exploring different issues at different stages of development with each of the participants. The findings were constantly in a state of being evaluated and synthesized. Choices had to be made as to how best to proceed with the data collection. Including two participants from each program proved to be a beneficial aspect, especially if the perception of the participants' from the same program differed. It provided me with a way to further explore and clarify different aspects of their perceptions.

The data collection included interview transcriptions, observation and conference notes, and other documentation within the centres. All these areas were valuable sources of information. However, I had to reflect continuously on my own values and beliefs so that I could be aware of personal biases. At times, this would mean a discussion with my research committee members. Their questions would demand that I identify my personal values and beliefs so that I gained an awareness of how my own biases were influencing my thinking and interpretations of the findings. Also, as the months progressed, I found myself becoming very close to the participants. As I gained their trust, they provided me with such rich, detailed accounts of the complexity of their personal, professional experiences which, in turn, proved important for gaining insights about the meanings of their perceptions. In reporting the findings, I have tried to retain the richness of their personal knowledge while at the same time recognizing that this study was to explore the impact of preservice preparation. It was, in essence, a study of early childhood preservice preparation programs based on the narratives of preschool teachers' experiences. In

reporting the data, ethical issues that related to the need to provide detailed accounts of events had to be addressed in a way that would protect the participants from any risks of their disclosures. The final report can be viewed optimistically, as it demonstrated the profoundly positive influence early childhood preservice preparation can assert on prospective teachers' teaching practices. The preschool teachers' narratives have led to informative discourses as they supported, challenged, and extended the existing research on early childhood teacher preparation. The findings have also raised concerns for future research on the nature of the relationship between formal, early childhood teacher education and teaching practices.

CHAPTER IV

EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHER PREPARATION: THE NATURE OF PARTICIPANTS' PERCEPTIONS

The participants of this study are graduates of three different Early Childhood Education programs: Lee and Liz graduated from a 1-year Early Childhood Education training program; Suzanne and Samantha from a 2-year, competency-based training centre for preschool personnel, and Samantha also completed a 1-year program in Special Education; while Veronica and Victoria completed a 4-year baccalaureate degree in Early Childhood Education. The purpose of this chapter is to describe the perceptions these 6 preschool teachers have of their preservice teacher preparation programs. The data analysis is presented through a description of the following themes: understanding the nature of the child, integration of theory and practice, the nature of classroom teaching, practicum experiences, and overall atmosphere. These themes, which were developed from the categories that emerged from the data collection, will be explored in relation to each of the preservice programs. The codes used to cite the information received from the participants are as follows:

1. Initially, each of the 6 participants was assigned a number rather than a name. These numbers are arranged in the order of the first set of interviews. Number 1 is Lee, 2 is Veronica, 3 is Victoria, 4 is Suzanne, 5 is Samantha, and 6 is Liz. Later, I used assigned names in which the number of syllables in each name corresponded to the number of years of preservice preparation each had received. For each type of

program, the names would start with the same letter. Hence, Lee and Liz both completed the 1-year training program.

2. In the citations that refer to information gathered from an interview, the procedure was: the number of the participant, the number of the interview's set of questions and the page number where it is located in the original transcript. For example, (1/3/7) refers to a comment by Lee in her third interview on page 7. Now (2/2b/9) would refer to Veronica, the second session of the second set of interview questions and is located on page 9. There were two reasons for a second session within a particular set of interview questions. The common one was we were unable to complete the interview in the allotted time, and the other was a problem with the tape recording equipment.

3. For the citations that relate to classroom observations, the code was as follows: the number of the participant, the number of the observation, and the page number where it is located in my typed notes. For example, (4/2ob/6) refers to Suzanne, the second observation and page number 6.

4. Other citations in the reporting of the findings include: (2/pp/4) which refers to one's participant's written personal philosophy and (personal notes/date) refers to my personal, hand written notes.

The following sections will characterize the perceptions of the participants. They are presented in an order based on the type of preservice preparation program each participant completed.

A 1-year Early Childhood Diploma Program: A Thematic Approach

According to program pamphlets, the 1-year training program in early childhood education was designed to prepare graduates for work with young children in a variety of settings such as day care centres, nursery schools, family day care, a hospital playroom, play groups, centres for special needs children, children's libraries and community centres. At the time Lee completed the program, there were 650 hours of supervised practicum and 475 hours of theory, seminars and workshops. When Liz completed the program, 3 years later, the hours had been reduced to 600 hours of supervised practicum and 450 hours of instructional time. The program used a cognitive-based approach with a special emphasis on providing developmentally appropriate practice. Courses included areas such as growth and development of the young child, observing and recording children's behaviour, planning the learning environment, professional personal development, and curriculum areas such as music, movement, art, behaviour management, health and nutrition. Guest speakers, workshops and seminars were also included in this program. The following section describes the basic themes that characterize these 2 graduates' perceptions of this program.

Understanding the Nature of the Child

The theme of understanding the nature of the child was an important aspect of this 1-year program. The program emphasized an integrated approach to the development of the whole child -- social, cognitive, emotional and physical growth. Lee stressed that knowledge of child development is important for preschool teachers

to: a) develop an understanding “about the inner thoughts and feelings of how children feel and how they look at the world” (1/2/2); and b) use this knowledge to plan developmentally appropriate experiences for young children (1/2/2). Learning about the psychology of child development helped the participants to gain a general understanding of how children develop at different ages and stages of growth. Knowledge of growth and development also enhanced the participants’ knowledge about individual children’s overall development and to identify developmental lags that can occur in the different stages of development. Lee emphasized that, “You have to know when something’s not right” (1/2/21). I interpreted this to relate to what Honig (1995) referred to as “the norms and windows” of children’s development, where the teacher is aware of developmental norms but knows that there are windows that allow for individual differences. The teacher also needs to recognize when that window may have closed, indicating a need for individual attention or professional intervention, in a particular area of development.

One way of gaining an understanding of individual children’s development is to observe and record children’s behaviour. Techniques on learning to observe and record children’s behaviour were perceived as important in learning about the nature of individual children – their interests, needs and abilities. Liz asserted, “That’s why I know my children so well, because I observe them and I record everything that they do” (6/2/23). Lee emphasized that by carefully observing and accurately recording children’s behaviour, “you learn about children and to base it [interpretations of their behaviour] on actual things that happened” (1/2/25). Lee stated that teachers often

make assumptions about children's behaviour. She used the following example to explain her point:

The old famous one is "He always does that." But if you really break down his week, he probably only did it three times, so it may not be behaviour that is typical of this child. So, you have to be careful of that and you have to really learn how to observe and record their behaviour. (1/2/25)

Lee indicated the value of learning different types of observations. Recording daily observations of the children helps to develop cumulative records on each child. These recordings can be used for child assessments, curriculum planning that relates to the children's interests, needs and abilities, as well as parental conferences. In one of Lee's practicum placements, a parent had a concern that her child was not doing much while she was in day care. In this case, Lee completed a running record of the child's activities over the next few days. She stated that while completing the running record she learned so much about this child -- her use of language, how she uses different materials, and her interests as demonstrated by her role playing. This enabled Lee to engage the child in dialogue related to her identified interest area, to expand on her present knowledge in that area, and to encourage teacher-child interactions. It also provided her with actual illustrations of the child's activities to share with the concerned parent. Consulting with a parent may also inform the teacher of something going on in the child's life outside of the centre, such as difficulty with sleeping, that may be affecting her/his behaviour. This approach recognizes the importance of the child's family and provides the family with

information about their child's overall development that is based on descriptions of actual events.

Liz mentioned that another way of gaining information about a child's development is to tape record and transcribe children's interactions. She remembered recording and transcribing a tape of a group of children at play. She analyzed it with respect to their language level and overall tone of the interactions. Lee reiterates that a key aspect to observing and recording children's behaviour was that "you have to be so careful because you have to observe it correctly and document it correctly . . . What they did and not what you thought [they did]" (1/2/28). It was important to record the behaviour accurately and to make interpretations based on the data you have collected. Observing and recording children's behaviour, as demonstrated by the above examples, was an important part of both the classroom work and the practicum experiences.

Knowledge about the children's growth and development is then used by the teacher in planning the curriculum. Lee asserted that understanding how children think and identifying how they feel helps the teacher to determine how to teach them. For example, if a 2-year old child is using uncontrolled scribbling when drawing, that is a stage in her or his learning process. At 5, this child may be drawing people. Knowledge gained through observations of the child helps the teacher to provide developmentally appropriate materials. Lee explained this concept by using an example of how she would provide appropriate art experiences for young children:

They [young children] need hands-on, so you would plan different things for different children according to how they would sit and draw. Did they use a pencil or did they just grab a marker, or would they rather have a big paint brush? You decide who is going to learn better from what kinds of things.

(1/2/4)

Liz demonstrated the importance of curriculum experiences based on the child's development by using an example in children's movement. She stated that learning about children's movement taught her about the physical development of children: what skills they develop at certain ages, how to identify a developmental lag, and appropriate exercises for assisting individual children in the different areas of physical development. She used the example of observing a child in the playground. "If I take them to the playground and if they are not able to do something, then I will think, well, we are going to work on that, because they should be able to, at this age level. They are 4-year-olds and they should be able to (pause) . . . bounce the ball or whatever" (6/2/29). She further stated that knowledge of different developmental levels is important to keep the learning environment healthy and safe for all the children. She stressed that with young children teachers must monitor "how clean you need to be, how things need to be sterile from a health perspective, and [how this relates to] a lot of diseases, a lot of causes of diseases, and stopping the spread of illnesses" (6/2/30). She told of how important it is to check each centre's policies in this area. She also referred to the importance of a safety check in the playground before the children enter the area (6/2/30-31).

In sum, the participants who graduated from the 1-year training program, maintained that a key aspect of their preservice program was the need to understand the nature of the child. They stated that knowledge of child development was important for providing an integrated approach to the development of the whole child; gaining an understanding of the general characteristics of different ages and stages; understanding the perspective of individual children; and identifying atypical behaviour. Observing and recording children's behaviour was recognized as an important strategy for gaining knowledge of individual children's growth and development. Various strategies were used to observe and record the children's interactions including daily observations of specific episodes, running records, and transcribing audio recordings of verbal interactions. This program demonstrated to these participants that knowledge of child development, supplemented with accurate recordings of teacher observations of a particular group of children, can be used in providing developmentally appropriate experiences for young children, developing assessments of children's overall development and providing detailed information in teacher-parent conferences.

Integration of Theory and Practice

In the 1-year program, theory and practice were closely linked through the use of principled practice, especially in the curriculum areas. This use of principled practice was identified by Liz and Lee as an important aspect of their preparation program, and was characterized by the following three features: a thematic, integrated approach to curriculum planning; the use of modelling; and direct

preparation for working in a day care centre. These aspects are explored from the perspectives of the 2 participants, Lee and Liz.

A Thematic, Integrated Curriculum

The use of a thematic, integrated curriculum approach, using a philosophy based on developmentally appropriate practice, was emphasized by the participants. Lee described the philosophy of the program as a change in one's thinking that is characterized by children's active learning:

Children learn through doing, through hands-on. That's the High Scope . . . which has to change your way of thinking because most people go into the course [program] thinking that children learn what you tell them, but that's the least that they learn. Actually what they learn is through experience . . . You set the classroom up at their level, it's their classroom, everything is on their level, everything is safe for them and they can use and manipulate everything that they want. Even if sand and water aren't supposed to go together, well if someone has a need to put sand and water together, you just talk to them about why they are doing it. It's not wrong that they want to put water and sand, that's the philosophy . . . (1/2/16)

A key aspect of this approach was planning the learning environment which was to be a reflection of the philosophy of the program. Curriculum in early childhood education refers to "the opportunities for experience you offer children that help them deepen their understanding of the world" (Jablon, 1992, p. 121). This includes the materials you provide, daily routines, small group work, opportunities for social

interactions and so forth. Lee stressed that the curriculum is an integrated one. Experiences for the children are organized around a theme that allows for the integration of knowledge, skills and dispositions rather than the traditional separation of discipline areas. Planned experiences are based on the interests of the children and the teachers' knowledge of the children's development. Areas such as multiculturalism, gender, play, and creativity are all integrated into the curriculum plans. Liz emphasized the importance of a multicultural perspective in all aspects of her planning, such as posters to be displayed, pictures to be used and the presentation of the materials to be explored (6/2/37-38). She stated, "Self-awareness is a big thing that is ongoing, especially with a group of young children . . . It's being aware of not just yourself, but being aware of other people around you. That is ongoing" (6/2/40).

These participants were taught to provide an integrated curriculum through the use of curriculum webs. Each web is based on a theme that relates to the children's interests, and is developed around the eight key experiences of the High Scope approach: active learning, language, representation, classification, seriation, number concepts, spatial relations, and time (Hohmann, Banet, & Weikart, 1979). Lee underscores the importance of integrating the theme into as many aspects of the daily routine as possible and into the many areas of the classroom, such as the writing area, table top activities, and dramatic play. Liz emphasized that in planning the learning environment, one plans for the development of the whole child. For example, the development of children's language, social relationships, as well as intellectual development, are all important components (6/2/9).

The importance of children's development of language was highlighted by both participants. Liz pointed out that language development includes learning about children's language, the stages of language development, how to enhance understanding and use of language, as well as the teacher's own language and its affect on children. She stressed that language is not only the content of your words but includes "a lot of gestures, using body language and the tone of your voice. . . Starting at the child's level, eye contact and so forth" (6/2/36-37).

An integrated approach to children's learning was encouraged in all areas of development. For example, Lee described the role of art activities in learning about numbers:

If you want to talk about numbers, it can be really boring if you are just going to show them flash cards but when you're painting, you can give them three different coloured paints or if they're matching paint and paint brushes, is there an extra paint brush? Or, are there four paint brushes and not three, that kind of thing. Or, different shapes, colours and sizes of paper. (1/2/5)

Liz used the example of integrating nutrition into the different areas of the curriculum. She indicated you could cook with the children, plan games with food cards that develop visual perception, count carrots and so forth (6/2/13). Experiences in the learning environment also influence the children's physical and social behaviour. Lee indicated that:

If you have a child that's having a problem, you should look at your learning environment first. Is it your routine? Is there too much space between

changes? Are there too many changes? Are there too many transitions? Is your bathroom too small? Are there not enough puzzles? (1/2/40)

This holistic, integrative approach to programming helped the students to become familiar with the importance of written plans, as well as the room arrangement, materials and equipment provided, the overall atmosphere and how children react to different surroundings (6/2/9). Bredekamp and Rosegrant (1992) explain that, "During early childhood the concept of integration derives from the integrated nature of development -- what happens in one developmental dimension, such as physical growth, inevitably influences other dimensions of development, such as cognitive and social development" (p. 37).

Planning for the learning environment was an important area of study. Lee asserted, "This gave you everything you needed for the actual classroom and your teaching program, your planning, why you were going to teach what you were going to teach" (1/2/18). When asked if there are aspects of this philosophy with which she does not agree, Lee explained:

You might have to look at it [your idea] from a different angle . . . but you can pretty much fit anything into it . . . you break it down into time, numbers, space and those kinds of things [key experiences: active learning, representation, classification, seriation, number concepts, spatial relations, and time]. (1/2/19)

The Use of Instructor Modelling

The use of instructor modelling refers to instructor modelling developmentally appropriate experiences for young children, while the students role play the part of the young children. Based on comments made by Lee and Liz, I felt the term model was being used in the way described by Bredekamp and Rosegrant (1992). In their continuum of teaching behaviours they include a range from nondirective (acknowledge, model) to mediating (facilitate, support, scaffold, co-construct) to directive (demonstrate, direct) behaviours (p. 39). In an early childhood classroom, teachers will use behaviours from all areas of the continuum, depending on the situation and the child's stage of development. However, modelling can be both implicit and explicit. The more explicit the behaviour, the more directive it becomes. Modelling is described as "teachers display for children the desirable ways of behaving in the classroom" (Bredekamp & Rosegrant, p. 40).

Teachers model desired behaviours implicitly through their own behaviour. It can become more explicit as teachers provide more information concerning an activity or process as they coach the children. Lee often referred to how her instructors would model developmentally appropriate activities for young children. She stated that one instructor "taught us like we were her own class" (1/2/29). At another time, she said, "Again, it was the same set up. We were the day care class and our teacher [instructor] did musical movement with us. So, you could actually take her classes right back to your small children" (1/2/29). She explained that when they were learning about children's art, the students developed a whole portfolio of art activities

to use when they started teaching (1/2/4). The instructor would model the teacher's role in the activity as the students did the activity.

Lee provided many examples of activities she had completed in classes, such as foot painting, finger painting on garbage bags and making paper imprints of the designs, using Q-tips and coloured glue to make designs on wax paper, crayon rubbings, blow painting, easel painting to music by Mozart, and gadget painting, which involved painting with tempera paints using household gadgets such as a spatula or a whisk. She explained that one of the benefits of learning in this manner was to experience the activity from the perspective of the child. It helps the teacher to "feel how the child would feel when you see the materials presented" (1/2/6). She recognized the anxiety that a child may feel about a new experience. Observing the instructors' modelling helped the students gain an understanding of how to present the activity in an appealing and appropriate manner as well as the importance of providing proper materials for the children. Doing the gadget painting activity helped Lee to understand why it was important to use flat trays and not deep bowls for the paint, to know what type of gadget would be best for this type of painting, and to see first hand the learning that takes place (1/2/6). This interactive approach to teaching also introduced the participants to activities that are creative, that allow for the child to freely explore the materials, and that recognize there is no "one right way" to do an activity.

Liz explained that by observing her instructors, she also learned the importance of being well-organized, writing detailed lesson plans and using an

integrated approach to a curriculum. She described the influence of one instructor, “She was so well planned and well prepared. When you see that from a teacher, you really want to be that way” (6/2/26). Learning how to make detailed lesson plans in this situation helped Liz to plan in other areas of the curriculum, such as circle time. It also seemed to enhance the student’s confidence and to create a desire to want to present the activity to children. These instructors involved the adult learners in active learning experiences. Jones (1986) stated that the active learning approach helps to prevent the student, a prospective preschool teacher, from regressing to prior conceptions of teaching:

When they in their turn become teachers, they’re likely to revert back to all their accumulated pictures of teachers and how they behave -- unless I’m able to make this other model real for them, something they have appreciated and would like to provide for other learners. (p. 69)

This approach appeared to demonstrate respect for the participants’ abilities to learn from the experiences provided and they, in turn, learned about respect for the child and her or his ability to learn from the freedom of creative exploration. Liz explained that it is important that the children “have the freedom to choose what they want from an art experience” (6/2/19). She stated that, “The cut out stuff where you say, ‘You stick it together this way, this way, this way, this way, this way, and this way’ were unacceptable” (6/2/19-21). An important extension of this approach to learning was the required assignments. One assignment, that both Liz and Lee described, was the one in which they wrote and illustrated their own book. Lee still

had her book and was excited to explain what she had learned from the activity. It helped her to gain an understanding how such an activity helps develop children's cognitive skills, such as learning about shapes, colours and spatial relationships (1/2/12). Lee explained that this activity proved to be challenging one. Exploring these activities seemed to help the participants to gain a new understanding of how children learn.

Modelling was also used to help the students learn instructional strategies. Lee found this to be a very effective way to learn. For example, in order to help the students understand not to police the classroom, one instructor had the students form a circle at the beginning of a class. Lee describes the situation in the following way:

This one day she sat us down in a circle but she was so rude. She said, "Be quiet, you're making too much noise." "Now, you can't sit like that." She was talking like this. And finally one girl got so upset she just left and then she [the instructor] said, "There, you see my point. That's not how you do an effective circle." And then she did it properly. (1/2/20)

Lee explained how this helped her to identify with the children's feeling when the activity is teacher-directed, passive and does not show respect for the child (1/2/20-21). This instructor's modelling appeared to be effective. This was demonstrated by the participants' recall of many details from the courses that involved modelling and the active involvement of the students. The opportunity to try out these activities on one's own was valued. Lee stressed that, "Instead of preaching to us and lecturing,

there was all this hands-on stuff to do” (1/2/21). In this way, the learning content had a direct relevance to their future career as a preschool teacher.

When studying children’s literature, the students actually read children’s books and used them to gain an understanding of how to choose an appropriate one. Lee explained how the class went to the library and critically reviewed children’s books. They studied different authors and illustrators. They compared the text of different books to see what was appropriate for young children and what was not. Lee asserted, “It showed us how to be more careful when you pick them [children’s books] out because there are a lot of negative connotations in books, sometimes” (1/2/11). Lee stressed that this helped her to learn that books teach children about moral development, social development and can help them to express how they feel (1/2/11). This approach to learning helped these graduates not only to learn about children’s development and to integrate books into curriculum themes, but it also inspired them to read. They gained a love of children’s literature. As Liz exulted, “If I had the money, I would buy every book there was going of children’s stories. I love them” (6/2/3). Lee stated, “And then when I started reading children’s books, [I realized] they’re written so well that children really understand them and can relate to them. So then, I realized that no matter what you do, you can always find a book that will relate to the issue you’re teaching, or what the children are interested in . . .” (1/2/10).

Music and movement were also taught in the same manner. In music, Lee learned the importance of music in children’s lives and how to use music in a

developmentally appropriate manner with children. They learned about musical instruments, rhythm and sounds as well as how they affect children. The use of music with young children “encourages the children to do things that you want to do and it [the sound of the music] just works, like as a transition or just changing the mood of everybody” (1/2/28). They were introduced to many songs for use in their practicum and for later, in their own teaching.

Lee felt that the practical application of doing the movement activities, not only enhanced her understanding of children’s physical development but was also important for two other reasons. The first is that it is very important for teachers of young children to be in good physical health, as work with young children can be very demanding physically. “You do a lot of bending and standing so you have to have good knees and a good back and keep yourself in good shape” (1/2/29). Her second reason related to knowing how to meet the children’s need for movement and to enhance development of coordination of their growing bodies. Through the practical application of movement activities, Lee learned the use of actual play apparatus such as bean bags and balls for skill development; she gained an understanding of how to make traditional games developmentally appropriate for young children; and she developed a file of a year of plans for creative movement. These experiences provided her with knowledge of children’s physical development and valuable resources for ways of enhancing children’s physical skills.

Another teaching strategy that also stressed an integration of theory and practice was when classroom instructors asked the participants to draw from their

observations of the children in their practicum to illustrate a particular issue being discussed. For example, when they discussed gender issues they were asked to recall if the children played with certain materials based on their sex (1/2/40).

These instructors' activities were perceived as being based on a philosophy of developmentally appropriate practice. Both participants believed this approach to teaching to be a very beneficial aspect of the 1-year program. The next step in this approach to learning required the participants to use their class assignments in their practicum placements.

Direct Preparation for Work in a Day Care Centre

The preparation for day care aspect of the principled practice approach is introduced in this section but will be explored further under the theme entitled "Practicum Experiences." The purpose of referring to the practicum in this section is to demonstrate how students' classroom assignments directly prepared the students for their practica in day care placements.

The 1-year program used a thematic approach to teacher preparation so the course work and practicum experiences were closely interwoven whenever possible. One placement was actually completed in a laboratory class. During classes, student assignments were often designed to be used directly in practicum placements. This, of course, was the intent of the program, but in actuality it often depended on the participants' placements as to the extent that this was possible. This approach proved to be a very positive aspect of Lee's practicum experiences. She told of how she planned a curriculum web in one of her classes to use in her placement. Lee recalled

vivid details of the web she had planned and of the children's reaction to her ideas. She told of how they enjoyed her formal plans for small groups and her informal planning, such as the materials she placed in the dramatic play area (1/2/19-20). In another assignment she chose the book, The Snowy Day, to read to the children in her placement and then planned a small group activity related to the story. She read the book and then took the children out in the snow to do all the things the little boy in the book had done. Lee maintained that this reinforced for her the importance of reading to children and how books can be integrated with the children's daily activities as well as teaching developmental skills, such as the recalling and sequencing of past events (1/2/11).

The use of their classroom assignments in their practicum experience helped students to value the children's growth in areas such as language development. Lee told of one art experience she planned and how the children's reactions helped her to discover the other areas of development these art activities can enhance. She described the children's reactions to painting with different household gadgets:

And they talk about the patterns and the shapes and the sizes and that's what you want. You want them to talk about what they're doing, so you see what they're getting out of it. They talk about the shapes and then, "I'm going to put something **inside** the shape, something on the **outside**." (1/2/7)

This opportunity to develop activities for use with young children, under the supervision of a classroom instructor, appeared to give the participants a feeling of confidence in their abilities to plan developmentally appropriate practice and to learn

from their own experiences. It also seemed to heighten their interest in the learning content in the classes. For example, Lee planned an integrated approach to using a science theme in the classroom. Her theme was “Things that Roll.” She told of some of the experiences she provided for the children. The children painted with things that rolled such as the wheels of cars and trucks. Lee placed things that roll in the interest areas of the classroom, such as the sand table, the water table, and the block area, for the children to discover. Later, they went on an outing and looked for things in their environment that roll. Lee smiled and the tone of her voice raised in excitement as she told of the delight of a child who would discover that something rolls:

They’ll be a child who will say, “Look, look, look, this rolls!” They just get so excited because they related it to what you were talking about. And that was something that was in the classroom all along but they didn’t realize that it rolled. (1/2/8)

The opportunity to use classroom planned activities in practicum experiences demonstrated the practical relevance of the work. This preparation would contribute to a successful practicum experience. It also appeared to create a sense of excitement as the participants prepared activities to use with young children.

In sum, the theme “Integration of Theory and Practice” was examined in the 1-year program through an exploration of the use of principled practice. Principled practice, as described by the participants of this study, had several identified characteristics. First, it was based on an integrated curriculum approach which

emphasized providing developmentally appropriate experiences for young children, through the use of thematic curriculum webs. Planning for the overall learning environment was an important aspect in the application of this approach to programming. Second, the instructors' use of modelling developmentally appropriate activities helped the students to appreciate the importance of careful preparation, an appealing and engaging presentation of activities, as well as the availability of proper resources. The actual "doing" of the activities helped the students to gain an understanding the rationale behind the activity, to value the child's perspective, and to appreciate an integrated approach to child development. This use of actual illustrations of children's work enhanced the students' understanding of theoretical concepts and the relevance of the learning content. Finally, the direct preparation for day care aspect of principled practice helped to prepare the students for actual, day care classroom situations. Classroom assignments were practically oriented as they were designed to be used in the students' practicum placements. This gave the students an opportunity to develop curriculum material under the supervision of a classroom instructor prior to presenting the material to young children. The approach seemed to enhance the students' confidence in their performance in their placement and demonstrated the practical relevance of the classroom assignments. Use of principled practice offered these participants a consistent, theoretically specific approach to early childhood education programming.

The Nature of Classroom Teaching

The perceived quality of classroom teaching methods played a major role in the level of learning retention and recall, according to these participants. Participants seemed to perceive learning content to be more beneficial when practical examples or concrete illustrations of theoretical concepts were presented to them, rather than the traditional lecture method. If they were able to make the connection between theoretical concepts and actual experiences with children, they felt they gained a better understanding of the theory. Lee described the teaching of one of her instructors who was knowledgeable about human development and had a vast range of experiences with children and youth. He related stories of the children with whom he worked to explain child development -- "how children in [different] age ranges look at things and how they see themselves" (1/2/3). The instructor described the child in the early years, and followed her or him through the teenage years to demonstrate how development in the beginning years influences later development. Lee stated that he "knows the effects that some things can have on them [the children] when they're smaller, and the changes that you can make early in their life" (1/2/3). Placing children's development in a context of overall human development helped Lee to recognize the powerful influence of the early years and the important role of preschool teachers. The use of practical examples, from the lives of children, helped the participants to gain an understanding of the theory and demonstrated the importance of child development knowledge in order to enhance children's healthy growth and development.

The use of concrete illustrations also appeared to make the learning content more meaningful as the participants related the theoretical concepts to individual children's lives. Through the use of concrete examples, it appeared that the participants came to value the importance of theory and to appreciate its application to teaching young children. The use of concrete illustrations of the theoretical concepts they were learning was viewed by both Lee and Liz, as a valuable aspect of the program. For example, when the participants were learning the theory about the stages of development in children's art experiences, they collected actual samples of children's drawings from the children in their practicum. They examined them, labelled important characteristics of the drawings, and then evaluated the child's stage of development according to the theory they were learning. Lee emphasized, "You were able to apply what you were learning, you could see it in action, concrete examples . . . you made a connection in your head that the kids really do this. Then when it came down to planning it was so easy to pick up on what they were doing and plan your day and your activities around it" (1/2/5).

The use of practical examples helped the student gain a better understanding of the theory, to recognize the different areas of children's growth that were being developed, and to plan accordingly (1/2/4-5). Jones (1986) stated, "Memory of a concrete event often triggers memory of a more abstract idea" (p. 49). This certainly appeared to be true for these participants. They were able to comprehend generalizations through specific, concrete examples. It also gave recognition to their

orientation to the practical (McAninch, 1993), and connected the learning content to their interest in working with children (Jones, 1986).

Use of a variety of instructional strategies that actively engaged the students in the learning process was also viewed very positively. The participants appreciated being actively involved in classes. Liz stated that classroom management is something that requires practical experience, but she found being involved in discussing case studies relating to children's behaviour to be very helpful. Students, in her classes, gathered in groups to discuss different teaching situations, different approaches to the situations, and the consequences of these actions. Liz realized that situations in actual teaching can be very different, but this gave her an awareness of different discipline strategies to use. This approach helped her to self-examine her own behaviour and to recognize approaches that were developmentally appropriate (6/2/7). The opportunity to discuss an issue based on an actual teaching episode was perceived to be a very valuable learning experience. Liz explained her reasons for valuing case studies. "I liked to have an idea in my head and see something concrete before I can try to solve the problem" (6/2/7). She found group work, in general, to be beneficial. She felt that group discussions helped her to view a situation from the different perspectives of the group members. For example, when discussing works of arts, different members of the group could have different interpretations of the paintings which created interesting discussions. Members of the group also provided a multicultural perspective to the issues that were explored, as there were people from

a variety of backgrounds. Liz valued the diversity of the group and their input into class discussions.

The participants also valued assignments that involved direct application of the learning content. This opportunity to use the subject matter was viewed as valuable and appeared to increase their learning retention. Liz explained that it was advantageous to explore activities on your own. The motivation becomes intrinsic (6/2/3). It also respects the autonomy of the learner. For example, she made the decision if she would read a book, tell a story orally, use props such as flannel pieces to tell the story, or create a story and/or a story book on her own. Teaching experiences were viewed very positively when the instructors in the program valued the need for participants' choices and the freedom to explore their choices in assignments. Liz, in talking about a list of creative assignments in one course, stated, "There was so much that you could do on your own . . . I think that's why I liked it the best" (6/2/3).

Opportunities for observations of children were perceived as very helpful in learning theoretical concepts about the child's growth and development. One course, which was mostly lecturing and memorizing the social, emotional and cognitive stages of development, also involved observations of children. Lee stated that the observations facilitated her recognition of the importance of understanding developmental theories. Lee felt that the most beneficial aspect of the course was the research assignment in which they chose a topic to research. She chose to research separation anxiety which was something she had experienced as a child, so it was an

area of personal interest. First, she researched the area and determined the key aspects of separation anxiety. Then she observed children in her practicum setting, what happened when they arrived in day care in the morning and when they left at the end of the day. So she learned about theories of separation anxiety, but the part she valued most was the observations and how they helped her to view the topic from the perspective of the child. “It just refreshed how I used to feel, so it made you more aware of how the children are feeling when they are left. It just keeps you sympathetic, I think” (1/2/24). These observations of children and the opportunity to choose a topic of personal interest appeared to contribute to Lee’s positive perception of this course, even though the course involved a traditional lecturing format and a textbook which she referred to as “pretty boring” (1/2/23).

Liz referred to the benefits of direct experiences with young children. She explained how helpful it was to record and transcribe conversations she had with the children. She stated that she could then apply what she was learning in her courses to her interactions with the children.

It really helped you think a lot more about how you were speaking to the children and what you could have said afterwards. That’s one that always got me in school. I’d think about it afterwards. I would start a conversation and then afterwards I’d be thinking about it saying, “Oh, I shouldn’t have said that. I should have said it differently” or “I should have kept going and asking more open-ended questions.” (6/2/9-10)

Jones (1986) maintained that adults also learn through active learning. This involves engaging the learner in personal experiences and reflecting on her or his actions.

Children were the reason the participants wanted to take this preservice program, thus any contact with them was considered a valuable learning experience. It was also enjoyable for them to work with children. For example, Liz laughed as she told me that while she was using the tape recorder to record her interactions with one child, another child started hollering, "Call 911! Call 911!" (6/2/9). Liz also appreciated being able to practice her language skills on her own, in preparation for when her practicum coaches would observe her. This was a teaching strategy that respected the autonomy of the learner and her or his ability to become a reflective practitioner.

The affective aspect to learning was considered to be an important element in participants' perspectives of their programs. Positive instructor/student relationships were felt to contribute to a positive learning environment. Classes were considered to be very interesting when the instructor was not only knowledgeable about the course content but had a pleasant manner and appeared to enjoy teaching. Lee uses the example of one instructor whose personal characteristics made his teaching enjoyable. "His whole demeanour -- he's a fun, easygoing guy . . . He really enjoys teaching" (1/2/3). Another instructor made the learning content interesting and relevant as she explained the history behind the children's stories and tales, placing children's literature within its historical context. The presentation of the learning material was detailed and demonstrated the instructor's interest in the area. Liz felt that this

detailed information would help to make her “more apt to ask appropriate questions” to her own students as “you know so much about them [the stories]” (6/2/6). It also recaptured a joy of reading for her. Concerning the subject matter she asserted, “I love it!” The instructor’s interest in the subject matter was contagious! The participants learned not only from what was taught but also from how it was taught.

When the learning content was entirely theoretical, the participants stated that they did not retain the learning. When the instructors lectured on theoretical issues and expected students to take notes and memorize them for tests, the participants’ reaction to this type of instruction was that it was of little benefit. Lee used the example of a highly theoretical class. The course was very condensed as there was a great deal of material to cover in a short time. She stated, “It [the content] just didn’t stay because of the way it was taught” (1/2/36). Liz expressed this same concern about one of her courses that was all the lecture format. She remarked, “I honestly can’t tell you much about it, nothing clicked . . . I think it was just textbook stuff. I think it could have been presented better than just a book . . . ” (6/2/32-33). She described the overall teaching in the program as ranging from excellent to “Where did they dig this one up?” (6/2/65). Liz referred to the teaching as “very disappointing” when the instruction was poor, the instructors were disorganized, the teaching was not interesting, and/or the learning content was all theory.

It reminded me of high school, of writing notes, and writing notes, and copying this, and writing this . . . I just don’t find that useful, to be writing

notes, and to be writing notes and to be writing notes . . . It wasn't useful the way it was done at the time. (6/2/67)

The courses that were "tying in" (6/2/68) with the practicum were viewed as more beneficial than those that were highly theoretical. It appeared that without the practical application of the theory, participants were not able to comprehend and/or value the learning content.

In sum, the participants perceived that the most beneficial aspects of the classroom teaching involved: the use of real life instances or concrete illustrations to explain theoretical concepts; the active involvement of the learner in the learning process; direct application of the learning content; and observations of or direct experiences with young children. A positive affective atmosphere was viewed as important and contributed to their learning. Unsatisfactory aspects of the classroom related to course work that was highly theoretical. When the learning content was mostly theoretical and the method of delivery was a traditional lecture/note-taking/exam format the participants understood very little of the material and were unable to recall details about the course. Teaching abstract concepts, without reference to their practical application, seemed to have little meaning for the participants. The participants needed to be actively involved in the learning process or shown the practical application of the course material in order to gain an understanding of and an appreciation for the subject matter.

Practicum Experiences

In this program, the students were in practicum for the entire 10-month, two-semester time frame. Each semester they attended practicum in the morning and classes in the afternoon. This was followed by a 1-month, block placement in a day care centre. They also completed a placement in the program's laboratory school. This placement ranged from 1 to 3 weeks. Lee and Liz found the practical experience with young children and the teachers in child care settings to be very valuable.

Liz stressed that the integration of the practicum and course work was "the bonus" (6/2/11):

You were, most of your time in your classes in the afternoons. In the morning, you were in your practicum. So everything, you tried to relate it in any way. They're relating it to what you're doing. A lot of your assignments are in your practicum . . . So you can actually take that with you to your practicum. Think about it there, do what you have to do there, and then bring it back to your classes, you know which ones to bring it up in. (6/2/11)

It was also valuable to have the program instructors as practicum coaches, as they helped students to implement the program's philosophy and assisted them in writing their journals (6/2/49). Neither Lee nor Liz found the journals to be that useful, especially for the amount of time they spent on them (6/2/49). Liz stated that if you had something you wanted to discuss with your practicum coach you could write it into your journal but "it wasn't really that valuable" (6/2/50).

The quality of their placements varied. Lee stated that she was placed in centres where “all the teachers were very High Scope-oriented and modelled very appropriate behaviour of what you should be doing” (1/2/38). At the completion of her program, Lee had a total of 682 hours of supervised practicum. She asserted, “I learned just as much in my practicum as I did in the courses” (1/2/38). The field experiences helped her to gain a holistic perspective of working in a day care centre. Lee stressed that it was especially helpful in her interactions with children and to gain a greater understanding of how to apply the philosophy of the program. She explained:

Like the actual way you handle a temper tantrum . . . you learn from the modelling of the teachers in the classroom . . . they teach you how [to use a positive approach]. “I can see you’re really upset but I’m really worried about you throwing those toys.” You have to give them an explanation. It’s all just philosophy and they just give you the tools to use and it works very well.

(1/2/38)

The direct experiences with children helped Lee to develop an attitude of learning from her experiences and to demonstrate flexibility to the children’s interests and needs. After doing an activity for the first time, she would reflect on the experience and think of the changes she would make for the next time. She asserted, “The main thing is you’d just plan to be open-minded and ready for change. It’s all right that it didn’t go the way that you planned it as long as you are learning”

(1/2/40).

Liz described her first placement as the “arts and craft school of the century” (6/2/59). She remarked that they had elaborate displays of crafts and well-behaved little children. During her observations she noticed that the children were not happy doing crafts and when one little child wanted to do something different, he was not allowed. She stated, “You know, that’s not fair” (6/2/22). In her classes, she would discuss these situations and learn the reasons why these activities were not appropriate. She felt uncomfortable in the placement as she was unable to apply what she was learning in her classes (6/2/60). Classroom teachers provide modelling for student teachers. However, as Liz asserted, if the teachers are “really bad role models, then it gets really tough” (6/2/8). Practicum coaches became an important resource in her placements. Liz stated that they provided “the structure” (6/2/49) for integrating the practicum with the classes. Nevertheless, she stressed that if the program was not based on the High Scope approach “it was really difficult, to implement what you were being taught. It would be difficult because you are just there for a short period of time and it’s not really your role to take over a program and do it the way you want” (6/2/53).

In Liz’s second placement there were difficulties in the situation. The teachers were encountering problems relating to each other. Liz viewed it as a positive experience because she was able to see the teachers as they worked at improving the situation. She said it was interesting to observe how the overall atmosphere affects the children. This was something she was able to discuss with her practicum coach (6/2/60). She related how observing the classroom teachers helped her in classroom

management (6/2/8). However, she would have liked the teachers to have explained more aspects of their work and to have given her more guidance. She stated, “It was good that I had class in the afternoon. I tried to take back what I could and to figure something out of it” (6/2/61).

Liz’s third placement was in the laboratory school which she described as “unbelievable” (6/2/62). In this positive situation, the student was given almost full teaching responsibilities and had the opportunity to teach under the supervision of a master teacher (6/2/62-63). “It was wonderful, because you had to put yourself in the situation where you had to do everything, you know, you had to do the snacks and you had to do the small group and you had to do the circles . . .” (6/2/62). The ratios in this class were high, so it allowed the participants to plan almost any activity they wanted to do. (6/2/63). She stated that it helps with your confidence level when you can do so many things on your own (6/2/63).

One aspect of practicum that Liz would like to see changed is the student’s introduction to the day care centres. Liz stated that it can be difficult to arrive at a comfortable level while in a placement. She suggested that a “good start” (6/2/71) would be at the beginning of practicum when the teachers and the student could have a discussion about the placement. Classroom teachers could present their expectations and the student could express their concerns or questions (6/2/71). She also acknowledged that it can be difficult to prepare students for a placement as the situations can be so different (6/2/70).

In sum, the close connection between the classes and the practicum experiences was believed to be a very valuable aspect of this program. Course work was designed to be used in practicum and the practicum coaches would help students to apply the knowledge they were learning in classes. Attending the practicum placement in the morning and classes in the afternoon allowed for opportunities to discuss practical experiences in class and vice versa. This approach was viewed as very beneficial. It helped the participants to become reflective concerning their teaching. Practicum experiences varied in the perceived quality of the placement, however, in all situations the participants appreciated the opportunity to learn from the children. The lab school provided a more ideal situation than the regular classrooms, and gave the participants an opportunity to explore the rationale of the program and the teacher's behaviour. It also allowed the student teacher to assume most of the teaching responsibilities in a day care environment. Overall, the participants felt that they learned as much in their practica as they did in their classes. However, there was an identified need for an improvement in the way that students are introduced to their placements.

Overall Atmosphere

Participants found the general atmosphere to be very friendly, and full-time faculty members were readily available and willing to assist the student with any of their questions or concerns. Courses often used small group work, so the students tended to know each other. However, there were few social events and no extracurricular activities. The participants recognized that working in child care is a

low status and low paying job. However, Lee was quick to point out, “People were very happy. I think it’s because you were doing exactly what you knew that you wanted to do” (1/2/45). She asserted that it is important for preschool teachers to feel that their work is important, as society often does not appreciate the work of day care teachers. Nevertheless, Lee optimistically contended, “You can change what people think, you know, it’s all how you present yourself when people ask you what you do” (1/2/46).

This program consisted of 600 hours of practicum and 450 hours of classroom work in a 10-month period. There were aspects of the program that Lee felt were important but there was a limit to what she could accomplish. She felt that there were areas that could have been eliminated as her program was very intensive. She told of how one instructor would hand out articles for them to read and discuss for general knowledge in the field. She explained that “with so much else going on in the course and what you had to worry about, I found I never had time to read the articles, so it was just a waste of paper” (1/2/33). Liz also found the program to be frustrating because of the very heavy workload. She stated, “You are always in that position of feeling inadequate as a student” (6/2/53). She explained that:

There was a heavy work load, your practicums, your journals and assignments . . . group assignments and individual assignments. And, you know, you are expected to do so much. And you want to do a lot here and a lot there. So what ends up sometimes happening is you do really, really well in your practicum and you let the rest of the theory and the classes slack off, you

know. Or your practicum slacks, and then you do really well in your assignments. (6/2/54)

By December there were a number of students that had left the program. When asked why they might have left, she replied, "I think a lot felt that it was a lot more work than they had planned for it to be" (6/2/56).

It appeared that the needs and opinions of the students were given recognition. Every month there was a 3-hour discussion session in which the students would meet and talk about their experiences. In this format, issues such as stress or other individual concerns could be identified and explored. This concern for the students as individuals was also demonstrated by the attention to studying interpersonal relationships. In the early childhood education classroom, the teachers generally work as part of a team of two to three teachers. A preschool teacher interacts with young children, parents, team members, colleagues, and administrators on a daily basis, so attention to this area is certainly a relevant consideration for an early childhood education training program. It was Lee who mentioned that she had received some assertiveness training. She felt it was an important topic for as she remarked, "I didn't realize when you start working in the field there's only one of you but there's 21 children and almost 42 parents, so you have to be assertive" (1/2/31). I asked her how she could use this training with the children and their parents. She replied, "It really showed you how to say, 'I understand you're feeling like this but this is the way its going to be.' Just to understand somebody else's point of view but to get your point across too. But not to come across where you're

making people defensive” (1/2/31). She added that although the text used examples from personal relationships the instructor “linked it back to working with your co-workers, working with a team, working with superiors, and working with the parents of your kids” (1/2/31).

This instructor had found innovative ways of helping the students to self-examine their own style of personal interactions. He would set up half the class members with instructions to make requests of the other half of the class, who were unaware of the instructor’s involvement. She related the following incident that took place in this class:

I remember the woman [a classmate] told me something about her husband’s car. And she said, “I didn’t do my homework for our next class and could you tell her [the instructor] that, you know, I just had to go or whatever.” I was like, “Sure, I’ll do anything, sure.” (1/2/33)

This was not the woman’s actual situation; Lee had been set up to see what her response would be to what she believed was an actual situation. The instructor explained the potential for difficulties with Lee’s reaction. He suggested that she should have changed the wording of her response to protect herself and to make the other person take some responsibility for her situation. Lee suggested that she could have put some restrictions on the request. She could have said: “I’m really sorry you’re in this predicament. I could help you out now. I’m not saying that I’m going to do it for you all the time but, I can do it for you today” (1/2/32-33). When questioned about her thoughts on this type of instruction she replied, “There are

things you can learn from a book, by just reading the book on your own. But, I think you learn more when you work with concrete examples and discuss it with people and the other ways of applying it rather than just reading the book. ” (1/2/32). So, in the area of personal development, the participant valued the use of the practical application of the learning content.

At the conclusion of the interviews on their preservice preparation programs, the participants were asked to respond to the question: What was the most important aspect of your program? These participants gave the following responses:

Lee: The most important thing must be the philosophy, the developmentally appropriate practice or the High Scope part of the program (1/2/48).

Liz: I really don't know if I can pinpoint one thing. I think probably just having so many people to bounce things off, and seeing so many people's perspectives (6/2/68).

Summary

Although the 2 participants, Liz and Lee, had different experiences in some courses and in their practicum placements, there were many similarities in their perceptions of their preservice preparation program. They both recognized the importance of learning about the principles of developmental theories, as it helped them to plan their curriculum based on the interests and needs of the children. Their observations and recordings about the children also enhanced their knowledge of the particular children with whom they were working. Thus, the knowledge of theoretical principles and the observations provided particularistic information. The

information was then used for assessments about the children, curricula planning and for parental communications.

The connectedness between course work and practica was a key aspect of the program. The philosophy of the program was based on a thematic approach to curriculum planning that provides developmentally appropriate practice. Course instructors often modelled this philosophy and helped the participants to compile collections of activities. In practicum, the use of activities studied in class helped to integrate the course work with the practical. Their practicum coaches were very important, especially when the philosophy of the placement program was incongruent with the philosophy of the training program. They also helped to integrate the course work with the practicum as the participants prepared for future work in child care settings.

The perceived quality of classroom teaching appeared to be directly related to the practical application of learning content to the participants' future role as preschool teachers. The participants felt that direct experiences with children, collections of concrete activities, the use of actual examples from children's experiences, and observations of children greatly improved their ability to understand theory and their ability to retain and use this knowledge. Courses in which the instructors used a traditional lecture/note-taking/test format led the participants to find that they had retained little of the information they had memorized at the time of their program. The participants expressed a need to be actively involved in the learning process.

Overall, both participants described the atmosphere as positive. They found the students to be pleasant and the full-time faculty members to be concerned about their progress. In general, the program was perceived to be very beneficial. However, both Lee and Liz felt that the program was very intensive and suggested that the workload could be reduced without lowering the quality of the program.

A 2-year Early Childhood Training Program: A Competency-based Approach

According to a program pamphlet, this 2-year, competency-based program prepared individuals to work in preschool settings that promote the healthy development of the whole child. Evaluation was based on the students' performance in units of competencies in four areas: the community, the facility, the child, and the adult. Students received a diploma in Early Childhood Education when they graduated. There was also a 1-year program in Special Education, which prepared students to work with developmentally delayed children and youth. Entrance into this program required successful completion of the 2-year Early Childhood Education program. The participants, Suzanne and Samantha, completed the 2-year, full-time Early Childhood Education program, and Samantha stayed a third year, to complete the one-year program in Special Education. The following themes characterize their perceptions of their preservice preparation program.

Understanding the Nature of the Child

Child development was perceived as a "very important" area in which to be knowledgeable (5/2a/7). This was an area that was a part of the 2-year program. For example, when learning about special education, knowledge was provided about

children's development and how to identify special needs. They went on field trips to different centres for children with special needs and observed the children (4/2a/9). Suzanne found the trips to be interesting and they helped her decide if this was an area in which she would like to work. She noted, however, that it would have improved her learning about child development had the instructors integrated the theory and its practical application by: (a) using examples of children's behaviour to illustrate the theory, and (b) discussing practical activities that enhance a child's growth and development at each developmental stage. They did not explore the "why" of the stages nor did they discuss the implications for curriculum planning for young children. The participants stated that child development had been a separate area of study not integrated with the practica. They also stated that they had no recall of any attention given to learning about methods of observing and recording children's behaviour as a way of understanding the child's perspective or learning about children's growth and development.

The students were introduced to general psychology. They studied Piagetian theory and the behaviourist approach to learning, but the implications for teaching young children were not explored. As Suzanne stated, "I'd never taken Psychology before so some of it was hard to comprehend and I don't retain a lot of what I studied there" (4/2a/9). The content was not shown to be of importance in child care. There appeared to be no links developed between psychological theories and their implication for planning curricula for young children. This was demonstrated by Samantha's comment, "I didn't feel any need to take a psychology course to work in

child care” (5/2a/2). There was no integration between the theoretical concepts being studied and its application to teaching practices.

Samantha indicated that instructional methods involved, “a lot of things we take home, read, the teacher would go over [it and give] tests every couple of weeks” (5/2a/6). Both participants did well on the tests in the different areas and had good academic grades. However, neither of the participants gave many of the details of the actual content of what they had studied in areas related to child development.

Samantha reiterated that, “There were a lot of handouts. More learning from reading. You know, stages, what to expect, and what to see, and what to look for, that sort of thing” (5/2a/6). They were evaluated by writing quizzes (5/2a/7).

Suzanne states that it was just memorizing material for the tests. She referred to one course in the area, as “one of those courses that came and like, gone” (4/2a/10).

In sum, I inferred from our interviews that the participants had not studied different developmental theories, but had been given lists of developmental profiles of young children. These lists of developmental milestones were memorized, but the knowledge gained was not explicitly integrated with the practica and was not applied in direct observations of children. So, although the information was thought to be valuable for teaching young children, they had memorized the learning content for the tests and were unable to recall it, with the passage of time. It appears that without the participants’ opportunities for application of this knowledge, the learning content was not retained for future programming.

Integration of Theory and Practice

During the 2 years of this course, there was a strong emphasis on the practical with less emphasis on the theoretical principles behind teaching practices. The participants differed in their perception of the relevance of the learning content to their future role as a day care teacher. For example, the students were introduced to the administrative procedures and responsibilities for administrators in a day care. Samantha stated, "We got a really huge binder with all kinds of information in it and it's useful information if you're going to open your own day care. There's a lot in it about space and equipment you should have and things like that" (5/2a/2). However, she added that she did not feel they needed a whole course on the information in the binder. She has the binder in case she ever decides to open a centre, but this was not an area of interest at this stage of her education. Suzanne, however, was interested in the administrative aspects of a day care centre, so her perspective was that this course provided her with valuable resource information and familiarized her with many important aspects of establishing as well as administering a day care centre. They studied areas such as: licensing requirements, equipment, and setting up the different interest areas in the classroom (4/2a/7). The assignment of planning a centre involved the practical application of this learning content. Suzanne was also interested in learning about financial matters related to child care centre administration, such as budgeting and subsidized day care. This program also provided this information. However, Samantha referred to this learning content as "very simple, general accounting" (5/2a/11). Both described the learning content as

basic, practical information, but each had a different perspective of the value of the subject matter.

In many of the curriculum areas, the students created portfolios of activities to use with young children in child care settings. The students were required to do the activities. They made a wide range of activities, such as watercolour prints, paper maché, goop, felt stories or puppets. Each week they used a block of time, equivalent to two classes, to complete arts and crafts for children. They would talk about how it felt and how they were using their bodies. Other times, “You got the supplies and you walked away and made them” (4/2a/15). The students completed scrapbooks of activities in different curriculum areas. However, Suzanne remarked, “As far as looking at the developmental process of art and creativity in children, I don’t remember doing that” (4/2b/2). Samantha stated that doing the actual arts and crafts are “okay once in a while because you get to experience what the children are going to experience. You get to find out what it’s all about -- if it’s a good craft, that kind of thing” (5/2a/3). She recognized the value of being familiar with how the activity is to be completed and of viewing an activity from the perspective of the children. However, she felt that too much time was spent on doing children’s activities, and she did not appreciate that the instructor would “talk to us like children” (5/2a/3-4).

The participants also took part in cooking activities to use with young children. As I continued to probe for more details that related to the value of these practical experiences for future teaching, Suzanne responded in a lighthearted manner, as she

hinted at her rural roots. She remarked: "I got to taste some new foods. Coming from [a small rural village] you don't get a lot of variety." I found this to be an interesting comment because earlier in the interview, she had explained to me some of the wonderful ethnic foods her mother had prepared for her as a child. For example, she had warm memories of her mother preparing *bourdouse*, which consists of "big dumplings and molasses" (4/2a/2). I inferred that she was trying to tell me, in her pleasant, good-natured way, that she enjoyed her time in the program, but she was unable to provide a lot of examples of the actual value of her program for one's future teaching performance, beyond the practical aspects of teaching in a day care.

The participants were able to recall more of the details of the subject matter when learning content was presented in an interesting manner; the instructor was knowledgeable and enthusiastic; subject matter was directly related to day care teaching; objectives for using the activities were explored; and students were actively involved in the learning process. For example, the approach used to introduce the students to music was viewed as positive, and the participants were able to recall many of the details related to this curriculum area. The students were taught a variety of songs and ways to use music in the classroom. The students were also allowed to explore music as they created new songs and ways of using music across the curriculum. For example, music can be used during transitions and for encouraging the children to follow routines. Students also gathered in groups to play their musical instrument and sing. As Suzanne stressed, they actually used the information they were learning (4/2a/6). Both participants expressed an appreciation

of music and its importance in the child care setting. "The music I know I use now. I have a binder, I still have all my old songs in it and I use them every day. The kids love them" (5/2a/2). Suzanne stated that, "It was a great course . . . You learned a lot, you learned how to play an instrument, how to improvise certain songs . . . I think it's the best course I ever took" (4/2a/5-6). She later added that the music was a key aspect of her program and "got her through" the beginning stage of her teaching (4/2a/13). So the students gained not only a binder of songs and suggestions for ways of using music in the classroom, but a desire to make music an important part of their teaching.

Concerning the strong emphasis on the practical, Suzanne stated that when she completed the program, her "main objective" (4/2a/6) was to gather hands-on materials that she would need for teaching young children. As she asserted, "If there are 12 kids looking at me, I want to have stuff so I can keep them busy" (4/2a/6). She thought these practical activities would be very useful in her practicum placements and for her future teaching. She stated, "When I took the course it was basically to learn, you know, some hands-on things that I could do, and that was my main goal, and to get right into the working field" (4/2/12). Nevertheless, both participants noted that they were not exposed to the theory or theoretical principles behind the activities. Suzanne informed me that one of her present goals is to learn more about the theoretical aspects of early childhood education (4/2a/12). She stated, "Now, that I'm in the field, I can see where the theory would play a very big role in it [teaching young children]" (4/2a/7).

When I asked Samantha her opinion of this very practical approach, she looked me right in the eye and quietly but with conviction in a strong, even tone of voice, replied, “I felt that we didn’t need to do that. That was just one of the examples of how they treated us like children there” (5/2a/3). She did not feel that this was an “appropriate” approach to teaching. When Samantha reviewed the transcripts of our interviews she wrote:

The overall theme when discussing courses from [my program], in my interviews and the memories I have most vividly, are one’s of being put in the role of the child. We cannot truly be put in the role of a child as an adult. They [the instructors] should be teaching their students as the adults they are . . . I recall being looked down on (and even made fun of) because I took [this course] . . . Their [other students’] view of us stemmed from the type of work they saw us doing (colouring, gluing, cutting out, etc.). (5/2b/13)

Suzanne mentioned that the program was considered a “bird course” by many of other students in the institution, who referred to the Early Childhood Education students as “babysitters” (4/2b/5). Other students would taunt them by saying, “You’re just taking that course to learn how to do your puppets” (4/2b/5). The reactions from the ECE students themselves, were mixed. Suzanne explained that during the practical activities some students “would roll their eyes, like, oh, good grief, what am I doing here?” (4/2b/7). Other students felt that they were happy to be gathering activities to use in their future classrooms and collected a lot of “stuff” (4/2b/7).

Samantha stated that the learning content was limited in its value for future application when teaching young children. In addition to the lack of theoretical concepts, she noted the lack of an integrated approach to children's learning. She maintained, "I think we would have liked more theory and connections through the classes. More information on programming as a whole . . . How to program daily, week to week and how to run the weeks together. I mean, that would have been really useful" (5/2b/4).

Language development was one topic that was integrated into different aspects of the program. It was an important part of special education, child development, and art activities (4/2a/13-14). However, for the most part curricula areas were presented as separate domains. Suzanne so succinctly described the separation of content areas such as infant development, "Let's look at infant development and bango, that's it. It was just alone. And a lot of them [content areas] were like that" (4/2a/14). When learning about art and young children, they were introduced to new art mediums and hands-on activities (4/2a/14). However, this experience was not integrated with learning about how these experiences can relate to mathematic knowledge or activities in the dramatic play area. Also, there was little attention to integrating issues related to multiculturalism, creativity or gender. Samantha stated that they did not present "the big picture" (5/2b/3) and stressed the need for attention to developing a philosophy as a basis for planning an integrated curriculum (5/2b/10). She informed me that she is now learning how to create integrated curriculum webs around a theme. Samantha, with her voice raising in excitement as she tapped the

index finger of the hand she was resting on the table, asserted, “Now, **there is something for planning**” (5/2a/6).

Generally, the learning content was kept at a very practical level. Both participants acknowledged that they had text books that probably included theoretical concepts, but this content was not integrated with practical experiences. Suzanne mentioned that at the time, she was focussed on the practical aspects of activities and was not interested in memorizing the material in the book (4/2a/7). However, she suggested that, “If you brought in the practical, as well as the theory and put them together, I think I would have understood it more” (4/2a/7). She added that if the instructors had integrated the theoretical concepts and the practical activities they were completing for use with young children, it would have been helpful in gaining a better understanding of the rationale behind these activities. She used the example of the concept of classification. If the instructor had discussed classification and then given examples of activities that help children to develop classification skills, she would have understood the importance of this concept for preschool-aged children. This knowledge could help her in her desire to continue to improve her teaching practice and in her presentations to parents in which she emphasizes the value of her day care program. Suzanne emphasized that the presentation of the content took away from its perceived value (4/2a/12). She maintained, “I think the textbooks are important but I think if they could add the practical to make a happy medium, it would really work well” (4/2a/12).

In sum, both Suzanne and Samantha stressed that their 2-year program was of a very practical nature and did not provide a theoretical background. They collected a wide variety of activities to present to young children. Suzanne felt these collections of activities were an important part of her teaching resources, especially as a beginning teacher. Samantha thought that it was important to collect some activities, but that this approach was condescending and not worthy of the amount of time that was devoted to actually doing activities. She believed that she should have been given the knowledge and skills needed to develop her own activities around an integrated, thematic approach to curriculum planning. Both participants acknowledged the limitations of this highly practical approach to early childhood education. Samantha stressed that without a theoretical background, it is difficult to develop a clearly articulated philosophy of early childhood education upon which to base one's programming. They felt the theory is also an important part of growing as a professional and improving one's teaching practices. Samantha and Suzanne stressed the need for a more balanced approach to learning the theoretical principles and the practical knowledge of implementing these concepts, than their experiences in their preservice program had provided.

The Nature of Classroom Teaching

One of the participants' key concerns about their preservice preparation related to the nature of the classroom teaching. Samantha felt that the level of much of the subject matter was not at a college level in either the content or the expected learning outcomes for graduates. She referred to one of the instructor's techniques:

We took it [the course] for one year, I think it was my first year and the whole year was writing a term paper. I can't remember what the topic was now but it was just like you do in high school -- you started out with your subject, brought it in and the teacher checks it. You go home, you fill out two cards with ideas, the teacher checks them. (5/2a/2)

Overall, she remarked that much of that subject matter was "a time waster" (5/2a/2). She felt it may have been of some benefit if the content of the required term paper had been related to some aspect of child care. Samantha described another method of instructional delivery as follows:

We would read a chapter in the book and the answers were word for word in the book. Next day, we would go back to class, she'd [instructor] ask people to answer, read out the answers, get more questions, go home. (5/2a/7)

She explained that, "A lot of things we would take home, read, the teacher would go over tests every couple of weeks, that sort of thing" (5/2a/6). Suzanne pointed out that the books may have been good resource material but that she was not motivated to read the chapters. Most review questions appeared to be of a convergent nature as the answers were copied directly from the text. There appeared to be very little application of the learning content, and the participants were unable to recall many of the details of the subject matter. For another area of study, Suzanne remarked:

I think, oh, it's coming back to me. It was a person who talked about trees.

We talked about trees and we had one book on nature and trees and that was

all we did were trees. So, if I'm remembering it correctly, it wasn't that interesting. (4/2a/8)

Often, when students were actively involved, it was to complete activities that were designed for use with young children. This approach consisted of doing the activities that were assigned. However, the rationale of the activity, as it relates to child development, was not addressed. It appeared that many of the methods of content delivery were very traditional in that they involved a systematic, lock step, teacher-directed approach.

Instruction was perceived to be of high quality when the subject matter was introduced in an interesting manner, reasons were given for the importance of the content, and the practical application of the learning content was demonstrated. For example, the special education aspect was considered to be "a very good course, good teacher . . ." (5/2a/6). It was taught using traditional lecture format with biweekly tests, but it also involved group work and independent student research. When the instructor used a variety of instructional strategies, such as direct experiences with young children, the participants appeared to have a higher rate of retention of the learning content. For example, to learn about children's movements they watched films of young children's movements and then planned movement activities which they conducted with groups of children. Suzanne recalled making obstacle courses, planning games and using the trampoline with young children. These experiences helped to give these participants an understanding of children's physical abilities and needs. Suzanne stated, "I think it's just the way I learn . . . I've got to see and do

and touch” (4/2b/4). The direct experience with children was viewed as valuable learning experiences. Samantha explained the value of interaction with young children:

I learned to make it fun and not to have the children necessarily have to follow what you have planned. Because there’d be a lot of times where you’d have things planned and just throw them out the window and do something else.

Learn to make it interesting and enjoy yourself while you do it. (5/2a/4)

Role playing was felt to be an interesting, but limited, approach to presenting course content. When learning about managing children’s behaviour the students would role play different behavioral situations and then discuss the consequences of different approaches to the given situation. It stressed being positive, and the class discussions provided interesting feedback (5/2a/8). Role playing was also used to explore different situations involving parents. However, it meant memorizing four counselling definitions and using these four approaches to deal with a given situation. When asked if these approaches would be helpful in actual teaching situations Samantha replied, “No, I would say no. I don’t even really remember a whole lot from that course and I just deal with parents from my own personality, I don’t come back to, you know, the counselling approaches or anything like that” (5/2a/9). It was helpful but limiting because “you’re not in a real situation, you’re not with real children” (5/2a/9) and the students varied in their ability to participate in the role playing. Samantha stressed that the learning content needed to be explored in greater detail than the role playing provided. Suzanne learned about discipline techniques in

a lecture format approach. These lectures stressed being consistent. She emphasized the need for reflection on one's practical experiences, in addition to lectures and text book readings. Concerning books and lectures on discipline she stated:

It looks good on paper but until you're there and you actually get to see a temper tantrum . . . well, reading about it in the book is not going to do anything for you. But when you see Johnny on the floor screaming and everything's going crazy, then you kind of think . . . How could I have done that better? Then I thought, okay, that didn't work, now I want to go to the books and read up on what other techniques I could have used. (4/2b/10)

The evaluation process for many of the courses was perceived by Samantha to be belittling and not at the academic level of college work. For example, some curriculum areas were graded on "neatness and if you had all your [activities] finished" (5/2a/3). Their mark was based on the scrapbooks, which consisted of their completed activities designed for young children (5/2a/10). The students went on interesting field trips but then had to write a paper in point form, accompanied by pictures they had gathered from magazines or photocopied from an encyclopedia and mounted on construction paper. Samantha referred to this method of evaluation as "just another one of the examples of how they treated us like children there" (5/2a/3).

In sum, the participants tended to relate the benefit derived from the learning content to the way it was taught. Strategies related to a teacher-directed approach, such as readings of textbooks and copying the answers to the review questions at the end of each chapter, were viewed as being of little value. When the method of

delivery involved the participants in a creative approach to the learning process, they appeared to retain more of the content than in the traditional lecture/test format. Group discussions, independent research, and direct experiences with young children were all considered positive instructional techniques. Role playing added variety to instructional methods but was viewed as very limiting. First, it needed to be accompanied with in-depth knowledge about the different situations, and second, it did not involve actual situations and the students varied in their ability to role play. Student evaluations, when based on the participants' completion of children's activities, were viewed as simplistic and condescending. Although there were aspects of the teaching that were valued, there appeared to be a general dissatisfaction with the quality of the teaching in the 2-year program.

Practicum Experiences

The participants completed three block placements. The first placement was comprised of 2 weeks; the second, 3 weeks; and the final one, 4 weeks. They found their placements to be very valuable and of good quality. The introduction to their practicum was valuable as it explained what the practicum involved. They also learned how to write journal entries about their experiences. As helpful as this was, it was limited in scope. For example, Samantha explained how they learned to write daily lessons plans. She said that they had to develop very detailed lesson plans. "It's like a page and a half for one, you know, who what, where, when, why, the whole thing" (5/2a/5-6) and "those lesson plans just weren't feasible when you're working in a classroom" (5/2b/3). She added that, "they would never cover, like,

how to program for a theme . . . They weren't very practical once you get out teaching" (5/2a/3-6). Suzanne pointed out a positive aspect of their introduction to practica. In the first weeks of the program, the students spent 2 days a week in a day care centre. She had never been in a day care centre, and this experience helped her to decide if this was what she wanted to do (4/2b/1). She explained:

It allowed me to see what did work and what didn't work. It allowed me to work on my comfort level as far as being with groups of children, as well as being kind of a team member and working with a team. (4/2b/2)

The students were also allowed to do a placement in their hometown and an out-of-province placement. There were usually two observations from a faculty supervisor for each placement. Supervisors would observe such aspects as the participants' interactions with the children, their ability to demonstrate initiative, and the range of activities they were using (5/2b/2). There were performance-based criteria for evaluating the students. Both students felt that the competencies to be demonstrated were clearly outlined, and they were always knowledgeable of their progress. In Suzanne's hometown, there was no day care, so she spent time in a part-time preschool program and in an elementary school (4/2b/1). In out-of-province placements, the cooperating teacher would write their evaluation. To complete an out-of-province practicum, the participants were required to locate a friend or relative in another province, willing to billet them. The program paid for one-half of the airfare. One participant went to central Canada and the other to a Western province. This was an especially pleasant learning experience for both participants. Samantha

informed me, “It worked out great. I was at a really, really great centre. I really enjoyed it” (5/2b/1). At that time the cooperating teacher would write the students’ evaluations. When I asked Samantha if she was able to integrate her course work into her practica, she responded as follows:

It was more the practicum. I mean I used like school lesson plans and ideas that I got from school, like arts and movement and music and things like that. So those aspects of it I used in the day cares. But, no, anything else, I pretty much, sort of watched the other teachers and picked up from what was happening there. (5/2b/1)

The practicum experiences helped the participants to gain a better understanding of the realities of working in a day care and provided an opportunity to work directly with young children (5/2b/9).

In sum, the participants who graduated from the 2-year program completed three block placements each year. They stressed that their introduction to these experiences was very helpful. At the start of the program, they immediately went into a day care setting for 2 days a week. This aided them in gaining an understanding of what was involved in working in a day care centre. The introduction to practicum also helped them to write lesson plans and journals. The lessons plans, however, were rather limited in their value as they involved writing about an activity in great detail but never advanced to developing a whole unit on a particular topic. There was a wide, geographical range among the different placements. They worked in rural settings, urban settings, and an out-of-province

placement. However, the out-of-province placement meant that program supervisors were unable to observe the participants. Overall, Suzanne and Samantha perceived their practicum placements to be very positive experiences, but not directly linked to their course work.

Overall Atmosphere

The general atmosphere was very pleasant and friendly. “Everyone was quite close. And in all our classes, we had a lot of group discussions. Most of the students were from small towns and outside of class, everyone was friendly” (5/2b/3). There were many social events to attend that involved both the faculty and the students. A faculty member was always accessible to address their concerns. “They [faculty members] had an office right up on the floor where we had all our classes. The door was always open; we could go in any time we wanted to” (5/2b/5). Samantha continued, “There was work to do every night. But most of the time we would sort of all get together and do the work together. Most of the time it was busy work” (5/2b/6). They spoke fondly of the coordinator, who they would see at the social events, which took place in the building where she had her office. She “catered to all the pizza parties and . . . would occasionally float through and if she did come into a class she’d just kind of, ‘Oh, my dears, my dears, my dears.’ She was just kind of the head honcho, and kind of made sure that everything was going smoothly” (4/2b/6).

There appeared to be a very concerned and caring atmosphere for the students as individuals. There were courses on the dangers of drugs, alcohol, and tobacco. They

went swimming and had aerobic classes. Learning about water safety was a part of the swimming class. Suzanne valued the exercise classes, as it is important for teachers to be physically fit when they work with young children (4/2a/5). They learned to write a resumé which Suzanne found very helpful when she started applying for a job in day care centres (4/2a/10). The participants stated that they were always informed of their progress. Suzanne referred to the brief summaries they were given about their progress. She recalled one summary she received that told her she was maintaining her high standards while working toward the final component of her program (4/2a/3). She was also a part of the awards banquet and graduation. Both participants did well in the program and enjoyed the many social functions. These participants were comfortable in the program and did not express any concerns about feeling overwhelmed in any way. Actually, there appeared to be a lightheartedness about the program. Suzanne was emphasizing her desire for practical, hands-on activities until she recalled her experience in learning about First Aid. She described the experience in the following manner:

My vivid memory of First Aid was the person who came in from . . . I don't know where, but she smelled like she came right from the manure pile, and to do anything hands-on with this person was not the most pleasant thing, so my reaction for First Aid was phew! She was, oh man, she came right out of the barn . . . Oh, she was wicked! So, nobody even wanted to go to the class, because she stunk that bad, let alone take First Aid! So I didn't learn a lot from that class. (4/2a/11)

In her summary of her overall perceptions, Samantha asserted that there needs to be more theory in the learning content, a wider range of instructional techniques, and more information on an integrated approach to programming for young children (5/2b/4). Upon graduating, she stated:

I was strong in communicating with the children, the routine and the transition times in the classroom . . . Music and doing circles, I've always enjoyed doing that, so I felt confident there. I was a bit leery on discipline . . . and the programming was a weakness for sure . . . I think they [instructors] were missing a lot . . . I think they could manage the time better and really think about what classes they're offering and the realities of what these students are going to be doing once they get the job and start teaching. (5/2b/8)

Suzanne also felt confident in the practical aspects such as conducting group circles, transitions, teacher planned activities, and using music with young children. She had collected files of activities in music, art, nutrition, and display pictures. Areas that Suzanne maintained should be a part of the program related to working with a co-worker, team building, classroom management and individualizing activities to the children's different tempos and interests. Concerning team teaching, she stated that:

Most times, children love you for who you are. You have to worry about how you come across with a co-worker -- being able to put your best foot forward and being able to work with the person that you're with. I think that would be a good course. (4/2b/9)

Suzanne stated that there was a range of courses, some that she perceived to be really beneficial and others she said she left wondering, “Good grief, what the heck was that?” (4/2b/7).

Discipline techniques and individualizing teaching instruction were also areas Suzanne suggested could have been expanded (4/2b/9). There was a library, but no curriculum resource centre where they could borrow materials to use with the children in their practica. Both participants stressed that their perspective is based on their experiences and that they do not know how the present program operates.

When asked about the most important aspect of the 2-year competency-based program, the participants responded in the following manner:

Suzanne: It allowed me to get into the field that I’m in now, which was so new to me. I didn’t have a clue what day care was like. And it allowed me the means to do so (4/2b/13).

Samantha: I think our practicum time was very valuable. And the teachers did put a positive view on day care - stressed how important it was (5/2b/9).

Summary

Suzanne and Samantha described the 2-year, competency-based program in rather similar ways, but their perceptions of the value of the program differed in certain areas. They both expressed concerns for the quality of the instruction as well as the need for knowledge of both the theory and the practice in early childhood education. Samantha was more concerned about the lack of theory, the low level of academic competency required to complete the program, and its lack of impact on her

teaching practices. She felt that after 3 years at this educational institution, she should have been better prepared for work in child care settings. Both participants agreed that developmental theory is important and was lacking in their program. Nevertheless, Suzanne indicated that, given that particular time in her life and that stage in her career, the practical aspects of the work were a primary focus for her. Her interest, at that time, was in meeting the requirements to enter the field so she could start working. There was a strong emphasis on the practical aspects of working in a day care. There was also a wide range in the quality of teaching in the different content areas. Positive perceptions of the program were related to direct interactions with young children. The more traditional approaches to instruction, which involved memorizing text book material and class handouts, were not found to be very beneficial. Practicum experiences took place in a wide range of geographical locations and were considered to be a positive, valued component of the program. Both participants valued the friendly, warm, overall atmosphere in their program which appeared to be a very positive aspect of this 2-year preservice program.

A 4-Year Early Childhood Program: An Interdisciplinary Approach

Two of the participants in this study had graduated from a 4-year degree program in Early Childhood Education. According to the program's catalogue, this 4-year degree program was designed to prepare graduates for leadership positions in early childhood settings. Depending on their choice of study, graduates could be employed in public schools, day care centres, preschools, hospitals, developmental centres, or in government positions relating to early childhood education. The

program used an interdisciplinary approach, and students were required to complete 23 units of credit, including three units related to practica. Content areas included: history of childhood, literature for children and young adults, sociology, nutrition, methods of teaching, play, curriculum development, biology, and several psychology courses. In the fourth year, students had a choice of choosing a specialization in developmental disabilities, program development, teaching young children, or special education. Both of the participants in this study specialized in developmental disabilities, and Veronica also specialized in program development. The following sections characterize their perceptions of their Early Childhood Education program.

Understanding the Nature of the Child

This 4-year program had a strong concentration in human development and assessment. The participants told of how the learning content related to many areas of development, such as language development, cognitive development, moral development, personality development, psychomotor development, and sex differences. This knowledge helped the participants to learn about the different stages of children's growth and development as well as atypical development. Veronica explained the importance of this knowledge:

[It] has given me guidelines to what is normal development. It is important to know what a child at a certain age is capable of achieving in all areas of development. Also, it is important to keep in mind that there is a certain amount of leeway in what is considered "normal" for a given age. Not all children develop at the same rate. Some children may have very well

developed language skills but their motor skills are below average. Being aware of what is the average for a given age group allows for programming to enhance development in areas that are weak. It also stops you and the child from becoming frustrated or bored. If you are planning activities or have expectations for skills or actions that are too advanced or not challenging enough for a child then behaviour problems can occur due to the child losing interests because of frustration or boredom. Thus, the importance of appropriate activities. (2/pp/3)

This knowledge of developmental theories also helped these participants to gain an understanding of “the reasons why you [as the teacher] do certain things” (2/2b/20). Veronica used the example of a child engaged in painting, “There’s fine motor skills, there’s cognitive skills, there’s language abilities that they get if they describe their picture . . . This knowledge also helps in programming and setting your goals for individual children” (1/2b/25). She wrote in her personal philosophy that children “view things differently than adults. Any adult that has been around children for very long also knows this, but my program helped me to see why a child may view things differently than an adult, i.e., magical thinking, egocentricity, reasoning abilities” (2/pp/2). She stressed the importance of language and the young child and of how she integrated the development of language skills across the curriculum. She wrote:

[The program] gave me insight into how language develops and how to enhance this process. Because language development is a continual process for young children, it is an area I tend to focus on a great deal in my

programming, as well as day-to-day routine activities such as dressing for outdoors, snack, lunch time, and toileting. I try to ask open-ended questions: Why, what, how, etc. I try to talk to the children and discuss things that occur in their lives as well as my own. (2/pp/2)

Victoria emphasized that in the third and fourth years she started to make connections between the theoretical concepts and the practical application. She maintained:

This [theoretical knowledge] helped me in that when you were programming for kids, to see which stage they are at, which things they could do, which would frustrate them. So it helped me that way. I found when you were in this [class] you didn't realize the benefit it would have until you are out doing your practicum or working in the field. (3/2a/11)

One of the benefits of a 4-year program is that the participants were able to build on their knowledge over 4 years. For example, some of the learning content, related to child growth and development, was useful not only for its own value, but because it was a building block to future learning. Developmental psychology was an area that proved to be valuable for planning activities for young children and it also became the basis for more advanced work in the area of child development. As they gained the required introductory knowledge, it enabled the participants to explore separate areas of development such as language or cognitive development in greater detail. This area of study helped them to understand what is appropriate for certain ages, in all areas of development, such as "physical and social or psychological" (2/2b/2).

Another area that related theoretical concepts and children's behaviour was behaviour management. The instructor in this class dealt with everyday situations and conflicts. The students would engage in simulations with a partner. They would identify the problem behaviour, set the goal for desirable behaviour, and then identify their baselines. They would then reinforce positive behaviours. However, Victoria stated that the course was of limited benefit for work with young children. She explained that, "[The instructor] dealt directly with his own line of thinking. He didn't apply it to other ways of dealing with behaviour management. This seemed to be his way of thinking, and that was it. It just seemed it was bias toward behaviouristic management." (3/2a/12). She related how she prefers to use other methods of behaviour management, such as redirection. She stressed that, "You need more exposure to more methods that you could work with your own personality, that you're comfortable with." (3/2a/13). Veronica also expressed her concern about the limitations of a behaviour modification approach to behaviour management.

Victoria noted that she feels there should have been more attention to infant/toddler development in the child study course. Their development was covered in child development but there was little application of this theory in the Early Childhood courses (3/2b/6). Veronica also stated that the preschool child was studied in greater detail in the Early Childhood courses than infant/toddler development. Veronica stressed that the learning content was mostly theory, and little observation of children was required (2/2b/5). The content was broad in scope so it was difficult to retain all the information. Several text books have become valuable references for

studying areas, such as childhood illnesses, and to review characteristics of chromosomal abnormalities (2/2b/5).

In addition to learning about children's ages and stages of growth and development, the participants also studied ways of assessing this development. They were introduced to different standardized developmental assessments -- how to administer them, how to read the results and how to report these results. The actual writing of the report helped the participants to learn how to describe a child's development in a concise, clearly written manner. Victoria emphasized the importance of this knowledge when observing a child, who may be developmentally delayed, and working with other professionals when professional intervention is required for a particular child (3/2a/6-7). Veronica stressed how the program's interdisciplinary approach to early childhood education helped her to realize that it is important to consider the child's family and cultural background when assessing a child's development. She stated that you must consider the child's life outside of the day care centre and how this may affect her or his development.

In sum, the participants of this 4-year degree program in child study perceived that within their program, there was a high concentration on learning about the nature of the child. Areas such as language, cognitive, moral and physical development were studied in great detail and at an advanced level. One of the values of the 4-year program was not only the opportunity to study the child in such breadth and depth, but it allowed the participants to build on their knowledge. During the latter part of the program, the participants found that they were able to begin making connections

between the different theoretical concepts and application to their teaching practices. Their knowledge of child development began to play an important role in providing developmentally appropriate practices for young children. They were critical of using one teacher-directed approach to managing children's behaviour, and suggested that a teacher needs to explore methods that are congruent with their own personal philosophy of teaching.

The participants valued the opportunity to learn about standardized developmental assessments of young children. This helped in their observations of children's development and identification of a child needing to be referred for a professional assessment. It also helped them in interpreting results and reports from other professionals concerning children in their classroom. However, the participants stressed that this standardized assessment is only part of their overall assessment of a child's development. They recognized the importance of areas such as the child's family and cultural background in affecting development.

Integration of Theory and Practice

For the most part, theory and practice appeared to be very separate entities in this 4-year degree program. This would relate, in part, to the fact that the program used an interdisciplinary approach, and many of the courses were taken in different departments of the institution. For example, when learning about language development, many of the other students in the class would be psychology majors. The content would be highly theoretical in nature, as is true for most university-level material. The instructor would be teaching about the subject matter, not how to teach

it. However, the participants stated that the theory and practice were often integrated in their early childhood education learning content.

The participants viewed the learning content very positively when the theory was integrated with the practice, as was evidenced by the high rating they gave to content involving a practical orientation. In keeping with their desire for the practical application of theory, they both rated the learning content related to methods of teaching as one of the most beneficial aspects of the program. It involved a very practical approach in which they studied the different curriculum areas, including language arts, music, science, mathematics and social studies. However, there is no mention of theoretical discussions or the development of an emergent curriculum based on the children's response to the planned activities.

Victoria described how the instructors would provide lectures and then demonstrate activities that could be used with young children. The students would participate in these activities and then gather activities to demonstrate themselves. They compiled a binder of activities for use in their own teaching. Victoria reminisced, "I still have that. I still go back to it" (3/2a/26). Veronica stressed, "It was really a hands-on course and it did a lot of things for me. It taught me songs, games and other activities and really, really practical things, especially for starting out" (2/2a/1). She also explained how this practical application helped to make the theoretical knowledge meaningful for teaching young children. For example, when she planned a circle time with young children, she has learned to apply her knowledge

about the developmental growth of the children. She wrote about what the children are learning during circle time:

[The use of] songs -- aids language development, children learn through repetition, action songs aid fine motor development; [use of] stories, games and weather chart develop cognitive skills, guessing answers, anticipation, repetition, visual attention, pre-reading skills, turn taking, sharing, and building self-esteem. (2/pp/1)

Veronica also revealed that learning about specific techniques and actual activities to use with young children was very helpful. She wrote:

[This] gave me a real lesson on the difference of art as opposed to crafts. Young children have a hard time with craft type activities where there is a set product that must be produced. I usually try to do activities that have no set product . . . Often children place more value on playing in the paint than actually having a completed a painting. They often do not care if they keep the finished product or not, especially at the younger ages. I received a reminder of this "process not product" philosophy during one of my small groups. I had planned on having the children bake cookies with me. We were going to give them to the parents as Valentine gifts. So, with my careful direction the children mixed the batter and cut out the cookies. I closely monitored what they did and helped them cut out perfect heart shapes. I was getting somewhat frazzled near the end of the activity. I felt all I had done was tell them to not do this and to not do that. I'm not sure how much fun

the activity was for the children but I was not enjoying it. Then, I gave each of the children a small piece of dough to play with after we had “finished” the activity. They all spent about 15 minutes playing with the dough, happy not arguing, and with no direction from me. Process, not product! (Cognitive development, methods of teaching) (2/pp/2-3)

Another aspect of the program that was valued because of its attention to the practical was the information about establishing and administering a day care centre. It provided the students with the basic overall requirements for setting up a quality day care, including such topics as programming, uses of space, health and safety requirements, auspice, licensing, and subsidization. Veronica added that she would have liked more attention given to financial matters as that is an area that was not addressed in the program.

Content related to creating a learning environment for young children, provided an opportunity to apply and integrate the theory from many areas such as child psychology, sociology, children’s literature, children’s behaviour and so forth. Veronica emphasized that in planning the environment, the teacher needs to provide experiences in all the different areas such as “block area, art area, dress-up area, table top toys, book corner, and others” to allow for “as many learning opportunities as possible for all areas of development” and “play activities at various levels” (2/pp/4). The overall environment should “blend well into the room” (2/pp/4). She continued with practical ways of ensuring this. For example:

Wet/messy activities should be near the sink. Cornmeal or sand tables are very inviting and should be placed near the door. Book corners (library) should be in a quiet spot away from the children running through on their way to other areas. (2/pp/4)

These strategies stressed an integrated, holistic approach to children's learning. This approach was beneficial as it taught the participants about important practical aspects of curriculum planning and also encouraged them to take a broad, integrated perspective to programming.

The participants were also made aware of the importance of play. Learning about play was felt to be a crucial component of the program's philosophy's that "children learn by doing" (2/pp/1). Veronica wrote that:

I remember the quote, "Play is children's work." If you believe in the philosophy that "children learn by doing" then it is only reasonable that play becomes an important part of an early educational program. We learned how various types of free play activities enhance certain skills. For example, the cornmeal table allows for pre-math skills, such as counting, measuring, one-to-one correspondence; fine motor skills, pouring, scooping, grabbing using pincher grip; social skills, sharing, turn taking, working together, language skills, asking for items, describing what the child is doing, and storytelling. Imaginative play may also occur -- I've had many pretend cornmeal cakes . . . We also set up the room to allow for various types of play such as solitary play, cooperative, parallel and imaginative play. (2/pp/3-4)

Victoria used the example of how learning about the practical application of theoretical concepts helped her to retain the learning content and made it more meaningful. She stated:

These were lectures on various psychomotor disorders, spina bifida and things like that and how to program for children with these disorders. For example, the mobility, keeping that in mind – what they could do, how to make it easier for them and not to exclude them from activities. [It mentioned] things like physio that would be available and different resources. (3/2b/2)

The balance between the knowledge about atypical development and the attention given to ways of applying this information in the curriculum planning gave the knowledge an added meaning and a direct relevance to their future work as a teacher.

This approach was also used when learning about multiculturalism and the need to “open our eyes to other cultures without being bias or discriminating” (3/2b/3). The participants were required to complete an independent, in-depth study of an issue that addressed multiculturalism. The literature review had to be accompanied by observations of actual situations related to their topic. Veronica remembered researching Native schooling. She stressed that the instructor was teaching them “to learn how to learn, not just to look at something and to regurgitate it back” (2/2b/8). During the discussion related to this particular assignment, Victoria recalled an example the instructor used to illustrate a point. She told them that if a child arrives at school and says she or he had a doughnut for breakfast, you have to react with sensitivity to the child’s situation before making a judgement about

what she or he had for breakfast (23/2b/3). That one example helped Victoria recall the importance of integrating multiculturalism into every aspect of one's curriculum. I asked Victoria why it was so important to involve these very practical aspects of the theory. She straightened up in her chair, established direct eye contact with me and asserted, "That's how I learn" (personal notes/March, 1996). It appeared that the practical application of theory forms a basis from which to understand the theory.

The participants maintained that in many areas of the program, there was not enough attention given to the application of the theory. Veronica used the example of learning about developmental disabilities. She indicated that they would learn about the special needs of children, but there was no attention given to programming to meet these needs or mention of resources to assist you in your planning (2/2a/4). Veronica also maintained that there should have been more attention to the practical realities of working in a day care, such as working with a team of teachers or relations with parents. She asserted:

They always said, "Involve the parents. Involve the parents." But not so much, "Well, here's a good way to involve the parents. Here's how you handle an irate parent storming in because his kid doesn't have his earmuffs on straight." They didn't talk about that part of it and aspects that can be quite stressful at times. (2/2b/18) That's probably one beef I have . . . they give you this fairytale world of day care. (2/2b/30)

Other times the information was "too technical for what we use it for" (2/2a/5).

Veronica appeared to be indicating that, at times, there was a lack of integration

between the theory and the introduction of practical teaching strategies and techniques. Victoria valued the practical aspects, but stated that by her third year of study, she was beginning to make those connections on her own, and the theoretical aspects took on a new meaning. She stated that the courses were interrelated and this reinforced the theory. This helped her to gain a better understanding of the theory and to begin to apply it in her practicum placements. For example, Piaget's theory was discussed in several courses. However, she also stressed the need for more integration of theory and practice in the program.

In sum, the participants in this 4-year degree program emphasized an orientation to the practical, as a way of understanding and utilizing the theoretical concepts related to early childhood education. It appeared that much of the learning content was highly theoretical, consequently the participants especially valued opportunities to explore the practical application of the theory. Practical application of the theory and/or use of concrete illustrations of theoretical concepts helped the participants to gain a better understanding of the theory and its application to teaching young children. The practical aspects appeared to form a basis from which they explored the theory. Through this exploration they had a better rate of learning retention and recall of details. Four years of education allowed for a wide ranging, in-depth examination of early childhood education. This contributed to students' recognition of a broad, multidisciplinary and integrated approach to programming for young children. However, both participants stressed a need for greater attention to

the practical application of the theory than what they had experienced in their preservice preparation.

The Nature of Classroom Teaching

Positive perceptions regarding the nature of the teaching related to the active involvement of the participant in the learning process. If the methods of instruction involved class discussions and individual assignments entailing application of the theory, participants were able to recall more details of the learning content as well as to demonstrate its value. For instance, Victoria referred to content related to learning about different ways of assessing young children. She recalled how all the students had to complete one test with a child and then each student in the class had to choose another test to administer to a young child. They had to write the actual reports and make recommendations based on the results. This process helped her to become familiar with the different assessments that are available, test terminology, how the tests are administered, how to read the results, as well as how to write very clearly and concisely regarding a child's development (3/2a/6-7).

Another teaching technique perceived to be beneficial involved individual presentations of one's research. In this case, the instructor presented the first lecture, and then the students took turns researching a particular topic and presenting it to the class. Victoria found that given this opportunity to research a topic in-depth and to present it to the class meant that she retained much of the detail of the course content, particularly about her topic. This was also true about the time she transcribed a child's language in a play situation, and presented it to the class.

When instructors used concrete examples to illustrate the theory, Victoria found this to be very helpful for understanding and retaining the learning content. For example when the instructor was lecturing about the importance of play and the different stages of children's play, it was helpful to learn how to set up different play centres. The students would examine different play materials to determine how they would enhance the child's play. For example, would they encourage solitary or cooperative play? They also observed children on playgrounds and discussed different types of play in written papers and oral discussions. Victoria was able to recall many of the details of this course and recognized the value of play centres for children. In an upbeat, strong tone, she adds, "I really liked this approach. It was fun" (3/2a/25). Veronica felt that this subject matter provided a good basic foundation from which to learn about other aspects of the child's development.

When the participants were involved in direct experiences with children, observations of children, or developing actual activities to use with young children, the learning content was rated as beneficial and of value to their present work in day care. For example, when learning research skills, they were required to observe children and to support or challenge past research with their results. Victoria recalled how her observation assignment helped her in doing research:

You had to go in and observe the children and write down the different options that the teacher made to boys versus girls, and which toys they pushed them towards. And then we had to go and find other articles which had researched the same thing and see what their findings were, and make a conclusion based

on it [your observations and readings] . . . It helped me a lot in my fourth year, because we had to do a lot of research papers. So it really helped a lot.

(3/2a/15)

Veronica pointed out how this observation assignment helped her to realize the importance of carefully recording your observations based on what had actually happened and not your interpretation of the events. She asserted:

I think it made you actually try to integrate more of what you've learned about the theory into the practical and to see if you're actually making the connection between the two. I found it was very useful. (2/2b/8)

It also reinforced the concept that one needs to critically examine the research literature. "You don't just accept the study at face value. You dig a little deeper and ask, well, did they take all these factors into account" (2/2b/5)

Instructor attitude and enthusiasm were also viewed as important aspects of quality teaching. Victoria pursued an interest in history as the instructor was "excellent" (3/2a/35). She found that the lectures were interesting and enjoyable. They provided her with a background from which to discuss the present. Other courses, however, were all lectures and note taking and very frustrating as the instructors were difficult to understand. Victoria stated, "They knew their information inside and out. But it was really hard to follow the professors and to get the facts straight and the dates and stuff" (3/2a/1). Another time, an instructor was difficult to follow in his or her lectures and was a "really hard marker" (3/2a/20). This had a negative impact on the learning retention. As Victoria stated, "The

marking interfered . . . Initially there was [student input] but I think, during the end people just were afraid to speak” (3/2a/20). Certain introductory courses may have contained important information, but when conducted in traditional lecture/note-taking/exam formats were felt to be of limited value. I began to infer that when the learning content was perceived to be too abstract, it was difficult to apply in the practical world of teaching young children. At one point, Veronica talked about the technical details of how children develop sounds and how “it went over my head.” When I asked her about its application to her teaching, she replied, “it was really difficult to apply” (2/2a/7). She added that topics such as moral development were “more from the adult perspective” than the development of children’s morality (2/2a/7). So the affective atmosphere, instructor/student relationships, and the methods of instruction and the applicability to teaching had an impact on the participants’ comprehension and retention of the subject matter.

Victoria’s greatest disappointment was in her area of specialization which was Special Education. These were fourth year, required courses and the instruction was perceived to be poor. The instructor appeared to have very little knowledge or experience in the area. The Chair of the department responded to students’ concerns by having a full-time instructor assist this instructor. Veronica’s felt the learning content was too abstract and there was no attention to how to help someone with a particular disability. She stated, “I didn’t get a whole lot from that material that actually helped” (2/2a/3-4).

In sum, Victoria and Veronica demonstrated that there was a wide range in the quality of teaching, during the 4 years of their preservice preparation program. The positive aspects of this program related to opportunities for the participants to be actively involved in the application of the theory. Direct observations of children, examination of children's learning materials, and individual presentations were especially valued. Instructors' attitudes, rapport with the students, methods of instructional delivery, and applicability to teaching directly impacted on the rate of participants' comprehension and learning retention of the learning content. For the most part, the participants perceived the nature of the teaching to be very beneficial for learning about early childhood education. However, there were a few exceptions, and they proved to be very frustrating for the participants.

Practicum Experiences

Veronica and Victoria perceived the opportunities for direct experiences with young children, in a wide range of child care settings, to be one of the most valuable components of the 4-year program in child study. Victoria explained how it helped her to gain an understanding of the individual needs of a diverse group of children and an awareness of different family situations. She also came to realize the personal characteristics needed by teachers of young children. For example, she stressed the patience needed in one of her special needs placements. She stated, "It takes a lot of patience . . . It just seems like you **worked** and **worked** for the little goals that you might take a long time to see" (3/2a/3). The experiences with special needs children helped her to gain a better understanding of the different characteristics of specific

disabilities of young children and ways of meeting their needs. Veronica emphasized that programming for the special needs children, in her placement, helped her with “putting the practical with the abstract” (2/2a/2).

This opportunity to work in a hospital environment gave Victoria the occasion to work with a team of medical professionals and to meet the parents of the children with whom she was working. She related stories about children with many different illnesses, some of whom were terminally ill. She stressed,

It’s not always dealing with the children. It’s dealing with the families. It’s helping them cope and helping the children cope with all their problems and the medical things that are happening to them. And you get to see the medical processes that go on. And it helps you understand how scary a hospital environment can be, not only for the child but for the families. (3/2a/5)

In this placement she came to know and care for a set of twins who were very ill. Her voice became very soft and she paused several times, as she told of how she kept in touch with their progress and of the death of one of the twins. The colour in her face changed and her emotional involvement in the lives of the children in this placement was evident.

For Veronica, her day care placement was very valuable, as that was the area in which she wanted to work when she graduated. She stated, “I got to actually work with children and put some of the things that I learned to work for me and to try them out” (2/2b/1). It especially helped in understanding the area of overall development of the young child and gaining a general idea of what is involved in working in a day

care centre. Veronica also enjoyed her administration placement which gave her hands-on experience with running a centre – working with staff, scheduling, and meeting government standards. She referred to it as the “nuts and bolts of day care” (2/2b/4). These two placements related to her personal and professional interests.

In one placement, Victoria witnessed child abuse and was involved in the process of reporting the incident to the proper authorities. She found she had a special affinity to teaching children who were struggling developmentally and who were considered at-risk because of poverty. Her voice lowered as she related the details of this placement. She concluded her thoughts by asserting, “You just wanted to take all of them and give them one big hug . . . and take them home with you. This was my favourite practicum” (3/2a/23). There was a minimum of 100 hours of practicum required in this placement, and Victoria did 140 hours. Veronica found her school placement valuable as she learned about different methods of discipline. However, she found the highly structured environment based on the “buzzer system” (2/2b/3) too regimented for her personality and style of teaching (2/2b/3).

Victoria found that all her on-site cooperating teachers/supervisors were very helpful at lending resources and making suggestions for modifications or changes to planned lessons. They also modelled effective teaching strategies. She added that her university supervisors gave her positive feedback relating to such things as her use of developmentally appropriate language, her interactions with the children and her programming. The students also attended seminars during practicum placement which allowed for additional time with the university supervisors to discuss different

situations and any problems or concerns. However, Veronica would have liked to have had more explanation of the reasoning behind different approaches. She felt that the practicum supervisors were not as involved in the practicum as she would have liked. At times, she found the relationship frustrating:

Sometimes I'd schedule for them [supervisors] to come in at a certain time when I was doing an activity and they were supposed to observe me doing it. They would come in a half an hour late, and we're dressing the children to go outside. (2/2b/14)

She summed up her practical experiences in the following way:

Practicum did give me a chance to try out activities and discipline techniques but I guess I would have liked more examples of how to deal with a specific situation or given even more than one way to look at a problem. (2/2b/9)

One criticism Victoria had of her practicum placements was that they were on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and for one placement in particular she would have preferred a block placement. It was a Special Education class and she felt the continuity of a daily follow-up of the children's work was important for these children. She felt that the separate days made it harder to follow their program, to be consistent, and gain an understanding of the different needs of the children (3/2a/14). Veronica also felt the separate days were difficult as it meant she was doing all her course work at the same time as her practicum. She stated that it felt "disjointed" and made it difficult to pick up on what the children had or had not done the day before (2/2b/22).

Victoria maintained that in the first year of the program it would have helped to have had more exposure to young children, through either direct interactions or observations. The course sequencing was also problematic at times. Victoria used the example of being in practicum and never having had any experience or knowledge relating to teaching methods or behaviour management. However, she pointed out that the theory taught in the courses had greater significance when you were in practicum because then you could relate it to your practice (3/2a/29-30). Both participants rated the practica as one of the most valuable aspects of their program.

In sum, the participants of the 4-year degree program in child study completed their practicum experiences in a wide variety of child care settings. In many ways, this was the application of their theoretical knowledge and skills related to the care and education of young children. Veronica and Victoria valued these opportunities to apply their theoretical knowledge and practical skills with young children. All the placements were perceived to be valuable learning experiences. However, there was a concern for more involvement of the program supervisors in the practicum, a request for more involvement with children and teaching strategies and techniques in the first year of the program, and an opportunity to do at least one block placement. Overall, the practica was considered to be one of the most important components of the 4-year preservice program.

Overall Atmosphere

In general, the overall atmosphere of the 4-year degree program was pleasant. The program operated within a large institution, but the participants stated that the

students in this program would all know each other. Their core courses for each year were basically the same. However, Veronica indicated that there were stressful times when “there would be papers due after papers due” (2/2b/15). The students were completing a full course load in addition to attending practicum on Tuesdays and Thursdays. This often made it difficult to meet the course requirements on time. Depending on the instructor, extensions were given to students in this particular program. Early Childhood Education instructors tended to be more accessible and understanding of individual situations. There were many extracurricular activities, and Victoria was active in the student society. She became very close to many of the students and stated that now they are an important support group for her. She often makes contact with them to discuss different teaching situations.

One important aspect of this program that the participants felt added to their personal development as knowledgeable, informed, and critical individuals was the opportunity to complete general studies and professional foundation courses. Many of these studies were highly theoretical in nature and involved the traditional lecture/note taking/exam format. However, the participants valued this opportunity to explore different issues from many perspectives. For example, they explained how their introduction to a sociological perspective helped them to gain a broader outlook on the diverse family structures in society. Victoria stated that, “It makes you more aware of families, more sensitive to their feelings and that what’s going on in that family affects that child. The family life cycle and how it affects the child’s behaviour or attitude changes” (3/2a/19). It helped her to become aware of various ethnic groups,

family responsibilities, and gender issues within a diverse population. “This is important as you work with children of different backgrounds and you need to be sensitive to their needs and their backgrounds and cultures . . . It opened my eyes to myself as compared to others” (3/2a/28). Véronica said that viewing the family from a sociological perspective made her more aware of her environment and the subtle influences it has on her beliefs, particularly in the area of sexism. Veronica pointed out, however, that “They [the instructors] tend to focus on what’s wrong, instead of what’s right or what you could do to make things better [between the sexes]” (2/2a/7).

Studies in areas such as children’s literature and the history of childhood provided general background. Veronica indicated that studying children’s literature helped her to evaluate what is good literature for children. It drew her attention to stereotypical books, racism, ageism, valuing diversity and the value of books in children’s lives. She learned that, “Books weren’t just to sit down and read, that there’s more to it than that. You can get a lot of messages from books” (2/2b/2-3). Veronica told of how she took a song and changed the ‘he’ and put in ‘she’. So, in the song the guy’s boss became a woman. She exclaimed:

One of the kids even said to me, “She can’t be a boss -- she’s a woman.”

This is age 3! So, it made me think about the children’s literature as well, how much you can bring that [sexism] across. (2/2b/3)

Victoria had an interest in biology and as the program had an interdisciplinary approach, she completed several courses in this subject. However, the number of

courses in which she could enroll was limited as laboratory work was often completed on Tuesdays and Thursdays, while she was in practicum. The subject matter she did complete allowed her to become more knowledgeable in the area. She now enjoys field trips and sharing her interest in the environment with young children. Another area she pursued was history which she finds very interesting. Veronica studied a required area of study that related to the physiological development of the child, but she believed the content, such as how the heart chambers develop in the infant, was of little practical use for teaching young children. She stated that it did not address aspects that a teacher would need to know in dealing with aspects of the child's growth and development such as childhood illnesses (2/2a/6). Also, as it was an interdisciplinary program, the application to teaching young children was limited in many of the areas they studied.

Victoria pointed out that often she was required to take advanced level subject matter and she did not have the background for the level of the course content. For example, Victoria found that she did not have the background for a required third-year course on government. The only connection she made to her area of study was in the final lecture when they discussed social programs and mentioned child care subsidizations (3/2b/2). However, Veronica enjoyed this subject matter. She stated that it helped to make her "a little more politically aware. [She learned about] the different bodies of the government, how they work, and who does what, where, why and how. I found it interesting just for my own general knowledge" (2/2a/5-6). A required course in statistics gave Victoria a renewed confidence in her abilities to be

successful in mathematics. She optimistically asserted, "Math was my worst subject in school. And I just made it into the course. And I came out with a ninety something. I couldn't believe it" (3/2a/35). Veronica, when asked about the overall value of her liberal arts courses, replied:

They were interesting. It was a lot of information. But as far as being really practical and useful, no. I guess part of university education isn't just the practical aspects of using everything you learn, it's the idea of gaining knowledge as well. I guess you could say it was helpful that way. (2/2b/7)

To me, part of the reason that I took the course was not just for a career; part of it was for my own personal growth. The idea that I knew I wanted to go to university, was one of my own personal goals. (2/2b/19)

However, due to the broad, interdisciplinary nature of the program, the participants completed only the introductory materials in many areas. For example, Veronica told of completing a course on computers but it was at an introductory level so it was very limited in its contribution to her use of computers. Nevertheless, this exposure to so many instructors with so many different specialities and perspectives on life and children was viewed as a valuable life experience. As Veronica reflected back on the 4 years of her preservice program, she stressed that it was difficult to determine the exact sources of her philosophy of teaching. She wrote:

I'm sure there are many other things I have learned through my [preservice program]. Some are obvious, other things are so subtle that I couldn't even say where I've learned them. Sometimes it is difficult to know where ideas

and philosophies come from. Is it [my program classes], practicum experiences, things I learned through teaching experiences, or is it my own personal views and biases? (2/pp/4)

Four years in a multidisciplinary program allowed the participants time to build on their knowledge from their many and varied experiences and to begin to develop their own personal philosophy. However, this length of time and exposure to so many content areas would add to the amount of information they had to sift through as they attempted to reflect on their perspective of the program. At the conclusion of this set of interview questions, I asked the participants what they considered to be the most important aspect of their preservice program. They responded as follows:

Veronica: I think it taught me that each child is different and special and that you have to allow for them to be that. (2/2b/24)

Victoria: The first year was all introductory and that was the basis that formed a framework for the second, third, and fourth years. It all came together in the third and fourth years as it was all interrelated. It wasn't just a course and it ended; you used that [knowledge] throughout the program. It was not only in your course work, but also in the practicum that you got to apply the theory in real life. It reinforced what you learned in the classroom. It helped me to understand the reasons why I was doing what I was doing program-wise -- what was appropriate and what wasn't appropriate. The program was so together. It wasn't in pieces -- it was so interrelated. It all came together in

the end and the way it was presented, it was up to us to decide [on an approach] with which we felt more comfortable. (Personal notes/March, 1996)

Summary

Veronica and Victoria valued the breadth and depth of their degree program. There was a strong emphasis in human development and assessment which helped the participants to gain an understanding of the ages as well as the stages of child development in all areas of development. They stressed the importance of developmental theory when learning to teach young children; it helps one to understand the reasons behind a teacher's behaviour and to plan curriculum for young children. They emphasized the importance of a personal philosophy upon which to base one's programming and interactions with young children.

Both participants expressed an orientation to the practical which was demonstrated by their recall of practical aspects of the learning content and in their ratings of the learning content that involved knowledge of practice. Participants placed a higher value on courses that consisted of a variety of instructional strategies and, in particular, those that actively involved the student in application of theory, than they did on the traditional lecture format. Highly theoretical content that was taught in the traditional lecture format was perceived to be of little value. However, general studies in the arts and science disciplines allowed them to pursue personal interests and to enhance their personal growth. These studies were perceived as contributing to a broad, critical perspective on the care and education of young children.

Overall, the atmosphere was pleasant, and being a part of a large institution provided many opportunities to be involved in extracurricular activities. Criticisms of the program related to the separation between the theory and the practical; a concern for more practical experiences in the first year of the program; and the value of having an option of doing at least one block placement. Overall, the participants spoke very positively of their program and its contribution to their growth as an early childhood preschool teacher.

Comparing and Contrasting the Participants' Perceptions of Their Preservice Programs

The preschool teachers' perceptions of their preservice preparation programs were characterized under the following themes: understanding the nature of the child; integration of theory and practice; nature of the classroom teaching; practicum experiences; and overall atmosphere. In this synthesis of the preschool teachers' perceptions, key aspects of their perceptions will be compared and contrasted under each of these themes. This provides an overview of the similarities and differences of participants' perceptions.

Understanding the Nature of the Child

Participants who graduated from the 1-year program perceived this area to be a beneficial aspect of their program. They had studied child development, but not a thorough in-depth analysis of developmental theories as in the 4-year program. Their knowledge of child development was gained more from studying the rationale behind different developmentally appropriate activities and learning about planning the child

care environment. Knowledge of developmental theories was transmitted through the activities and teaching strategies the instructors provided. These participants were not as familiar with developmental theories as the graduates of the 4-year program, but they described the general characteristics of children's development and how children learn at different ages and stages.

Another area of importance in learning about the nature of children was observing and recording children's behaviour. The participants gave detailed descriptions of anecdotal writing of specific events, running records of individual children, and overall assessment records which were based on their observations of children. They also described how they would tape record and transcribe children's verbal interactions. These written records were all ways of reviewing and reflecting on their own behaviour and identifying the children's interests, needs and development.

Graduates of the 2-year program also stressed the importance of child development in teaching young children. However, their perceptions differed from the other participants. They were unable to recall many of the details about developmental theory that were addressed in their program. There appeared to be little integration of theory and practice. The theory tended to be taught in a manner in which the participants passively memorized developmental profiles of different ages and stages. They were then tested on their knowledge. Both participants did well on their tests, but the learning, which was studied as isolated facts, lacked meaning and relevancy and was not retained for use in future programming.

Knowledge of child development was a main area of concentration in the 4-year program. The participants who completed this program described an in-depth study of the nature of the child. They referred to individual courses of study in developmental theories in many areas, such as language, cognitive, moral, personality, and psychomotor development. They studied both typical and atypical development. Both participants choose to specialize in children's developmental disabilities. These developmental theories were integrated with the practical in practicum placements and in many of their Early Childhood Education courses, such as programming and teaching methods. This theoretical knowledge was perceived to be the basis of program goals and planning as well as helping them to understand the rationale behind the classroom teachers' behaviour. The opportunity to study developmental assessments also helped them to gain a better understanding of a child's overall development. Administering developmental assessments gave them an opportunity to learn about different assessments -- test construction, areas of assessment, how to administer the test, and how to interpret and report the results. They told of how an Early Childhood teacher could integrate this knowledge into their classroom programming. Interdisciplinary studies, such as psychology, sociology and history, helped to broaden the participants' view of children's development as they began to be aware of the influences of the child's family, cultural background, as well as society at large. During the 4 years of the program, the learning content was interrelated and built on the students' previous knowledge. An area that caused difficulties involved the wide scope of knowledge, which meant that it was very

difficult to absorb so much information. At times, the participants found the content to be too technical and difficult to apply in their work with young children.

However, some of their textbooks have become valuable resources. The participants also indicated that there was a lack of attention to infant/toddler development and care.

Overall, learning about the nature of the child was perceived to be one of the most important areas in early childhood teacher preparation. Both the participants from the 4-year and the 1-year programs stated that their program stressed the importance of knowledge of child development for providing guidelines for assessing children's development, planning curriculum, and individualizing instruction. In this way, the participants felt they would be able to provide developmentally appropriate practice.

So, although all participants recognized the value of understanding the nature of the child, each program used a distinctly different approach which contributed to the participants' differing perceptions. The 4-year program was the most in-depth approach to child development. In the 1-year program, general principles in child development relating to the nature of the child tended to be closely interwoven with the practical. Knowledge of individual children's development was taught by attention to various methods of observing and recording children's behaviour. The 2-year, competency-based program appeared to present the learning content as isolated facts, separate from its practical application.

Integration of Theory and Practice

Each of the preservice preparation programs presented a different approach to the integration of theory and practice. In the 1-year program, theory and practice were integrated mainly through a principled practice approach. This approach, as described by the participants, involved three key aspects: a thematic, integrated curriculum; instructor modelling; and direct preparation for work in a day care centre.

The first aspect, the thematic, integrated curriculum, encouraged children's learning through active interaction with hands-on activities. One strategy used for implementing this approach was the use of thematic curriculum webs that were developed around eight key experiences: active learning, language, representation, classification, seriation, number, spatial relations and time (Hohmann et al., 1979, p. ix). This integrated curriculum emphasized a holistic approach that develops the whole child. The overall learning environment was stressed as it affects the children's behaviour. Areas discussed included planned activities, scheduling, routines, transitions, room arrangement, interest areas, team teaching, materials and equipment. Theoretical principles appeared to be learned through the study of the rationale behind instructors' demonstrations of activities and teaching strategies. They were learning what one participant referred to as, "Why you were going to teach what you were going to teach" (1/2/18).

The second part of the principled practice comprised instructor modelling activities and teaching strategies. The participants stated that they completed

activities, coached by their instructors, and compiled portfolios of these activities. They claimed that this approach helped them to gain an understanding of the child's perspective; to learn how to prepare, organize and present activities; and to recognize the relevance of the learning content.

The third aspect was the direct preparation for work in a day care centre. The participants revealed that many course assignments were designed to be used in their practica. One placement was in a laboratory school which helped the participants to learn how to implement the philosophy of the training program. Thus, the training program prepared the participant for all the practical aspects of work in a day care. The principled practice approach made the learning content meaningful for the participants as it provided an active learning approach and demonstrated the relevancy of the learning content to their future role as a preschool teacher. It also appeared to contribute to their high rate of learning retention as evidenced by the recall of many of the details of the learning content. It provided a consistent, specific approach to teaching in a child care setting.

The 2-year competency-based program placed a strong emphasis on a performance-based approach. The participants were engaged in completing activities and compiling them in binders. The theory-related learning content was presented as lists of facts that characterized the different ages and stages of young children. Both participants recognized that the theory was lacking but differed in their perceptions of the value of the practical activities they completed. One participant felt these activities provided needed materials and ideas for when one first starts teaching. The

second participant felt this approach was too simplistic and of limited value. She stressed the need for a theoretical perspective in order to develop a teaching philosophy on which to base one's programming.

The 4-year interdisciplinary program involved many instructors who used a wide array of teaching approaches. The content in the different discipline areas tended to be highly theoretical and little attention was given to the practical application of the theory to teaching in child care settings. Professional courses in early childhood education often integrated the theory and practice through research assignments, observations of children, or interactive teaching approaches. The participants valued the course work that provided practical activities for use with young children. The courses were interrelated, and introductory work provided a foundation for later, more advanced study in the different areas of child development. Both participants from the 4-year program stressed the need for more attention to the practical application of theory in course work and a greater integration of actual interactions or observations of young children in the learning content, in the first year of the program.

The Nature of Classroom Teaching

This was one theme in which there were more similarities than differences among the participants' perceptions. All the participants stressed the importance of the nature of classroom teaching for understanding the learning content and for long-term learning retention. The participants who graduated from the 1-year program emphasized the value of instructors' use of concrete illustrations, real life

instantiations, and practical examples of the theoretical constructs. They indicated that they had a greater retention of the learning content when instructors used specific, concrete examples and then introduced the broader theoretical generalizations from these practical examples. The participants also valued the use of a variety of teaching strategies including case studies, group work, direct interactions with young children, observations of children, and interactive teaching techniques.

Participants from the 2-year program also valued direct experiences with young children. They acknowledged an instructor who was very knowledgeable in her subject matter and introduced them to creative, innovative techniques for presenting activities to young children. They found opportunities to role play simulations of possible teaching situations to be helpful. However, they did recognize the limitations of the use of role playing.

Participants from the 4-year program valued teaching strategies that included application of the theory through in-depth research, class discussions, observations of children, direct interactions with children, individual presentations, and the use of concrete illustrations. All the participants valued opportunities to be actively engaged in the learning process.

Participants from both the 1-year and the 4-year programs mentioned the affective aspects of teaching. They valued positive instructor/student interactions, enthusiastic instructors and instructor attention to student concerns along with input related to the subject matter. Unsatisfactory aspects for all the participants involved teaching techniques in which the participants were taught matter in the passive,

traditional lecture format of taking notes to memorize for exams. This type of instruction was perceived to be of poor quality and of little benefit. Instructors who were disorganized or perceived as having little knowledge or experience in the learning content were not valued. If textbooks were perceived to be of value, they were considered to be a valuable resource for teaching.

Practicum Experiences

All the participants valued the opportunity to be part of a child care setting. They rated their practicum experiences as one of the most valuable aspect of their preservice preparation programs. In the 1-year program, practicum experiences were tightly interwoven with their course work. Students attended practicum in the morning and classes in the afternoon. They also completed two 1-month placements in day cares and a placement in a laboratory school that demonstrated the philosophy of the training program. The participants completed assignments in some curriculum courses that were to be used in their placement. After completing the activity with the children they would reflect on their experiences in their classes. Program instructors were also the practicum coaches. As this was a thematic program, every effort was made to assist the students in implementing the philosophy of the training program in their practicum placements. The laboratory school was viewed as an important component of the training program. High adult/child ratios provided the participants with the opportunity to engage in a wide range of activities and responsibilities. The classroom teacher explained the rationale behind her actions and facilitated their reflection on their own experiences. Jones (1986) also stressed the

need for this approach when teaching adults. She stated, “We tend to learn, and retain, only those things which make connections with our experience and fit into the patterns of our thinking” (p. 96). One area that a participant suggested needed improvement was the manner in which the students are introduced to the teachers in their practicum placements.

Participants from the 2-year program stated that in the first weeks of the program, they attended a day care for 2 days a week. This was viewed as valuable because it allowed them to determine if they wanted to continue in the field. They completed block placements in a wide range of geographical areas, including rural, urban, and out-of-province placements. The participants stated that the placements were a source of valuable ideas and helped them to gain a better understanding about the nature of day care work. They were informed of their progress throughout their practica. However, there was little integration of their practica with their course work.

In the 4-year program, participants attended a wide range of child care settings. They experienced a great diversity in children’s backgrounds, ages, and developmental levels. The key benefits of their practica were: recognition of the personal characteristics needed by teachers of young children; opportunity for the application of theory; the meaningfulness and emotionally fulfilling aspects of working with young children; observation of children’s development in a holistic manner; an overview of a variety of child care settings; introduction to teaching techniques, particularly in the area of classroom management; and discovery of the areas of child

care in which they would like to work. Three areas in which they expressed concerns were: the quality of the feedback from program supervisors varied, as did their opportunities to interrelate the theory with the practical; all placements were on Tuesdays and Thursday, and they would have liked the opportunity to complete at least one block placement; and the need for more involvement in early childhood education in the first year of the program, especially experiences working directly with children or observing them in child care settings.

Overall Atmosphere

All 6 of the participants in this study found that their respective programs had a friendly atmosphere, which was greatly facilitated by supportive instructors. In the 1-year program, instructors were perceived as accessible and willing to assist students with their work, while a full-time instructor was always available for the students in the 2-year program. The participants from the 4-year program also stated that their instructors were helpful, understanding, and frequently available to offer support. The friendly atmosphere in the 2-year program was also enhanced by frequent social events. Both participants from this program remembered attending several of these events in their 2 years of study, and each felt very comfortable in her program.

The social events which were organised during the 2-year program seemed to be valued because they provided an opportunity for social interaction between students and their peers. Lee and Liz asserted that one of the greatest strengths of their 1-year program was the opportunity to work and learn collaboratively with many instructors, students, preschool teachers and children. Victoria and Veronica also enjoyed

working with others, and they believed that opportunities for academic interaction were enhanced by the interdisciplinary approach of their 4-year program. This approach allowed students to pursue different fields of study, and resulted in personal growth for the students as knowledgeable, critical thinkers and writers; exposure to a broader view of child care which integrates sociological, historical and psychological perspectives; opportunities to self-examine their own values, beliefs, and biases; and, in general, exposure to many instructors with different specializations.

Victoria and Veronica found that the wide range of experiences they encountered in their interdisciplinary program helped them to determine their own independent teaching philosophy. The length of their 4-year program enabled this approach because it gave Victoria and Veronica time in which they could develop their own critical approaches to teaching. Unfortunately, Victoria and Veronica found that their exposure to an interdisciplinary approach was limited in some aspects, since the variety and number of courses which were required to take meant that in most content areas they were unable to advance beyond a second-year level. Also, the practica for both participants, which occurred on Tuesdays and Thursdays, limited their choices of available courses, thereby curtailing their freedom to explore different fields of study.

Victoria and Veronica were not the only participants in the study who felt that their program was lacking in certain respects. Suzanne and Samantha found that the 2-year program prepared them for teaching in the following areas: planning routines, directing transitions, conducting circle time, use of music, as well as developing a

collection of activities and pictures for children. However, they both indicated areas which they perceived as needing additional attention: theoretical knowledge, higher standards in course content, greater variety of teaching strategies, as well as attention to long term curriculum planning and team teaching. Participants from the 1-year program, Lee and Liz, found that their program was too intense, and they shared a desire with Victoria and Veronica to have handled a lighter workload in their early childhood preservice preparation.

CHAPTER V

PARTICIPANTS' TEACHING PRACTICES

This chapter explores the teaching practices of the 6 participants in the study. The purpose of the chapter is to identify “meaningful patterns” (Lubeck, 1985) within the practices of these participants. These patterns demonstrate links, even tentative ones, that support and/or challenge the participants’ perceptions of their preservice preparation program and its impact on their early childhood programs. Harms and Clifford (1993) using factor analyses of both the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (Harms & Clifford, 1980) and the Early Childhood Classroom Observation – used by National Association for the Education of Young Children for their accreditation process – (Bredekamp, 1989) identified three key components in quality early childhood programs: (a) activities, (b) routines, and (c) interactions. Based on the participants’ perceptions (as stated in Chapter IV), my classroom observations of the participants’ practice, and the organizational structures of the centres, I explored the nature of the programs of the participants, using these components, in the following manner.

To explore activities, I focused on small group, teacher-initiated activities. In each of the classrooms, the participants worked with a team of teachers. During the day, many activities were planned and carried out as a team. However, the teacher-initiated activities were planned and conducted by individual teachers, usually with a small group of 7 children. The only exception was Lee, who worked with a team of teachers that took turns planning small group activities during the weekly, 2-hour

planning time when one teacher was relieved of her classroom activities. This aspect of the daily schedule provided an opportunity to observe the participants' understanding of the nature of the children, knowledge of developmental theory and pedagogical practices.

In the area of routines, I examined the daily schedule of planned events and the physical environment within which these activities took place. The types of activities and the time allotments of the daily schedule form a framework around which the participants must plan their day. The physical environment reflects the philosophy of the program and implicit expectations for the children's behaviour. Cuffaro (1995) stated, "The fundamental function of the physical space of the classroom is two-fold: to create those conditions that will evoke each child's potential and capacity, and, further, will facilitate interactions that promote and encourage the communication necessary to create community" (p. 33). Researchers have shown that the organization and provision of materials, space and time "set the stage" for the type of learning that can take place within a program (Hohmann et al., 1979; Jones & Reynolds, 1992; Prescott, Jones, & Kritchevsky, 1972). At times, the materials are the curriculum. Cuffaro referred to the materials in a program as the "texts of early childhood classrooms" (p. 33). She argued, "if materials are tools for learning and means for obtaining knowledge, which materials are chosen to equip the early childhood classrooms become a matter of significant consequence" (p. 33). Examining the routines within the participants' teaching relates to crystallizations of their beliefs of how children learn, knowledge of procedural techniques, such as

transitions, as well as support links to both preservice course work and practicum placements.

Lubeck (1985) defined interaction as “the meaningful action that takes place between and among people” (p.112). To examine “meaningful interactions,” the focus was on teacher-child interactions during free play. Free play is a crucial component of an early childhood program. Jones (1992) stated that play is “the most important activity of early childhood; in play children are at their most competent” (p. 9). Spontaneous interactions of the participants during free play incorporated many of the aspects of stated perceptions of their preservice program, such as knowledge of individual needs, as well as attention to the developmental needs of the whole group. Observations of the teachers’ interactions during free play can demonstrate the teachers’ ability to translate one’s philosophy into practice.

Programs will be explored, using the format of the previous chapter, which grouped the participants according to their preservice preparation. I begin by presenting the overall goals of their programs which provide a framework for the study of the participants’ teacher-initiated activities, routines, and teacher-child interactions during free play.

Graduates of a 1-Year ECE Program: Lee and Liz

The Nature of the Curriculum

The purpose and overall design of both Lee’s and Liz’s curricula were similar and consistent with the way that they described their practice during our interviews. Their goals were child-centred and focussed on the children’s growth in all areas of

development – cognitive, social, emotional and physical. They emphasized the need for the environment to be healthy, safe, comfortable, and developmentally appropriate. They stressed the need to support and enhance each child's healthy self-esteem, which would allow them to take intellectual risks as well as engage in independent problem-solving as they explore their environment. As Lee stated, "They come here every day and, hopefully, when they leave nothing I have done has belittled them, and hopefully, what I have done has expanded their learning or given them a new idea about different things" (1/3/15). Both teachers reported that the beliefs and values, on which their goals were based, were rooted in their own family values, but that it was their preservice preparation program that taught them how to plan experiences for young children that would help them to achieve those goals.

In their programming, Lee and Liz used an integrated, thematic approach that involved the children in active learning. In Liz's program, the teachers developed monthly themes; and in Lee's, the teachers completed 2 weeks of planning around a particular theme. In their preservice program, planning was based on an integrated, thematic approach which utilized elaborate curriculum webs that used the key experiences in the eight concept areas of the High Scope model: (a) active learning, which involves the senses and exploration of concrete materials; (b) using language in both the spoken and written form; (c) representation of experiences and ideas; (d) classification; (e) seriation; (f) number concepts; (g) spatial relations; and (h) time (Hohmann et al., 1979). Lee and Liz still used a thematic, integrated approach to planning which took these key conceptual areas into consideration as they developed

written plans and make changes to the physical environment. However, it was in their individual planning for small group activities that the impact of their preservice preparation was most apparent.

Teacher-Initiated Small Group Activities

Liz's and Lee's small group planning was based on strategies modelled by instructors in their preservice preparation, which emphasized active learning. Planning strategies that they related to their preservice preparation included the following key aspects.

First, the activities were based on the children's interests. As Lee stated, "We don't just pick things out of the air" (1/3/24). Liz was recently reminded of how important it is to base activities on the children's interests. She told of her experience when she tried to plan small group activities on a topic she thought would be interesting:

I have to do something they [the children] are really involved in, and that they enjoy. If I don't, they [small group activities] start falling apart. That's what happened last month. At the beginning of the month, I started really focussing on what I wanted to do. They were hopeless. I felt really let down. I started to rethink what I was doing and paying more attention to what they wanted to do, to adjust it. I had wanted to do a lot of snow things for the month. I gave up on snow and did water. I am not going to do something they don't feel like participating in just because this is what I want them to do. (6/3/9-10)

Second, the activities were based on the children's needs and development. The participants used the key experiences, more directly in planning their small group activities, for assessing individual children's overall development. Their observation sheets and assessment records of the children, the same as those used in their preservice program, incorporated the conceptual areas included in the eight key experiences. The teachers made notes on their observations of different children. This information was then placed within the proper area of the overall assessment records. Initially, notes were completed on the child's interests and abilities, which were then placed within the overall context of the general characteristics of her or his age and stage of growth, as outlined in the assessment records.

These observation records were also used in planning activities to meet the needs of individual children. For example, Lee told of how one child had nothing in his assessment record in the section on drawing or painting [relates to the key concept of representation of experiences] so she planned small group activities that involved these areas in order to explore this aspect of the child's development. These observation and assessment sheets were an important part of both participants' teaching practices. Jones (1992) asserted that for teachers in early childhood education, "the most fundamental skill is observation" (p. 12). The participants used these written records for individual assessments, small group planning, and parent conferences. The use of these daily observation records may have contributed to their ability to provide detailed, accurate accounts of their teaching activities and in-depth narratives about the children during our interviews. They would often refer to direct

quotes from the children and explicit descriptions of the children's behaviour. In describing one child, Lee wrote:

Timmy enjoys paint, glue, and markers but is not yet making representations.

When playing with dolls will use a higher voice to represent Mother. Follows single movements at circle. Sentences: "More lunch, please." "Where is my bed?" One goal is to help Timmy work on problem solving as he retreats to his locker, with his blanket, when he is frustrated or upset.

In addition to this, there was a very detailed record on how Timmy was progressing developmentally, with dated, anecdotal notes to support each statement. This approach was a positive one, as it stressed Timmy's uniqueness first, and then assessed his overall development. It gave the teachers a way of not only assessing each child's development, but an opportunity for them to reflect on their curriculum and determine if they were meeting the interests, needs, and abilities of these particular children. This very meaningful approach to evaluation of one's teaching practice was a significant strength of the graduates of the 1-year preparation program and one that was not evident in the other participants.

Third, the activities involved an integrated approach to learning. As Liz explained, an activity, such as making bubbles with coloured water and soap with the seven 3-year-olds in her small group, may appear to be very simple. However, as she planned and conducted the activity she involved the children in the development of many skills and concepts in areas such as social development (sharing water trays and exchanging trays containing different coloured water), fine motor development

(blowing through the straw), using language (talking about what they were doing), symbolism (pretending the mounds of bubbles were piles of snow), colour recognition (colouring the water with food colouring), creative representation (bubble prints), problem solving (how to make pink water), and scientific concepts (how to create bubbles) (6/3/54).

Finally, there was a need for flexibility in all programming. Lee indicated that there were many reasons for a change in plans, such as a change in the weather, the children's moods, or suggestions. She stressed that the child's ideas need to be "valued and respected" (1/3/25). She asserted, "I don't understand how a child can develop if they can't use their own ideas" (1/3/11). To encourage the children's ideas, small group activities involved open-ended activities in which the children interacted with the materials. The children were actively engaged in the activity and encouraged to use their initiative in choosing how to explore the materials. For example, during Lee's small group activity on making foot prints, one child decided not to become involved. (Lee explained that this child often reacted in this manner when there are new adults in the room.) She stated, "I respected his choice to observe and kept in conversation with him about what the other children were doing" (1/1ob/3); two children spent most of the time exploring the feel of the paint on their feet; two children made multicolored foot prints all along the path of brown paper as they marched to the beat of the music; and a sixth child decided to make hand prints (1/1ob/1-3).

As I observed the participants conducting small group activities, I noticed that they used a specific technique. There appeared to be a planned sequence for small group presentations. The needed materials were carefully prepared and placed in a specific area. When the children arrived at the table for small group activities, the materials were introduced, often one at a time. As each material was presented, the children were allowed to explore it, within reasonable limits. Then they conducted the planned activity. Throughout the activity, the children were encouraged to talk about what they are doing, usually through the use of questions related to their actions, such as, "How does it feel?" Questions, such as predictions or analysis that would extend on the experience, such as "What do you think will happen if we add water to the cornstarch?" were used to a lesser extent. As the time frame drew to a close, the children were informed that small group time was coming to an end and that it would soon be time to clean up. As the children were cleaning up, they were told what was coming next in the schedule.

These small group activities were teacher-initiated and appeared to be based on a skills approach to teaching. The children were not forced to participate in the activity but there was a feeling that they were expected to do so. If a child decided not to participate, he was encouraged to do so. There was only the one incident, when a child would not participate and he became engaged in "onlooker play" (Parten, 1932). During my observations, all the other children in both classrooms were engaged in small group activities at the same time; there appeared to be a strong expectation that the children participate in the small group activity. The teachers used

open-ended materials, and there was choice, although at times it was rather limited, in how the materials were to be used. However, the planned sequence, which appears to be directly linked to instructor modelling in the preservice program, added to the amount of direction, as opposed to guidance, given by the teacher. Participants' adherence to this step-by-step presentation provided organization to the activity but also limited the opportunity for the creative exploration of the materials. If the materials had been attractively arranged and the children allowed to freely explore them, rather than being carefully directed and/or guided by the teachers, it may have revealed more about their present, overall development while enhancing their creativity, initiative, autonomy and feelings of competence in their abilities.

Overall, the teachers' behaviours, during small group activities, were consistent with their perceptions of their preservice preparation. Their curriculum goals were similar, both were child-centred and stressed development of the whole child. They emphasized overall environment and development of the child's positive, self-esteem. Their teacher-initiated, small group activities used an integrated approach to learning in which the children were actively engaged in exploring concrete, open-ended materials. Activities were based on the children's interests, needs and development. Both participants emphasized the need for teacher flexibility in the curriculum. There was flexibility in their use of materials, however, they followed a specific format that involved: preparation of materials, introduction of the materials, children explore the materials, and a planned closure. There was one aspect that was inconsistent with their perceptions of their program. Lee had reported

that instructors in her program stated that attractive displays of the children's activities show respect for their work. Small group activities resulted in wonderful creations, such as the bubble prints and colourful foot prints, which were discarded. The prints could have been a part of children's portfolios or used to make beautiful displays in the classroom. These works, along with other representations of the children's activities, such as language experience charts, transcripts of conversations, or photographs of the children doing the activity, would have demonstrated that the work the children do is important. Teacher/child discussions and reflections about their work could also be related to the key experiences of the High Scope curriculum (Hohmann et al., 1979).

Routines

As noted in Chapter IV, the practicum component in the 1-year program consisted of attending a practicum placement every morning of each of the two 4-month semesters, followed by a 1-month block placement in the classroom. There was also a placement of 1 to 3 weeks in a laboratory classroom. During this time the participants, under the supervision of a head teacher, were responsible for planning and carrying out the whole day of teaching. This may account for the marked similarity in physical and temporal aspects of the participants' programs. The following section identifies these key similarities and supports the links to their preservice preparation.

Physical environment. The physical designs of both Lee's and Liz's classrooms were well-organized, attractive, and accessible for young children. The

spaces were arranged into well-defined interest areas using a moderate, open concept which allowed for integrated play between the different areas. The areas were not the same, but both were very traditional, such as block/construction, dramatic play, library, art/writing, science, and tabletop activities. One major difference was that, unlike Liz's room, Lee's had no wooden unit blocks. Lee explained that she had been told that the teachers felt they could be unsafe. Neither classroom contained a woodworking area nor an indoor space for large muscle development. However, there was a wide variety of materials, particularly manipulatives, that would meet a broad range of developmental abilities. They included transformative materials such as water, blocks, and sand; open-ended materials such as vehicles, tabletop activities and other manipulative materials; and closed, self-correcting activities such as puzzles. There were child-sized tables and chairs throughout the room, but there was no adult-sized furniture in the room. All materials were labelled and neatly arranged on child-sized shelves. Quieter areas, such as the libraries were away from the more active areas, such as the blocks. Areas that invite integrated play, such as the dramatic play and block areas, were located next to each other. The theme around which the teachers were planning their program was not readily identifiable in the physical environment. However, as time went by, there were changes in the physical environment as the main theme changed or the teacher felt the children's behaviour demonstrated a need for change. As I began to recognize these changes, the theme became more apparent.

Overall, both the environments appeared inviting, comfortable, and a physical manifestation of the overall goals stated by the participants. Physical environments were also consistent with the stated perceptions of their preservice preparation program, which stressed children constructing their knowledge and skills through active exploration of their environment. Both participants were very concerned about the physical environment and that all the areas were properly set up and available for the children, when they arrived in the morning.

Daily schedules. Lee's and Liz's daily schedules involved a balance of teacher-initiated/child-initiated activities, indoor/outdoor play, large/small group activities, whole group/open snack, and active/quiet times. Terms used in their schedules, such as Plan-Do-Review and Planning Work Time were directly related to their preservice program. Free play involved large chunks of time, at least 1½ hours in both the morning and afternoon. In the afternoon sessions, there was a set time for children to plan their work before starting free play. There was clean up time, after each free play period, and all the materials were returned to the shelves. Each day there was a large group activity, referred to as "circle," for about 15 to 20 minutes, when the children came together for singing, telling stories, and movement activities. There was a lot of flexibility as to time frames and what was done within the time frame, but the order of the schedule was followed very closely.

Another aspect that was common to both these participants was their planned transitions. Transitions from one activity to another can be very difficult times for young children. Transitions in these classrooms were predictable and involved: (a)

preparing the children for when an activity was about to come to a close; (b) informing the children when the activity had ended and what was coming next; and (c) preparation for moving to the next activity. For example, in Lee's class the children were given a warning that free play was going to end in 5 minutes. Then, after the 5 minutes, she would tell them that it was time to clean up and get ready to go to circle time. She began singing the clean up song with the children as they put the materials back on the shelves. Next, she went to the space used for circle time, and as the children arrived they were engaged in a transition activity that prepared them for circle time. In this case, Lee had them join hands as they sang, "Circle, circle . . . let's make it bigger, bigger, bigger . . . (in a softer voice) let's make it smaller, smaller" Once all the children had joined her, they sat down and she started circle time. Liz used transition activities such as referring to the type of clothing the children are wearing (anyone wearing red can go to their table); songs with the children's names in them (Hickey-tickety bumblebee, can you say your name for me?); or same and different things (all children with black hair can . . .).

Compared with the other participants' classrooms, these classrooms had the least amount of wait time or confusion during transitions. Both participants indicated that learning about transitions was part of both their course work and their practica, so this may account for their success with transitions. Liz added that, "The children are very self-centred and these activities help to make them aware of themselves and others" (6/2ob/4).

Overall, the routines in both participants' curriculum reflected their stated goals. Physical environments were well-organized, attractive and accessible. The spaces were arranged in separate interest areas with a modified, open concept which allowed for integrated play within these areas. The theme was integrated into the physical environment. Daily schedules allowed for a balance of activities in areas such as teacher-initiated/child initiated activities, large/small group times, indoor/outdoor play, quiet/active play, and whole group/open snack. Two areas that were directly related to their preservice program were: use of a planning time before free play and transitions that used a set sequence of steps to follow. Transitions were well-planned, smooth and kept to a minimum. The overall learning environment was generally consistent with their stated philosophy.

Free Play: Teacher-Child Interactions

Free play was a valued and important time in both Lee's and Liz's classrooms. This attention to free play was demonstrated by the time allotted to play, by the expenditures of teacher energy in attending to the children, and by the variety of materials available. They described their role as one of facilitating the needs of the children. In both of these classrooms, the children were assisted in planning their work time through the use of a planning board. This was a strategy Lee and Liz related to their preservice training. During free play children were allowed to move freely between interest areas. Areas that encourage integrated play, such as blocks and dramatic play, were next to each other.

Lee and Liz were supportive of the children's play as shown by their use of strategies that sustained the children's play. Both participants emphasized the use of language in the children's play to resolve conflict as well as encourage reasoning and independent problem solving. For example, two children were engaged in a conflict about one of the materials in the dramatic play area:

Liz: We already know the problem. How are you going to solve it?

1st Child: I could give it to him for 10 minutes.

Liz (turning to the second child): What do you think of that?

2nd Child: Five minutes.

1st Child: Ten.

2nd Child: Five.

Liz: What's between 5 and 10? After 5, we have 6, 7, 8, and 9.

1st Child: He can have it for 7 minutes.

2nd Child: Six.

1st Child: Seven.

2nd Child: Six.

1st Child: Okay, 6.

Liz (as she looks at her watch): I'll keep time. (6/3ob/2-3)

However, in general, there appeared to be a need for more open-ended questions to deal with more complex, divergent thinking that would extend the children's thinking and sustain the language.

Two different aspects of the participants' interactions with the children that they attributed to their preservice training were Lee's attention to the socioemotional development of individual children and Liz's use of role play. Lee had a central concern for the children's feelings and tried to acknowledge each child as they arrived in the morning. She said that it relates to her own fear of separation as a child. She had also chosen this topic for a research paper she completed in her preservice program. She stated that, "It just refreshed how I used to feel, so it made you more aware of how children are feeling when they are left" (1/2/24). She was very empathetic to the child's perspective. For example, she noticed one child with her head down on a table. She approached her and asked, "Tanisha, are you not happy today? The child, without looking up, shook her head. Then Lee asked, "Did your mother do your hair over the weekend?" The child, forgetting her unhappiness, became very animated as she explained how her mother did her hair. As she finished her story, Lee helped her to become involved in an activity. Another afternoon, a child whose attendance was not consistent made a gun out of blocks and pretended to shoot his friend. Lee approached the child, "That makes me sad that you made a gun." The child had appeared uncomfortable in the classroom and Lee explained that he was still unfamiliar with the routines of the classroom and it was affecting his behaviour. She said she would plan to meet with his parent. Lee had explained how guns or toys with a violent theme are not allowed in the centre. However, in this incident, I felt she had been aware of the child's uncomfortableness in the day care environment, as her response was based on her own understanding of the child rather

than moralizing about the situation. She remarked, "When in doubt, speak from how you are feeling. This is very effective communication in all parts of your life" (1/4ob/2).

During our interviews, Liz emphasized that learning about children's literature had rekindled a love of reading for her. She had learned about the use of different ways to present stories to children. Literature and the use of dramatic scripts were very evident in her classroom. For example, while learning about forests, she had introduced the story of the three bears. There were three versions of the book in the classroom and a flannel board story, and the children would act out the story in circle and the dramatic play area. During one of my observations, the children were in the dramatic play area preparing to act out the story of Cinderella. One child, dressed as Cinderella in a long, pink gown and fancy shoes, approached me and asked, "Do you like my dress? The mice made it" Then he skipped off as he chanted, "I'm going to the ball. I'm going to the ball" (6/3ob/1). Books were integrated into many areas of the program. This opportunity to act out dramatic scripts, such as fairy tales, enriches the child's life for the tales deal with universal themes of concern to all children. They develop their inner resources in a way that "one's emotions, imagination and intellect mutually support and enrich one another" (Bettelheim, 1975, p. 4).

Overall, teacher-child interactions during free play in both these rooms appeared consistent with, and closely related to, the participants' perceptions of their preservice preparation. They stated that their role during free play was to facilitate

the needs of the children. Planning boards, which illustrated the different interest areas, were used to help the children plan their free play time. The children moved freely from one interest area to another, with the freedom to plan and then choose their work. All areas were opened at all times. Lee and Liz were very attentive to the children's needs and encouraged independent problem solving. They were modelling appropriate play, redirecting a child's attention, using language to enhance reasoning abilities or supplying needed props and other materials. They enhanced and sustained the children's play in the various interest areas as they encountered different situations. These were all strategies they related to their preservice preparation. This approach resulted in an atmosphere, in both rooms, that demonstrated respect, caring, cooperation and mediated problem solving between the children and the teachers.

Summary

During the observations of the participants who had graduated from the 1-year teacher preparation program, many links were identified between their perceptions of this program and their actual teaching practices. Their overall goals were similar and were based on developmentally appropriate practice that was child-centred and used an integrated approach to the development of the whole child. They both stated that this approach was consistent with their personal values and beliefs about how young children grow, develop, and learn. However, they asserted that their methods of providing experiences to young children were directly related to their preservice program. This was demonstrated in areas such as the use of an integrated, thematic curriculum based on the children's interests, needs, and development. Many of the

actual procedures used to plan, implement, as well as assess these experiences were also directly related to their preservice program, including conducting small group activities, directing transitions, and designing and arranging the use of classroom space. The physical environment was well organized and accessible for young children. There was a variety of materials in each of the areas, and the children were allowed to move freely among the areas. The scheduling demonstrated a balance of different types of activities for young children. Free play was an important part of the curriculum and the participants viewed their role as one of facilitating the children's needs in a variety of ways, depending on the situation. Free play was important for children's development, particularly in areas of social relations, and involved a large segment of time in both the morning as well as afternoon sessions. All interest areas were open at all times. The participants encouraged independent problem solving and the children's initiative and autonomy in the use of the materials in the different interest areas. They sustained the children's play using a variety of teaching strategies, such as modelling, redirecting, positive verbal and nonverbal feedback, as well as the use of props.

Graduates of a 2-Year ECE Program: Suzanne and Samantha

The Nature of the Curriculum

Suzanne and Samantha described their goals as child-centred. They emphasized the need for the child to be happy, independent, and confident in her or his abilities. They both told of how important it is for the children to learn to be caring and helpful to each other. They also stressed that early childhood programs

are different from public school programs and that they were opposed to the use of direct instruction of predetermined objectives of what the children should know. As Suzanne stated, "I think children learn by doing. I think that if you expose them to enough materials and hands-on things, that they learn that way" (4/3/8).

As for the overall design of their written curriculum, both participants were working with graduates of the 1-year ECE program and had started using the integrated, thematic webs that are designed around the eight key experiences of the High Scope model (Hohmann et al., 1979). This approach to programming has been described by the participants in this study who had graduated from the 1-year preservice program. Suzanne and Samantha were following the key experiences very closely in their designs of elaborate, detailed webs, similar to those that Lee and Liz had described doing during their preservice program. Themes were used for approximately 3 weeks to 1 month. Both Suzanne and Samantha stated that they had not studied webs in their preservice program. They stated that this new approach was a useful framework for program planning as it provided them with the knowledge of different areas of growth in children's development and a way to integrate these skills into related activities. Suzanne stated that this approach was helping her to gain a better understanding of the reasons why she was doing an activity. From these thematic webs, which were based on the children's interests and needs, they designed their small group activities. Samantha informed me that she had started noting her observations of the children in a notebook and was using this information in designing her planned activities.

Teacher-Initiated Small Group Activities

Samantha, along with her colleague, had recently started planning small group activities each afternoon, for their fourteen 4- and 5-year-olds. She explained that in consultation with her colleague and director, they had decided that small group time would prepare the children for public school, “for structured time where it’s time to sit down and do an activity with the teacher” (5/3ob/10). Suzanne and her colleague had continued setting up their planned activities during each free play period. Often, she also conducted an activity during large group time, with the eleven 2½- to 3½-year-olds, in her room.

The influence of Suzanne’s and Samantha’s colleagues in planning teacher-initiated activities was evident in their curriculum web designs. However, both of these participants’ activities were characterized by more flexibility in the structuring of the small group activity time than I observed in the participants from the 1-year preservice program who appeared to have a step-by-step procedure. Although the activities Suzanne and Samantha used emphasized an integrated approach to learning, they were different, in other respects from the participants, from the 1-year program. Their types of activities varied in the amount of emphasis on the product as opposed to the process, whereas the graduates of the 1-year program emphasized the process over the product. For example, there were projects that had a finished product in mind, such as clothespin dolls and predesigned craft. Other activities were more open ended, such as the activity of exploring, sorting, and grouping a variety of buttons. This range of types of activities that varied in their developmental appropriateness and

inappropriateness was also evident in the displays and folders of the children's work. Liz and Lee planned activities that involved open-ended, concrete materials which were introduced in a specific manner but could be used in a number of acceptable ways.

I observed more in common between these participants' general attitudes and approach to teaching, as opposed to any specific model or theoretical perspective. The confounding influences of their preservice program, colleagues, and personal characteristics were difficult to separate and document. For example, during circle time, Samantha had chosen a book to read that related to the planned theme of "living things." However, the children chose another book about buttons that they wanted to hear. The children became very animated during the reading of this book. Small group time followed the story, so Samantha gave each child a bottle of paper, glue, and a tray of assorted buttons. Then, she wrote their name and the words "small group -- classification" on the top of the paper. She then drew lines to divide the paper into sections. She told the children that they could group the buttons, on their paper, in any way they wanted. Their excitement escalated as the children explored their own buttons. This was demonstrated by their comments, such as "Look at this. It's a shape with two eyeballs!" (5/2ob/3).

Samantha informed me that she had her small group prepared but thought of the button bottle and decided to expand on the children's interest in buttons. The influence of the need to work with the key experiences was evident in her writing classification on the top of each child's paper, however, her flexibility and free flow

of activities was more characteristic of graduates of the 2-year program than the graduates of the 1-year program. Suzanne demonstrated even more flexibility in her planning of small group activities. In her room, there was no expectation that the children had to participate in the activity, nor did they have to complete it within a particular time frame. For example, one day the small group activity was set up so the children could paint the dog bones they had made the day before. A 3-year-old boy went to the small group activity table and began painting several of the dog bones, some of which were made from clay dough and others from cardboard. This child spent a long time busily painting bones and there was neither a push to have him hurry nor the expectation for the other children to come to the table and paint.

Overall, both Suzanne and Samantha appeared to be hard working, conscientious preschool teachers, but their approach to teacher-initiated activities appeared to be more related to the development of a positive, enthusiastic attitude in the children, than to the development of a specific, theoretical perspective, as demonstrated by the graduates of the 1-year program. Kramer (1994) stated:

Good teaching does not mean having all the answers, but instead means knowing how to offer experiences that help generate interest and help to extend curiosity and the desire to explore. This is the first and perhaps the most important, attitude for teachers to make their own. (p. 30)

Activities provided by these participants ranged in their emphasis from a finished product to an open-ended process. However, these participants consistently demonstrated a flexible, positive attitude which included a great deal of interest and

concern for enhancing the children's curiosity and joy of living. As Suzanne emphasized, an important part of her role as a preschool teacher is "always being happy, fair, positive and a good role model" (4/3/16). This attitude, which both participants had stressed, appeared to have been encouraged and supported by the overall environment of their preservice program.

In sum, the participants from the 2-year program had similar teaching philosophies which stressed the need for a child-centred approach based on active learning through the use of hands-on activities. The participants emphasized the social development of the children. They were learning how to plan and implement thematic, integrated curriculum webs based on the approach used by the participants from the 1-year program. Suzanne and Samantha found this to be a beneficial approach to planning the curriculum. However, although the planning stages were similar to the graduates from the 1-year program, there were differences in the way the participants from the 2-year program were implementing (the what and the how) the activities outlined in their webs. The graduates of the 2-year program were more flexible in the procedures involved in small group activities and had a wide range of types of activities. The graduates of the 1-year program used a step-by step design using open-ended materials that the children explored in different ways. This was an approach used by the graduates of the 2-year program for some activities, but others involved predesigned crafts which for young children can be developmentally inappropriate (Bredekamp, 1987; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997).

The teaching practices of Suzanne and Samantha were more similar in their supportive and caring attitudes toward preschool children than in implementing a specific theoretical perspective. This attitude appeared to be supported by the overall atmosphere of their preservice preparation. Both participants had reported on how their instructors had stressed the importance of working with young children and were supportive of their teaching endeavours.

Routines

Suzanne and Samantha stated that their practicum experiences were very valuable as they had learned about the routines of different early childhood programs. During the interviews both had stressed the importance of the materials, the room design, and routines. It should also be noted, that although Suzanne and Samantha worked in different centres, they worked for the same organization.

Physical environment. Upon entering these classrooms, I was immediately impressed with the quality of the learning materials -- they were sturdy, bright, colourful, and very attractively arranged. Interest areas were well defined and well maintained. Also, Suzanne explained how she adapted the environment based on the children's needs:

If a child has had a hard time coming in, in the morning or if Mom or Dad says, "This morning has been just unbelievable," I try to accommodate that in what I put out. I know that so-and-so loves to play with trucks so I put trucks in the sand or I pick a book to read that I know this person really likes.

(4/3/17)

Suzanne also involved the children in planning the environment. For example, she asked a child, "I was thinking about putting some paint on the easel. What colour will I put out?" (4/3/29).

There were 11 children in Suzanne's room, so the space requirements were lower than in the classrooms that had 21 children. The materials, such as clear containers and thin, see-through shelving, appear to have been chosen with this small room in mind. The arrangement of the furniture and materials allowed for easy movement as well as high accessibility for the children. In this limited space, there was a variety of interest areas such as a block area, housekeeping corner, and soft areas. Areas for quiet play were separated from the noisy, more active play spaces. Both classrooms had samples of the children's work displayed around the room. The present theme was also evident in the physical environment. For example, materials related to the theme of "living things" included blooming tulips, colourful vinyl animals in the water table and science area, and a vet's office in the dramatic play area (5/10b/1). However, the other centres in which I observed appeared to have more materials which provided a greater variety and opportunities for choice in each of the different interest areas.

Both centres had special situations to consider as they planned the design of their rooms. In Suzanne's room, there were no bathrooms and no source of water in the classroom. This added to the physical demands and stress. Additional physical work was related to age of the children, who may not have had the bladder control or inclination to leave their play when they had to go to the bathroom. It meant that

when one teacher accompanied a child to the bathroom, the other teacher was left alone with the other children. It also added transitional times for group trips to the bathroom. Water had to be carried and changed frequently. Yet, I observed no limitations on the use of materials or planned activities that require a great deal of clean up because of the lack of a sink and a bathroom.

This was the one centre in which the easel was set up during all my observations! In Samantha's classroom, the space was divided into three areas. There were two small rooms and one larger room. This arrangement meant that: interest areas were separated by cement walls so the children's play was not integrated; there was limited space for whole group activities; and there was a concern for visual supervision. The children in this classroom went to the centre's kitchen area for lunch and snack.

Overall, the physical environments did reflect the participants' stated goals to provide an environment in which the children were comfortable, happy, and allowed their independence in the choice as well as use of the materials. The wall displays demonstrated respect for the children's work. This attention to the physical environment may be related, in part, to their stated value of their practicum experiences, in different day care settings, which helped them to gain an understanding of the day care setting.

Daily schedules. The schedules of these two classrooms were similar to those of the 1-year program, and included typical areas such as free play, snack, circle, lunch, and outside play. However, Samantha's schedule was different in several

ways. Samantha, unlike Suzanne, did not have a scheduled time in an indoor gym. The children in Samantha's room did not have a nap time, so during the early afternoon free play there was only one teacher to work with the children during the other teacher's lunch hour. The third difference was that there were four school-aged children who were members of this class. These children attended at lunch time and after school. This meant that the teachers had to plan around these times. For example, during my observations I noticed that when we went on a morning walk, we had to return at noon to greet the school-aged children. Yet, lunch was not served until 12:30 p.m. It added to the transition times and had implications for the teachers' planning of activities. Overall, there was a balance of teacher-initiated/child-initiated activities, indoor/outdoor play, quiet/active activities, and large/small group times in the teachers' schedules. Lower group sizes (11 and 14) meant that transitions were less time consuming than in the classrooms in which I observed that involved 21 children.

Free Play: Teacher-Child Interactions

Free play in both of these classrooms was characterized by a "free flow, where the children can come in and decide what they want to do, where they want to do it, and who they want to do it with" (5/3/5-6). Samantha stressed that they do prepare the environment for the children by planning the materials to be placed in each interest area. Free play was believed to be a very important component of their curriculum. As Suzanne asserted, "That's how they [the children] learn!" She stressed that they want a "relaxed environment" in which the children are given the

“independence to choose what they want to use” (4/3/32). In these classrooms, unlike the other participants’ rooms, there was a teacher-planned activity each day that was available for the children to complete during free play. There would be an activity set up at a table which either a child or a small group of children could complete, if they wanted. There was no expectation that the children had to do this teacher-planned activity. These activities ranged in their developmental appropriateness or inappropriateness (Bredekamp, 1987; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). They involved activities such as stringing circles of oat cereal on pipe cleaners to be used for bird feeders in the park, string painting, letter collages, or craft projects such as making animal shapes using paper plates and precut paper shapes.

Suzanne also used many two- and three-dimensional activities, such as painting, working with clay, and designing collages that allowed for free expression. In both classrooms, the children could put their work on the walls. Both participants had very creative ideas for props in the sand and water tables which were two focal points in their classrooms. As stated earlier, these transformative materials are very important for children in the Piagetian stage of preoperational thinking. Samantha stressed the value of free play for the children:

They’re interacting, talking, making choices, working with each other and the teachers, expressing themselves, taking responsibility in tidying up when they finish playing, and exploring with games, activities and ideas. (5/3/26)

The participants’ stated belief in the need for children’s choice and independence was consistent with what they had referred to as “an open-ended

environment" (5/3/29) which was valued in their preservice program. However, the participants indicated that many of their teaching strategies were related to their own teaching experience and what they had learned from children and co-workers, as well as the administrators of this centre. It was interesting that they both used the same metaphor to describe themselves when they first started teaching. Samantha had stated, "I was pretty green . . ." (5/3/34) and Suzanne remarked, "I was green, green as the grass . . ." (4/3/56).

They were both very positive in their approach with children, and they used a range of strategies to manage the children's behaviour during free play. For example, a behaviouristic approach Samantha used was to tell the children that if their behaviour did not improve, she would remove the materials with which they were playing or she would close the sand box, if that was the area in which they were having difficulty. She added, "There's that '5,4,3,2,1.' It helps." (5/3/46). However, all areas of the classroom remained open while I was observing their free play. One of Suzanne's strengths in her interactions with the children was her ability to redirect the children's behaviour and to sustain their play. It was often related to her wonderful sense of humour. For example, one time a child was working on an activity and shouted in frustration, "I'm stuck." Suzanne, cupping her hand around her mouth, exclaimed, "Call the tow truck, someone's stuck!" The child, who had been frustrated, found the comment so funny that he was giggled right out loud and then went back to work on his activity.

There was one area that was common to these participants that was a direct link to their preservice preparation. This area was their use of music in the classroom during free play. Music was very evident in both rooms. As Suzanne stated, "I sing all the time. I think it helps make things go great. It helps when we're dressing and during transition times. I think that singing is a really important thing" (4/3/29). Samantha also emphasized music, "We do a lot of singing and a lot of musical instruments, drums, bells, and tambourines. I have my old ukulele from [preservice program] that the kids enjoy" (5/3/25). Suzanne, in particular, had integrated music in all aspects of her curriculum. Suzanne and the children were always singing. As an observer, I felt this use of music created a wonderfully warm and caring atmosphere within the room.

Overall, free play was an important component of Suzanne's and Samantha's curriculum. It stressed a prepared environment that allowed children the autonomy to choose concrete materials and the autonomy to explore them in the way that they wanted. This was consistent with their stated philosophy of their preservice preparation program. Free play was valued because of its contribution to the growth of the child in all areas of development and because it is the way in which they learn. However, their teacher planned activities demonstrated a wide range in the developmentally appropriateness of their practice (Bredekamp, 1987; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). Their teacher-child interactions were very different, and the participants related their teaching strategies and techniques to their teaching experiences in their present centres. However, one manifestation of their teaching

that was directly linked to their preservice program was their salient use of music as they interacted with the children during free play.

Summary

Suzanne and Samantha had similar teaching philosophies that were based on the theory that children “learn by doing.” This approach was consistent with their personal values and beliefs, but they also related it to their preservice preparation program. In their overall goals, they stressed the social development of the young child. Written plans were based on the High Scope model, the same design used by the graduates of the 1-year program. Their classroom colleagues, graduates of the 1-year program, were assisting them in this new endeavour. However, their small group activities were very different from the participants who had graduated from the 1-year program. Although the Suzanne and Samantha used an integrated approach to learning which is consistent with the High Scope model, they differed in their content and in the teaching strategies used to conduct the procedures. Their planned activities ranged from the free exploration of materials which emphasize the process to completing predesigned activities which emphasize the product. Lee and Liz on the other hand, emphasized the process at all times, and Suzanne’s and Samantha’s rationale for this was related to the principles of developmentally appropriate practice (Bredekamp, 1987; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997).

One area of their teaching that may be related, in part, to their practicum experiences was their attention to procedural aspects such as the physical environment and program scheduling. Their physical environments were consistent with their

stated goals of making the materials accessible in a comfortable atmosphere that encourage the children's independence. This was also true for their scheduling which involved a balance of activities for young children.

Free play was valued as the opportunity for children to grow, develop, and learn. Suzanne and Samantha provided a variety of activities which ranged in their developmental appropriateness and inappropriateness. They differed in their interactions with the children, and stated that their teaching styles and strategies were developed, for the most part, in their experiences as a preschool teacher. They had learned from their interactions with the children, their co-teachers, and administrators. However, there was an area that was directly related to their preservice preparation and that was their prominent use of music with the children.

Overall, I was unable to identify similar patterns in Suzanne's and Samantha's teaching styles and strategies or to relate much of their behaviour to their preservice teacher preparation. However, their teaching attitudes were very similar in that they were very supportive of the children's work and created positive, warm atmospheres in which caring for each other was a notable aspect. This attitude may be related to their preparation program in part, as they stated how the instructors were very positive and supportive of the participants' well-being.

Graduates of a 4-Year ECE Program: Veronica and Victoria

The Nature of the Curriculum

The graduates of the 4-year ECE program indicated that they preferred to teach in an "unstructured" environment (3/3a/4; 2/4ob/1) which allows the child time

to play and emphasizes the process of learning rather than an end product. The basic overall goal that both Veronica and Victoria first mentioned was the social development of the child, in particular helping the children to express themselves in a confident, socially acceptable manner. These participants stressed the need for respect for the child and her or his abilities to be independent, to make choices, and to be creative. They believed that children need “a sense of accomplishment in their abilities” (2/3a/10) to build on their self esteem and problem solving abilities. As Veronica asserted, “A sense of self esteem. That’s the most important because if you don’t have that you don’t really have anything. You can always learn to tie your shoes later in life” (2/3b/46). Victoria related these goals to their own personal values and beliefs of needed life skills:

There are times when they will have to make choices in their later life and maybe they’ll be better prepared. When I was growing up, I can’t remember having a lot of choice and for me, it is really hard in decision making and problem solving. Maybe it will help them in working through the consequences . . . if I do this what will happen . . . or if I do that what will happen? (3/3b/2-3)

Veronica stressed that one of her “firm beliefs” was that “children need limits.” She also stated that she used a variety of teaching approaches that are theoretically eclectic. At times, she used direct teaching instruction which she related to her long term goals for the children:

I feel it's important that a child should be able to sit and listen to what an adult has to say. I have 3-year-olds in the room; they're only 3, but they will be in school at some point and, good or bad, that's the way the school system is for the most part. You do have to learn there are times to listen, there are times when you can talk, and there are times when you can do what you want. We incorporate all those things in our room. (2/3a/8)

Assessments of the children's progress were done through standardized forms that involved check lists and short summaries of the children's development. These forms are the same ones used by the graduates of the 2-year program. The participants did not appear to be familiar with other teacher assessment forms. They were summative evaluations rather than descriptive, formative evaluations. The participants did not make daily, written records of their observations of the children but kept "mental files" (2/3b/12).

Teacher-Initiated Small Group Activities

Veronica and Victoria both planned activities for their small groups that were related to weekly themes, such as the beach, dinosaurs, Valentine's Day, and Easter. There was some evidence of the theme in the physical environment, such as teacher designed bulletin boards or objects added to the room. For example, one week the theme was the colour purple and there was a table with objects that were purple. However, changing the theme every week does not allow new concepts to be placed within a meaningful context and attention to the role of culture may be superficial (Bredenkamp, 1997). One week, Victoria and her team of teachers explored nutrition.

Each day, one of the teachers would cook a food that was related to a certain country. A culminating event was a field trip to the grocery store to talk about the nutritious value of different foods. The children explored different foods, but two incidents suggested that the concept may have been too abstract. At the bakery, they were very anxious to eat the huge cookies that the baker gave them, and at the meat counter, they were more excited about eating the candy lollipops the butcher gave them than hearing about the nutritional value of the meat. However, the use of weekly themes can be limiting in building on the children interests, existing knowledge and sociocultural background. The use of themes that extend for several weeks and is integrated into the many areas of the curriculum, including the physical environment, can provide for:

- (a) in-depth exploration of topics and learning that is more than just superficial coverage;
- (b) more choices and therefore more motivation to learn and greater satisfaction with the results;
- (c) more active learning;
- (d) an opportunity for the teacher to learn along with the children and model lifelong learning; and
- (e) a more effective use of student and teacher time. (Brewer, 1995, p. 13)

Both participants appeared to be grappling with the implementation of their stated philosophy, applying their knowledge of theories of how children learn and dealing with environmental constraints that were inconsistent with the philosophy of their preservice preparation program. Veronica explained how her plans are reviewed by an administrator whom she described as insisting on “teacher directed and almost a

school type atmosphere” (2/3a/9). The children were expected to sit and follow directions. She gave the following example:

I wrote an activity for a theme on healthy habits. I planned on having the children wipe down the walls and shelves with soap and water. And I was questioned on it because the administrator felt it should be more on personal hygiene. I felt that is a part of their own hygiene as it is a part of their environment. I wasn't just looking at whether I'm teaching healthy habits, I'm thinking there's fine motor skills involved, gross motor skills, there's sharing and turn taking, there's science with bubble making and things like that. So there's a lot more to it than just teaching them what a healthy habit is. The theme is just a guide to help plan. (2/3b/10)

Veronica's reaction to this approach, which she perceived as having to defend her practice, involved, at times, buying her own supplies and trying to adapt her planned activities so that they would be acceptable to this administrator. I observed her making Valentine's Day cards with her small group of children. She had brought supplies such as lace doilies, feathers, and sequins for the children to use to decorate their cards. The supplies were limited so they were divided evenly among the children in the group. Veronica was very responsive to individual children's needs as they completed the activity, but it was teacher directed in that she controlled the materials and gave them out to the children in sequenced stages. The children appeared to enjoy the activity and were allowed to put their materials on the paper in the way that they chose. Nevertheless, had these inviting materials been attractively

arranged on the table and the children allowed to create designs using the materials in the way that they chose, it would have enhanced the autonomy and the creative abilities of the children.

When I observed Victoria doing a small group activity, the children were involved in painting with cotton balls which they held in their hands using clothes pins ("Painting with Rabbit Tails"). The children chose the colours to use and when to bring closure to the activity. However, I questioned Veronica about the children's work that was displayed on the wall. The activities were crafts, such as flowers made from cupcake liners and pipe cleaners and Easter bunny faces, that were all the same. These activities emphasized an end product which was not consistent with Veronica's stated philosophy of emphasizing the process of an activity. She stated that she was required to do two crafts a day. She noted:

One of the teachers puts a lot of emphasis on children knowing how to cut when they get to her room so sometimes I feel pressured to do lots of cutting activities. I do tend to put in a few crafts of this nature for holiday bulletin boards but I don't go crazy if they can't cut on the lines, and so forth. They are given lots of materials to decorate items with; they are free to decorate as they wish. The parents tend to take to these items more so than open-ended crafts. I would never give them an activity like this, if I knew they weren't capable of doing it. (3/3ob/4)

However, teacher directed activities, particularly product-oriented crafts, control the child as the power resides with the teacher. Elkind (1986) stressed how teacher

directed instruction can subvert the child's healthy development of her or his self-esteem as "a child may learn to become dependent on adult direction and not to trust his own or her own initiative" (p. 635). The value of the children's work and their developing self concept becomes related to teacher approval (Elkind). Moreover, this approach takes away from a child's feeling of competence in her or his own abilities and reduces the opportunities to take risks within her or his environment that would enhance their initiative as well as autonomy.

Lyons (1994) stressed how the dilemmas of teachers' practices and development are embedded in "the intricate interactions between a teacher's knowledge and values, assumptions about knowing, a craft, and relationships" (p. 196). So this use of a variety of activities that ranged in levels of developmental appropriateness (Bredenkamp, 1987) could be related to: (a) Veronica's and Victoria's concern that their preservice program needed more attention to pedagogy to enhance their knowledge of developmentally appropriate practice; (b) an operationally defined role of the teacher that appears to relate more to a traditional role of the teacher than espoused by their stated philosophy; and (c) an adaptation to working conditions which relates to relationships to significant others such as administrators, teachers, and parents. Another concern is the closure that these participants brought to these situations and the lack of exploration of alternatives. The participants appeared to be feeling very disheartened as to their abilities to bring about any change in these areas. Nevertheless, as Chasnoff (1995) stated, "continuous attention to diagnosis is the cornerstone of objective problem solving" (p. 26). Without this attention to

diagnosis, decisions tend to reflect on the person's status or ability to argue rather than the facts of the situation. Chasnoff further stated that one of the reasons why there is not good diagnosis work regarding a difficult situation is the lack of clear educational goals. In this case, the participants lacked a clearly defined theory of practice as demonstrated by the inconsistencies between their stated philosophies and actual practice.

In sum, the participants had stated that their teaching philosophy was play oriented and stressed the need for children's independence, opportunities for choice, and the development of creativity. A healthy self-esteem was also important for preschool-aged children. The participants asserted that the process of children's activities was more important than the end product and they were concerned with the development of the whole child. However, their teaching strategies, at times, were teacher-directed as well as inconsistent with their stated goals and overall philosophy of how children learn. Small group activities were based on weekly themes and allowed for little independence or choice of how to use the materials. Often the activities were teacher directed and there was an emphasis on the end product rather than the process. This was also evident in their bulletin boards which were teacher designed and involved little of the children's work, other than teacher planned crafts that related to a theme. They appeared to be identifying with a more traditional role of the teacher than that of a facilitator developing an emergent curriculum. However, this approach to small group activities was confounded by environmental constraints within their centres. The participants related their inconsistencies between their stated

philosophies and practice to their working conditions. For example, they stated that teacher directed activities were valued by the administrators and the parents.

Routines

In the 4-year ECE program, the participants completed practica in a variety of settings. For Victoria, the centre in which she worked at the time of the study was her only experience in a day care environment. It was the centre where she did her only day care practicum. Veronica had been in more than one day care during her practicum placements, and this was the second centre in which she had worked. The structures of the participants' programs were very different, but both created difficulties for them.

Physical environment. Both classrooms were divided into well-defined interest areas. These areas were well maintained, and materials were on child-sized shelves. There was a variety of materials that were transformative, open- and closed-ended. Both of these rooms had a number of materials in which the play is theme directed, such as a model farm or hospital. There were child-sized tables and chairs but no adult-sized furniture. I did not observe the easels being used in either classroom, and three-dimensional materials were not available in the art area. The quiet areas were away from the more active areas, but there were no soft areas. In both centres, putting out cots and mattresses for nap time involved a lot of moving and finding places for the children. Both centres had access to a separate room for large muscle development. These participants used calendar and/or weather charts with their children. I questioned Victoria about the use of these charts and she replied that she

had observed their use in her practice placements as a way to bring the group together.

Victoria's classroom area involved more than one room. A large room was used for whole group activities such as free play and circle. Other activities such as lunch and small group time were held in Victoria's own room. This smaller room was approximately 10 feet by 12 feet and limited the types and amount of material that were available to the children. The limited space was not conducive to active exploration through play with a variety of open-ended materials. However, Victoria worked hard at providing materials that would interest the children and promote growth in all areas of development. This arrangement also meant that the children's use of the interest areas in the large room was very limited to short periods of time each day. Due to the physical lay out of Victoria's centre there would be a concern for visual supervision during nap time.

Daily schedules. Both participants expressed concerns about their schedules. One concern was related to the types of activities scheduled. The teachers in Veronica's class were expected to do two whole group teacher-directed activities, and Victoria was expected to do two crafts a day. They both expressed the need for more time for free play. In Victoria's classroom, free play in the morning was from 7:00 a.m. to 9:30 a.m., and opportunity for free play in the afternoon started at 4:00 p.m. So, for the children who arrive at the centre at 8:30 a.m. or later, there would be limited access to free play. Veronica also expressed her concern about not being able to give the children the time needed for uninterrupted play or the time for teachers to

spontaneously schedule activities based on the children's interests and needs. As she stated:

We might be doing a small group activity where the children are colouring a picture. They're doing a really great job and all of a sudden, you're saying, "It's time to go outside now. You can't finish it." I know that's not right but I know that's the way it is sometimes. (2/3b/6).

Another area that they both found difficult was trips scheduled by the administrators. They could see the benefits derived from some of these experiences, but they did create difficulties. They found they had to rush the children to get ready to go and, later, rush the children back to the centre for lunch. This meant extra transitions, and when they were behind schedule, it could become very hectic.

Veronica stated, "you're always on the go . . . so often you're stopping their play" (3/3b/18). Both participants maintained that these aspects of predetermined plans may have benefits on paper, but they made it difficult for them to implement their own philosophy of teaching. This appeared to be especially true for Veronica. During my observations, there were so many whole group transitions, involving the 21 children, and at times, transitions were made more difficult by the scheduling of teacher breaks. For example, during a whole group transition from small group time to outside play, one teacher was on break. It meant that there were only two teachers to help twenty-one 2½- to 3½-year-olds get ready to go outside in the winter weather. The teachers and children had to wait until **all** the children were ready. These transitions were long and difficult. These types of situations constrained rather than

challenged the teachers. As Veronica stated, “The problem I have is that I don’t think that it’s realistic for our age group, some of the things that are expected, so that makes it stressful for us and stressful for the children” (2/3a/4).

In sum, Veronica’s and Victoria’s classroom were separated into well-defined interest areas that contained a variety of materials. The materials were accessible and well-maintained. The areas were arranged to separate the quiet activities from the more active ones. There were separate rooms for the children’s large muscle development. However, the design of the physical environment of Victoria’s work place meant limited space and limited access to materials, for parts of the day.

Both participants had situations, relating to their routines, which they perceived placed constraints on their ability to implement their stated goals. The administrators in the centres had exercised their authority in this area by determining the daily scheduling of events. This meant little uninterrupted time for free play or spontaneous planning of events based on the children’s interests and needs. It also added to the number of large group transitions which can be difficult for young children. For example, when the activities required going outdoors, dressing for the cold Canadian winters was time consuming and tiresome for everyone involved. Imposed scheduling of specific events and limited physical space made it difficult for the participants to implement their espoused philosophy. It also appeared to negatively affect Veronica’s and Victoria’s sense of teacher autonomy in their practices. This placed added stress on the participants who were working in a job that is both physically and mentally demanding. I questioned Victoria’s routine of

working on the calendar every day, but she believed the children enjoyed it. However, this activity is developmentally inappropriate for most preschool-aged children, and it is something that is already done in so many public primary classes. This is a teacher directed activity and associated with the traditional role of the teacher. Victoria did state that she observed this activity in their placements. It did not appear to have been questioned in their practice, although it would be developmentally appropriate for the older children they would have observed in public school placements. This routine use of the calendar may also be related to their stated concern that the children be prepared for later schooling. My attention to this area is also related to my own frustrations with what I perceive as an inordinate, normative attention to the calendar or weather rather than an activity more appropriate to the preschool children's interest and development. Katz (1994) pointed out that attention to the "calendar ritual" (p. 126) in preschools could negatively affect children's confidence in their own competence when they are being expected to act with understanding when they do not comprehend the concepts.

Free Play: Teacher-Child Interactions

Veronica and Victoria identified similar aspects of their approaches to free play which they related to their preservice preparation. Both stated that free play was an important component of their curriculum, which was based on their philosophy espoused by their preservice program, that children "learn by doing." They also recognized the importance of free play for the children's growth in all areas of development. As Victoria stated, "There's a lot of social skills. In the block area,

there's a lot of problem-solving – they tend to build things and if they fall down, what happened? There's language skills and free choice" (3/3b/16). Veronica explained that her role during free play "can be anywhere from referee to cleaner to playing with them [the children] or reading a book to a small group" (2/3b/26). Victoria accented her role as "a player" (Jones & Reynolds, 1992) in the children's play as she liked to be actively involved in their play. She appeared very comfortable on the floor with the children, unintrusively assisting them in their activities and making suggestions to enrich their play. One of her concerns was that during free play, one teacher was often called to do administrative duties and it meant one less teacher to monitor the area. She remarked that this meant spending most of her time dealing with conflicts or matters that required a teacher's immediate attention. Both participants engaged in a lot of nonverbal interactions, particularly facial expressions, with the children. One example that stood out in my mind was a little girl who was having trouble with her hat. It kept falling down on her eyes. I introduced myself and asked if I could help with her hat. She nodded and so I helped her to pull it back on her head. Once the hat was on right, the child looked at me and said, "Thank you, Mary Jane." Victoria turned in her direction and gave her an approving smile. The little girl's face spread into a wide grin, demonstrating her pride in herself (3/1ob/2).

During free play in both these rooms, the children's behaviour was governed by a number of rules. For example, the children were not allowed to move the dolls from the housekeeping area. If a child started to move out of the housekeeping area

and she had a doll in her arms, she was told to return the doll if she wanted to go to another area. Victoria was concerned that some of these rules were not developmentally appropriate. As she told of how the children were not permitted to remove the materials from one area for use in another area, she asserted, “Why can’t they bring their doll out [of housekeeping] if they’re incorporating that into their play with the blocks? Sometimes, I question that” (3/3b/19). Children were also required to spend a minimum of time in an interest area before they were allowed to leave to go to another area.

Another practice used in these rooms was to close interest areas or equipment. In Victoria’s centre, many interest areas were closed for large blocks of the day. In Veronica’s room, some areas were closed because of the children’s behaviour or just not opened. For example, I heard Veronica tell two children, “Tomorrow when you want to play in housekeeping you won’t be allowed” (2/1ob/3). Later in the day the area was closed because the children were not cleaning up. In response to my observation, Veronica wrote, “We have tried many different ways of dealing with the two girls who didn’t clean up: praise, modelling appropriate behaviour, stickers, putting less in housekeeping, etc.” (2/1ob/3). However, Beardsley (1990) explained how this approach takes the control away from the child and all the power goes to the teacher. She stated, “When this activity [clean up time] is taken out of the child’s control by the teachers’ insistence that it be completed on their terms, not the child’s, then an enjoyable, intellectually stimulating task becomes a burdensome chore” (p.

97). As Beardsley explained, there are a cognitive aspects, such as reversibility, related to the clean up, as well as a social responsibility.

This aspect of cleaning up all the materials at the end of every free period was the procedure that all the participants followed. However, these were the only two participants to discuss this practice. Veronica and Victoria both expressed their distress about this procedure. Veronica was concerned about interrupting the children's play so often and that some of the materials in her room were not developmentally appropriate, thus making the clean up difficult. Victoria stated that she finds it difficult to tell a child that he has to take his building apart when he has just spent so much time in building it. Why not have the children place their name tag on unfinished work or take pictures of completed constructions? This would allow the child a part in the decision of what happens to her or his creations. Beardsley (1990) stressed that, "Good early childhood programs are sensitive, in terms of both the structure and process, to the development of the child as an individual and as a member of the group" (p. 96).

Another commonality between these participants was their emphasis on language development. They engaged individual children in questions concerning their work. They would use a variety of questions that would extend and enrich the children's play. For example, one child was singing a song from a popular movie, that was about a lion. As he sang the song, the child was building a house in which to sleep. Victoria was familiar with the story and asked him a variety of types of questions to gain an understanding of his interpretation of the movie. There were

questions that involved making predictions and using his knowledge in the new situations she was creating. As the lion was planning to go to sleep, she asked, 'What will you eat when you wake up? How do you think you will feel if you eat too much?' The child had initiated the conversation, and Victoria was expanding on his understanding of the basic dilemmas within the story. This use of different types of questions for expanding and sustaining the children's language was certainly a strength associated with these participants' teaching practice.

A final similarity was their attention to children with special needs. There was a child with a severe hearing impairment in Veronica's room, and she had integrated a lot of visuals into all aspects of her programming. She used sign language with all the children and there were pictures of objects with their accompanying signs around the room. During free play I observed a child using sign language with another child. This use of sign language as a way of communication was becoming an accepted part of the curriculum. Victoria was also very understanding and knowledgeable about a child in her centre who was developmentally delayed. This was another strength of the graduates of the 4-year preparation program.

Overall, Veronica and Victoria both stressed the important role of free play for children's opportunities for integrated learning and overall healthy development. During free play, their teaching practices and interactions with the children were very different, but there were certain aspects that appeared to be related to their preservice preparation program. Five areas of their teaching in which similar patterns emerged were: (a) their use of nonverbal language with the children to provide positive

feedback and/or to direct classroom management; (b) their emphasis on language development -- they would use different types of questions for teacher intervention in which they involved the children in sustained conversations and critical thinking skills; (c) their attention to special needs children and their knowledge of teaching strategies to help integrate these children's needs into the classroom environment, in a pleasant, accepting manner; (d) free play was much more rule-oriented than in the other classrooms in which I observed, and children were not allowed to use interest areas for integrated play; and (e) their questioning of and reflection on "accepted practices" in their day care environments.

These aspects of the participants' teaching practice may be linked to their preservice preparation program. Their in-depth knowledge of child development and learning content and practice related to special needs children could be related to their emphasis on language and attention to integration of special needs children into their classroom. Their background in research skills would also assist them in gaining additional knowledge of specific, individual needs. Their use of nonverbal language, however, appeared to be related more to their quiet, observant, personal natures than their educational backgrounds. Their rule-orientation during free play, which involved additional teacher direction, may be linked to two main factors. The first was their working environment where this was the accepted practice; and second, their expressed need for more attention to the practical application of their formal, academic knowledge so that they could be familiar with the principles of developmentally appropriate practice that respects the importance of children's

initiative and autonomy during free play. Yet, the participants had noted the need for independence and choice in the development of a healthy self-esteem in their stated philosophy. Their critical reflection on some of the existing practices may be related to both their formal knowledge of child development and their work in general studies and professional foundations because the participants stated that their interdisciplinary studies encouraged them to critically examine existing systemic structures and processes from different perspectives.

Summary

Veronica and Victoria explained that their teaching philosophies were based on development of the whole child through a play oriented curriculum that emphasized the process involved in the children's work rather than the product. Their goals involved developing the children's independence, creativity, and healthy self-esteem. They stressed the need to prepare the children for further schooling. Assessments of their teaching were based on standard rating on a variety of checklists with brief notes of the teachers' comments.

There were notable inconsistencies between their stated philosophies in the interview and their teaching practices observed during naturalistic observations. For example, during small group activities, there was a range from free exploration of materials to more teacher directed activities that involved finished products. The topics were related to weekly themes rather than extending on different focuses based on the children's reactions to the present activity. There was also little documentation of the children's behaviour or data gathering for an emergent curriculum that would

encompass and recognize the children's sociocultural backgrounds, an area that they stated their preservice program emphasized. Points of focus in the classroom, such as bulletin boards, were teacher designed and involved very little of the children's work, other than teacher designed crafts. This approach was related to the participants' perceived lack of attention to pedagogy in their preservice program; working conditions such as administrative directions, parental expectations, and limited physical space; and the participants' expressed concern about providing the children with the skills needed for future schooling experiences.

The physical environments were well-arranged, well-maintained, and accessible for the children. There were well-defined interest areas (including separate rooms for the children large muscle development) which contained a variety of materials. However, when Victoria worked with her small group, it was in a room that had limited space and placed constraints on the types of activities she could provide for the children. In the area of scheduling, there were conflicts with the participants' stated philosophy and constraints in the amount of teacher autonomy. Imposed administrative scheduling meant added transitions, inappropriate field trips, and constant interruptions to the children's play. It also added stress to the participants' work with young children. I questioned the use of the calendar as a daily activity which appeared to have been influenced by their student teaching experiences.

Both participants stressed the importance of free play and the role it plays in the child's learning and overall development. Participant/child interactions were

characterized by: (a) use of nonverbal interaction; (b) emphasis on language development; (c) attention to special needs children; (d) rule orientation to free play; and (e) reflection on the overall structuring of free play. These characteristics were related to the following aspects of participants' preservice preparation: (a) a topical approach to theories of child development which involved in-depth knowledge of the different areas of children growth and development; (b) their specialization in developmental disabilities; and (c) their interdisciplinary program that encouraged a critical examination of societal issues and concerns. Personal characteristics and present working conditions were recognized as being notable influences on the participants' interactions during free play.

Comparing and Contrasting Participants' Teaching Practices

Each of the 6 participants in the study described a philosophy that was child-centred. They believed in an integrated approach to learning that promoted the growth and development of the whole child. The development of a positive self-esteem in young children was especially important. Long-term goals related to personal characteristics such as independence by enhancing self-help skills and problem solving abilities. Stated teaching approaches were all based on the need for the child to be actively engaged in the exploration of her or his environment. The graduates of the 1-year ECE program also stressed the importance of the learning environment being developmentally appropriate. All participants stated that their philosophy was consistent with that of their preservice preparation programs.

Written curriculum plans for both the graduates of the 1-year and 2-year ECE programs were related to the format of the 1-year ECE program. It was an integrated, thematic approach to programming that was developed around curriculum webs. These webs incorporated the eight key experiences of the High Scope curriculum model. The graduates of the 4-year program developed plans based on weekly themes which often related to traditional holidays.

Teacher-initiated activities developed by Lee and Liz were modelled after activities they completed in their 1-year preservice program. These activities involved the use of concrete learning materials and were based on: the children's interests, needs, and development; an integrated approach to learning; and a flexible approach to teaching that allowed for the children's ideas. Daily observations and assessment records were an important part of the program and were identified as a beneficial aspect of their preservice program. Suzanne and Samantha used a variety of types of activities that demonstrated a range from appropriate to inappropriate practices. Similarities between them included their positive attitude to working with young children and their concern that the children enjoy day care, rather than any specific teaching strategies or techniques. This may relate to the lack of theory in their 2-year preservice program. Veronica's and Victoria's use of weekly themes was discussed. Their planned activities, like those of the graduates of the 2-year program, demonstrated a range from developmentally appropriate practices to inappropriateness practices. However, they differed from Suzanne and Samantha in that inconsistencies with their stated overall goals appeared to be related to personal beliefs about the role

of the preschool teacher, “how to” implement their knowledge of child development, and working conditions.

Discussions of routines involved descriptions of the participants’ physical environment and daily schedules. Lee, Liz, Suzanne, and Samantha had rather similar daily schedules that demonstrated a balance of activities. Lee and Liz were very efficient in their planned transitions which they credited to their preservice course work and experiences in practicum placements. All of the physical environments were traditional day care arrangements but the participants encouraged different levels of independent exploration by the children. Interest areas were well defined and well maintained. There was a variety of materials that were developmentally appropriate and readily accessible to the children. In general, the art areas were lacking in three-dimensional materials and the art easels were not set up. Suzanne was an exception as she did provide materials for free, creative expression such as painting at the easel, working with clay, and making three-dimensional collages. The physical environments of the rooms of Veronica and Victoria had many of the same features of the other rooms but they did have aspects that impinged on their abilities to implement their own philosophies. Their schedules emphasized more teacher-initiated activities than child-initiated activities. They also expressed a need for more uninterrupted time for free play. Events and trips planned by the administrators of the centre added to the constraints placed on their time. This also meant additional, whole group transitions which were time consuming and confusing for the children. The organizational approach also appeared to place restraints on the

teachers' sense of autonomy and added to the stress involved in caring for young children.

Free play was a valued component of the programs of all participants. They stated that their preservice programs had stressed that children learn through their interactions with their environment. Free play also contributes to young children's overall growth and development. Curricula in the classrooms of Lee, Liz, Suzanne, and Samantha devoted more time to free play than did Veronica's and Victoria's. However, this was related in part to centre policies, as both Veronica and Victoria expressed a need for more uninterrupted free play. Each of the participants believed that their role during free play was to facilitate the needs of the children. Lee, Liz, Suzanne, and Samantha placed more emphasis on the prepared environment as it related to their theme, than Veronica or Victoria. An important aspect of the free play environment of the participants' from the 2-year program was their use of music. They directly related this to their preservice program. Their use of music lent a caring and inviting atmosphere to their rooms. The participants from the 4-year program referred to the wide scope of the teacher's role in meeting the needs of the children during free play and were more adept at adapting the curriculum for special needs children than the other participants.

During free play the teacher/child interactions of the participants from the 1-year program were characterized by an emphasis on language development and independent problem solving. Lee also encouraged the development of empathy in the children, and Liz actively engaged the children in role playing. These were areas

they felt their preservice program had emphasized. Strategies Lee and Liz used to guide the children's behaviour were also related to their preservice program, particularly their practicum placements. These strategies included teacher modelling, redirection, and the use of questions or props to enrich the children's play. These were strategies also employed by the other teachers. However, Suzanne and Samantha related their use of these strategies to their teaching experiences. Veronica and Victoria had stated that their preservice program dealt with guiding children's behaviour using behaviourist approaches, such as time out. They stated that often this approach was not appropriate in early childhood programs, thus they had taken workshops on classroom management, offered by the 1-year program, early in their professional career.

During free play, the atmosphere in the rooms of Veronica and Victoria were different from that in the other participants' rooms. It was a pleasant atmosphere but was more teacher directed than the other participants' classrooms. For example, the children's play was much more rule driven, with implicit expectations for appropriate behaviour in each interest area. One implication of this was more teacher direction, more teacher talk, as well as less choice and independence. The participants related this approach to centre policies and administrative decisions. Their teacher/child interactions were characterized by an emphasis on language development. An area in which they were exceptional was their attention to integrating children with special needs into the classroom.

Overall, they appeared to be grappling with issues related to their construction of a theory of practice. They recognized needed changes in existing practices but were unsure of how to bring about these changes. Their critical approach to their practices could be related to their broad, liberal education, while their struggle with “how to” may be related to their concentration on their knowledge of theories of development which informs, but is different than a theory of practice (Genishi, 1992).

The exploration of the key aspects, such as teacher-initiated activities, routines, and teacher-child interactions, of the participants’ teaching practices led to many valuable insights regarding the impact of their preservice preparation programs. Examination of these aspects identified direct links between teaching practices and the preservice preparation of the preschool teacher. Environmental influences, such as centre policies and administrative decisions, have also been shown to impact on the teaching practices of the participants in their care settings.

CHAPTER VI

LEARNING FROM THE PRACTITIONER

In Canada, there has been an increase in the number of families that require professional child care, which has led to a need for additional early childhood teachers. Research in quality child care has identified teachers' preparation as an important indicator of the level of quality of care and education provided to young children.

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of experienced, preschool teachers, who had graduated from varying types of preservice preparation programs, regarding the nature of their training programs and its impact on their present teaching practices. In the prelude to the study, three research questions were identified: What are the similarities and differences among preschool teachers' perceptions of their different preservice teacher preparation programs? How and why does a teacher's preservice preparation influence her or his teaching practices? What do the participants perceive to be the relative influences on their teaching practices in their early childhood settings? Six preschool teachers provided responses to these questions. In the analysis of the findings, areas of preservice teacher preparation that were perceived to be beneficial, in need of improvement, or require a change were identified. Links or suggested links were established between participants' perceptions and present teaching practices. Their perceptions and suggested links were at times controversial or presented dilemmas as to how best to prepare teachers in early childhood education. There were different strengths and weaknesses in the

three approaches to preschool teacher preparation. In this chapter the interpretations of the findings are discussed, and when they support or challenge studies by other researchers, they are related to the literature review. The findings are discussed under the following headings: professional foundations and instructional knowledge in early childhood teacher preparation; teaching and learning: examining participants' perceptions of instructors' pedagogical approaches; practicum experiences; and the subculture of day care centres.

Professional Foundations and Instructional Knowledge in Early Childhood Teacher Preparation

The findings of the study demonstrated three, key aspects of participants' perceptions concerning the role of professional foundations and instructional knowledge in preparing prospective teachers to learn and grow in future teaching practices. The first aspect is the value of an eclectic approach to theoretical knowledge in child development. This knowledge can assist preschool teachers to interpret children's behaviours as well as facilitate their future learning. The experiences of Veronica and Victoria demonstrated the value of in-depth theoretical knowledge of child development. Their detailed knowledge of theories of child development and the variability within this process of development was demonstrated in their individualized programming and adaptations for the children with special needs. This was also evident in their verbal interactions with the children during free play. Their use of a variety of types of questions built on the children's existing knowledge and expanded on the children's understanding of language use. This

relationship between advanced teacher preparation in early childhood education is supported by other researchers and has been related to increased language and cognitive abilities in young children (Arnett, 1986; Berk, 1985; Tizard, Philps, & Plewis, 1976; Whitebook et al., 1989). Knowledge of theories of child development is also a recognized basis for growth as a professional in the field of early childhood education (VanArdell, 1994). However, an area in which these participants were struggling was in the translation of their eclectic theories into the overall learning environment. This finding illustrates the value of not only being knowledgeable about theories of child development, but, also, the importance of learning how to use this theoretical knowledge as a part of planning, implementing, and evaluating an emergent curriculum that is based on the interests, needs, development, and sociocultural backgrounds of the children. Peters and Klinzing (1990) asserted, “the early childhood teacher is expected to be an expert in and an applied practitioner of child development” (p. 67).

A second key aspect of the findings is the positive influence of a thematic, curriculum approach to planning, implementing, and evaluating the overall learning environment. The experiences of Lee and Liz demonstrated the powerful impact of a thematic, integrated approach to learning about instructional knowledge in early childhood education. The many links developed between the teaching practices of Lee and Liz demonstrated the potential impact of this integrated approach to programming. For example, principles of child development were integrated into program planning, implementation, and evaluation through the study of systematically

observing and recording children's actions. Peters and Klinzing (1990) stated the benefits of instructional knowledge on "how-to" observe and record children's behaviours are:

- (1) [it] assists the student to make a connection between what is learned about normative development sequences and patterns and his or her understanding of the uniqueness of every child, and (2) reinforces the notion of systematic study as a way to understand children. (p. 76)

Opportunities to plan, implement, and evaluate the different aspects of a planned curriculum, in direct experiences with young children, appeared to be a very positive aspect of the 1-year program. This attention to the "how-to" of instructional knowledge appeared to provide a basis for Lee and Liz to organize and retain their acquired knowledge.

Nonetheless, there were controversies in the links established between the practices of the participants from the 1-year program and their teaching practices. The graduates of the 1-year program stated that their activities were based on the children's interests, needs, and development. Their planned activities, however, appeared to be based on the participants' assumed knowledge of the children's interests rather than building on existing knowledge as evidenced by their reactions to present activities. I did not observe the teachers involving the children in any discussions of how they would like to proceed with a particular topic, nor did I observe any note taking of their observations of the children. The teachers appeared to have begun to rely on past activities, particularly those modelled in their preservice

programs, and to fit them into their program. This implies a need for attention to professional development of preschool teachers.

The third key aspect of the findings in this area is the need for professional education for preschool teachers. The experiences of all the participants demonstrated a need for professional development and further education. Preservice preparation is a beginning of a life-long, developmental process of learning about teaching, and the findings of this study demonstrated that there are strengths and weaknesses in different approaches to preparing professionals. Attention to the professional development of preschool teachers could build on the strengths and decrease the weaknesses of preschool teachers' practices. It could also address the process of change in working conditions in different early childhood settings.

In sum, the central role of professional foundations and instructional knowledge for early childhood teachers was recognized by all the participants. However, the structure for the presentation of these knowledge areas differed in each program. The differences resulted in a variety of types of knowledge about early childhood education among the participants' perceptions. The findings of the study which related to these different types of knowledge demonstrated: (a) the value of eclectic, theoretical knowledge of child development; (b) the positive impact of the use of a curriculum model to provide an integrated approach to planning, implementing, and evaluating the overall learning environment; and (c) the need for professional education of practitioners to build on strengths and address weaknesses of the practitioners as they work within the existing realities of day care centres. These

aspects of the participants' perceptions appeared to be related to the nature of their preservice teacher preparation and more specifically, its role in preparing them to learn from future work experiences in day care centres.

Teaching and Learning: Examining Participants' Perceptions of Instructors' Pedagogical Approaches

Based on the participants' perceptions, preservice teacher preparation was demonstrated to impact in various areas on the present teaching practices of the participants. In this section, some of the teaching pedagogies used by instructors in the preservice programs are discussed as a way of exploring the relationship between these pedagogical approaches and the nature of the participants' perceived learning as well as future teaching practices. My interest was in conceptualizing how the participants' viewed pedagogical approaches that involved their active participation, and then to suggest how these perceptions impacted on their future teaching practices. My purpose was to demonstrate how different pedagogical approaches may impact on the teacher candidates' perceptions of the value of the learning content and its applicability to future teaching practices.

All the participants rated course content that involved practical application of knowledge as the most beneficial to their future teaching and stated that this was the way they learned. They valued the knowledge of activities to use with young children and the opportunity to actually do the activities. However, there was one participant who did not value this approach and felt that as an adult she did not want to be placed in the role of being a child. She appreciated the opportunity to learn about different

activities but not the expectation that she actually complete these activities or engage in role playing. She felt these approaches were condescending and limited in their value for future learning.

All the participants valued opportunities to apply academic knowledge through activities such as case studies, observations of children, individual presentations, individual research assignments, or small group discussions. They stated that these approaches were most beneficial in learning about instructional knowledge, which is an important component in the preparation of early childhood professionals (NAEYC, CEC, NBPTS, 1996; Saracho, 1993; Spodek & Saracho, 1990). Benefits of these pedagogical approaches included: learning about the child's perspective; the importance of detailed planning and presentation of materials; free exploration of open-ended materials; using an integrated approach to learning; learning instructional strategies for use with young children; and collecting activities to use with young children. These approaches appeared to enhance the participants' understanding of different knowledge constructs and, thus, increased their understanding of how to use this knowledge in their teaching practices. It appeared to make the knowledge more personalized, explicit, and accessible than the more didactic approaches to teaching. Perhaps it provided a safe base from which to proceed in one's learning. This need for certainty and definite answers appeared to be an important aspect of teacher preparation for these participants and is supported by existing research (McAninch, 1993; Bruner, 1996; Jones, 1986). Wasserman (1994), in her discussion on the value of case studies in teacher education, argued that teacher educators need to bridge the

gap between “knowing and knowing how” (p. 604). She stated that instructional strategies such as case studies allow the prospective teacher to “learn to envision teaching as a series of complex situations that are in a constant state of flux. ...They learn to become more critical, more thoughtful, more intelligent meaning makers, exchanging simplistic judgements for suspended judgement” (pp. 604-605). Bridging this identified gap could be superficial attention to what may be a serious and complex issue in society. This valuing of practical, pedagogical approaches may be grounded in existing ways of learning that are socially and culturally determined from past educational experiences. This desire for the practical may also limit teachers’ opportunities for further learning in other ways of knowing, such as reviewing research studies or reading professional, research journals. Further research could explore this area that relates to what appeared to be a basic need of the participants for the practical as a prerequisite to learning.

One possible link between the participants’ need for practical, pedagogical approaches and their present teaching practices was their emphasis on the children’s “doing,” with little reflection on the actual process. This lack of reflection on the learning process was evident in the shortage of representation of the children’s work in attractive classroom displays. By examining the process through the product, preschool teachers can begin to gain insights about individual children, the program, and instructional techniques. LeeKeenan and Nimmo (1993), in writing about the Reggio Emilia project approach, stated,

In projects at Reggio, we saw strong connection between process and product. ...Because children of this age [two and three years of age] tend to be immersed in the immediate moment and in the process rather than the product of their activity, often teachers, when developing curriculum, tend to put little emphasis on long-range planning and on developing extensive connections between different activities. But through Reggio ideas we saw a way to bridge this gap. The process and the product seem to merge together. Any piece of work shifts through multiple transitions as ideas are explored, discussed, and revised and new children enter the adventure to offer new elaborations. Through group analysis of the product, the product can become a starting point from which to start something new. (pp. 253-254)

This use of children's work to expand and gain greater depth of thinking was not utilized in my observations of the participants. There was some reflection on the process through the use of questioning during activities, but it was limited.

An examination of the daily schedule of the participants revealed that there was no time for planning or discussions with co-workers about the children's interests, needs, and abilities, so as to develop an emergent curriculum. Teaching in a day care centre appeared to involve implementing sets of preplanned activities. All the participants referred to their binder of activities or picture files as treasured possessions. The expectation that beginning day care teachers have a portfolio of activities to implement without regard for children's existing knowledge and interests is a complex issue. The issue may also relate to the high value the participants placed

on the practicum experiences. Further research in the area, involving professionals in the day care centres and the preservice teacher programs, appears to be needed.

Overall, the findings of the study indicate the need for a variety of pedagogical models in teaching. The pedagogical approach used by instructors appeared to contribute to the learning that was acquired. The participants always valued being actively engaged in the learning process in a collaborative manner with their peers. They believed that their learning was enhanced when they engaged in the application of propositional knowledge. The participants' perceptions supported Jones' (1986) argument for an active approach to adult learning. However, this may be a much more complex issue and one that affects the participants' opportunities for further learning.

Practicum Experiences

Teaching young children is a dynamic, interactive process, and teachers' knowledge, skills, values, and beliefs about teaching needs to be contextualized within different settings, with children of varying interests, needs, and abilities, and from diverse populations. That prospective teachers learn from modelling experienced teachers (VanArsdell, 1994) and through tacit learning in 'doing' the actual teaching with young children (Sternberg & Caruso, 1985) was supported by the participants' perceptions of their preservice preparation. They all rated their practicum experiences and opportunities to work directly with children as the most valuable aspects of their programs.

The participants described very different approaches to the practicum experiences. The 1-year program provided a thematic approach to teacher training which was prescriptive. McAninch (1993) described a prescriptive approach as supporting an “emphasis on concrete tasks, close supervision by teacher educators, heavy use of advance organizers, and plenty of opportunities for guided practice” (p. 39). The use of a specific framework for teaching appeared to provide an avenue for the novice teachers to organize their thinking and to plan their curriculum. During some curriculum classes, the participants developed their own curricula to be used in their practica experiences. This approach provided meaning and relevancy to the course work. It also provided the student teacher with a basis from which to ground their teaching performance rather than being dependent on the classroom teacher or searching for isolated activities. This organization of knowledge based on a specific, theoretical approach appeared to assist the students in understanding the purpose and rationale of an integrated approach to curriculum planning. After completing their activities in their practicum setting, the participants would discuss what had happened with their practicum coaches or with an instructor in a class. Their experiences would then be discussed in relation to the generalized principles of developmentally appropriate practice. Feedback and coaching were almost immediate as they used a vertical integration of course work and practica, and students were able to discuss their own teaching behaviours, classroom routines, and planned activities with the classroom instructors. Placement in a lab school meant that the teaching was consistent with the philosophy of the program and they were able to assume greater

responsibilities than in the other placements. The participants believed the experience of student teaching was given the same status as the classroom instruction in learning how to provide quality care for young children. The importance of valuing both classroom instruction and teaching practice was supported in the findings in the literature review (National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 1982; Snider & Fu, 1990).

This thematic approach to training also appeared to prevent the “two world pitfall” (Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1985, p. 54) in which student teachers in a traditional teacher education program dismissed the academic learning as not relevant to their student teaching placement. Instructors all followed the same theoretical approach, thus provided consistency for the beginning teacher. The approach could be related to knowledge of procedural aspects such as transitions; their abilities to provide a thematic, integrated curriculum; their concern for the overall learning environment and classroom management; and their overall level of consistency in their teaching practices in relation to their stated philosophy. Their overall learning environment was harmonious and routines were well synchronised. Procedural aspects of the program were carried out in a very efficient manner.

However, the participants’ reflection on their teaching was limited to following generalized principles. This is a type of reductionist approach to teaching if not followed up with additional course work after they are in the field. It is also possible that the participants, who are bright, articulate individuals, may tire of practicing this approach.

The approach of the 2-year program was very different from that used by the other two programs, as perceived by the other participants. The course work and practica were considered separate components of the program, and the participants made few links between the two areas. The participants emphasized that they learned about procedural aspects, such as routines and collecting materials to use with young children. They stated that their program stressed a positive approach to discipline. However, in being positive in their classroom management, they tended to refer to behaviouristic approaches such as classroom rules, rather than utilizing strategies used by those who graduated from the 1-year program, for example, redirecting and collaborative problem solving. These participants also indicated that working with children helped them to learn to be flexible and to change strategies according to the children's reactions. In my observations I noted that they were very flexible and did change their planned activities based on the children's behaviours.

Participants from the 4-year program completed practica in a wide range of early childhood settings. As is true of most degree programs, the practicum supervisors may or may not have been teaching in the program. Neither participant provided knowledge of substantive feedback from their university supervisors. However, they both stated that by the third and fourth years they were beginning to value the practicum as an opportunity to apply their knowledge of formal child development theories. They stressed the need for more opportunities for practical application of theories. In their present classrooms, teacher planned curricula did not

allow for an emergent curriculum. Other aspects of their teaching, such as the use of crafts and calendar/weather charts, appeared to be related to practica experiences.

These participants' lack of consistency between their teaching practices and stated philosophy could be related to several areas in their program: separation of different early childhood courses relating to instructional knowledge which is important for teaching practices (Snider & Fu, 1990); varied levels of quality feedback from faculty supervisors; limited time in each placement; lack of continuity of practicum, which was undertaken on Tuesdays and Thursdays; limited time and amount of diversity in types of childhood settings may have contributed to few opportunities to experience the full range of responsibilities in a placement; and the stress of a full academic course load in addition to practicum placements may not have allowed the participants the time necessary to devote to their practica. The situation appears to be tautological in that the participants were provided with so many varied experiences that it restricted their learning. It is also difficult to determine how much of this was related to difficulties they were experiencing in their present teaching situations. The participants stated that the centre's philosophy was not totally consistent with their personal philosophy of teaching young children. They were reflecting on the practices in their centres, and the development of reflective practitioners is an important aspect of preservice teacher education. As Lubeck (1996) noted, "'reflective practitioners' learn to think deeply about the implications of their choices and may be more likely to tailor their activities to the diverse needs of children in a multicultural society" (p. 147). These findings support the important

role of theoretical knowledge in developing reflective practitioners (Dewey, 1929; Kennedy, 1987).

In sum, the participants who completed the 1-year thematic program believed that their practica were an integrated part of their program and contributed to their understanding of their course work. The participants from the 2-year program indicated that the practica were not directly integrated with the course work, but that the experiences contributed to their procedural knowledge about teaching and they had added to their repertoire of activities for young children. The participants from the 4-year program valued the opportunities to work with children in so many different placements in their practica; however, there were difficulties in their practica that related to the university setting. Nevertheless, all the participants valued opportunities to learn from an experienced teacher and to work with children.

The Subculture of Day Care Centres

There was a common preschool culture among these participants' classrooms, such as the use of space, arrangement of materials and equipment, activities on the schedule (although they differed in duration of scheduled times and degree of perceived flexibility which are important areas), materials and equipment, organization of the staff as team teachers with rotating responsibilities, turnover of staff, and even in the language used, for example, "open your ears," "use your words," or "go to circle." Structural obstacles, such as limited space, placed constraints on the teachers' practices. There was no adult-sized furniture in any of the rooms, and one participant was pregnant during the study, while two other

participants suffered from back pain. However, the most difficult adjustment appeared to be one of working in a centre where the philosophy was not consistent with one's personal philosophy. The participants from the 4-year program were dealing with challenges imposed on them by administrative decisions. These decisions were not always viewed as developmentally appropriate for the children and added stress to teaching responsibilities. It also took away from the participants' sense of autonomy as professionals and added feelings of needing to defend their teaching practices. Difficulties that administrative decisions presented for the teachers appeared to be viewed as a reflection of the participants' lack of teaching ability. It also created a tension that I did not sense in the other classrooms.

Common, too, were the low wages and low status of working in a day care centre. For example, Suzanne told of going to a local store which specializes in teaching supplies and requesting the discount for teachers. When the clerk asked where she worked, she was informed that, as a day care centre teacher, she was not a real teacher and was not eligible for the discount. Nevertheless, in all the classrooms there was an atmosphere of joy and excitement that demonstrated the dedication of the preschool teachers who participated in this study.

Summary

This study demonstrated the importance of early childhood teachers as a source of knowledge about teacher preparation and teaching practices. The findings illustrated some potential ways in which different early childhood teacher preparation programs can impact on teacher candidates' acquired knowledge and skills, as well as

how they impact on future teaching practices. The participants' perceptions demonstrated that the relationship between early childhood teacher preparation and teaching practices is complex and multifaceted.

Key aspects of the participants' positive perceptions of their preservice teacher preparation related to professional foundations and instructional knowledge. These aspects included the value of theoretical knowledge of child development; the benefits of a thematic, integrated approach to curriculum planning, implementation, and evaluation; and the need for professional development and education in early childhood education. All the participants in the study believed that instructors' pedagogical approaches that actively involved them in the learning process to be the most beneficial aspects of the course work, and it was these approaches to teaching prospective teachers that the participants identified as most of the links to their teaching practices. Practicum experiences were considered to be the most valued component of their preservice preparation. All the participants stated that there were many benefits to working directly with children in a supervised situation. They valued the knowledge they gained regarding the procedural aspects of early childhood programs for young children. There was evidence of a preschool culture among the observed classrooms which characterized and shaped the perspective practices of the participants.

Results of this study suggested that while Powell and Dunn (1990) stated that non-baccalaureate degree programs are a "principle vehicle" for providing quality care to young children, there are limitations to this approach. It sets a minimum

standard of quality rather than working to develop a comprehensive system that integrates early childhood training with overall education in early childhood education programs.

These 6 preschool teachers provided detailed knowledge about the content and process of their early childhood preservice teacher preparation and its impact on their future teaching practices. They proved to be a valuable source of knowledge about early childhood teacher preparation. Similarities among their perceptions related to identified areas of importance, but their conceptualizations of these areas were vastly different, as were the approaches used in their preservice teacher preparation programs.

CHAPTER VII

IMPLICATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study explored the nature of the relationship between early childhood preparation and teaching practices from the perspectives of experienced, preschool teachers. The preschool teachers in this study provided needed information in this area. The implications of the findings also identified possibilities for further research which will be explored in this chapter.

Implications for Practice

Teachers in day care centres must be given the support, time, and resources to enhance their professional development and to change their practices as new research develops. For example, the participants in this study were all required to complete teacher designed activities in advance of their work with the children, at the expense of an emphasis on the importance of documenting an emergent curriculum based on the children's interests, development, and existing knowledge and skills. This approach places an emphasis on teacher preplanned activities rather than an emphasis on the importance of documentation of an emergent curriculum that is based on the children's interests, development, as well as existing knowledge. The present approach to curriculum planning, which is a requirement of licensing regulations, involves teachers' preplanning skills but ignores their interactive experiences with children and their reflections on these experiences. This need for research on the professional development of early childhood teachers has implications for policy makers and administrators in childcare centres. It would be important that this

needed research involve all the constituents in the different aspects of professional child care as the research findings would be of interest to policy makers, child care centre personnel, and early childhood teacher educators. Powell and Dunn (1990) stressed that concerns about early childhood education “must be viewed and addressed as manifestations of larger issues in the field of early childhood education and of society’s stance toward the education and care of young children” (p. 54).

Implications for Early Childhood Educators

This study demonstrated the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches to preparing prospective preschool teachers to work in day care centres. These identified strengths and weaknesses highlight three key issues for future research. The first aspect relates to the richness of the diversity of preservice programs and the need to explore and possibly develop an educational continuum amongst the early childhood teacher preparation programs that would provide an opportunity for practitioners’ professional growth and development. This would provide early childhood teachers with the opportunity to extend and broaden their knowledge about early childhood education. This educational continuum could also enhance the professional status of teachers who work in child care and become part of the development of a Canadian “professional lattice” (Willer & Bredekamp, 1993, p. 66).

A second aspect of future research is the need for early childhood teacher program standards to award teacher certification for work with children in licensed child care settings. The Association of Teacher Educators and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (1991) identified an early childhood

teaching certification as “the mandatory, state-level process whereby an individual who meets certain minimum standards gains a permit/license to practice and/or an institution is approved by the state to grant teaching certificates” (p. 17). The process for determining program standards requires a review of existing programs, a study of the knowledge base in early childhood education, and input from professionals involved in the different areas of early childhood education.

The third aspect is the need for further research in the process of how adults learn to enhance the care and education of young children, particularly as they relate to the benefits of providing an overall environment that supports and responds to the development of the whole child. An important finding that emerged from this study is how the preschool teachers’ orientation to their active engagement in the learning process shapes their perceptions of teacher preparation and impacts on their acquired knowledge as well as ensuing teaching practices. Further exploration of the beginning early childhood teacher modes of knowledge is needed, to determine how teacher educators can best provide an instructional environment that is supportive of prospective teachers’ advanced learning. This research would also have implications for the practicum experiences and the need for student teachers to reflect on the role of psychological and educational theories in their practice teaching.

Implications for Preschool Teachers

This study demonstrated the importance of a well- articulated philosophy of early childhood teaching for beginning teachers. This philosophy would explain their values, beliefs, goals, theoretical underpinning, and methods of assessment. It would

demonstrate their knowledge of and commitment to an integrated curriculum that provides developmentally and culturally appropriate practice for young children. A well-defined, comprehensive philosophy of teaching provides an objective, rational basis for discussions about teaching practices. As stated by Katz and Goffin (1990), a thematic approach for beginning teachers provides a “concordant message from all instructors . . . resulting in a clear message about how to proceed and what is ‘good’ or ‘bad,’ ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ in teaching” (p. 198). However, “the doctrine approach is antithetical to the norms and ethos of higher education institutions that prize openness to alternative points of view (Katz & Goffin, p. 199). The lack of attention to different, theoretical perspectives does not provide prospective teachers with the skills to research and critically examine other approaches to teaching. Further research is required into the thinking of a beginning teacher and the process of becoming an experienced teacher. There is a definite need for professional organizations that advocate for quality child care for young children to encourage professional development for preschool teachers.

Finally, an area that was not part of my study, but which became obvious during the naturalistic observations, was the need for early childhood teachers to be supported by society in their endeavours to provide quality child care. Studies are needed on the overall quality of day care environments for practitioners.

Accountability for young children can be physically, mentally, and emotionally draining. For example, the participants worked all day in an environment in which everything is child-sized. Three of the participants were well above average height,

yet if they wanted to sit down they had to use a child-sized chair. We must start to show day care teachers the respect they deserve, and perhaps this will help them to achieve the collective strength to demand better working conditions. Further research is required on the needs of the adults in the day care environment.

Conclusion

Research on different types and amounts of early childhood teacher education is just beginning to be explored. The use of the case study methodology to examine preschool teachers' perceptions in this area has added to the knowledge base. Preschool teachers are a rich source of knowledge concerning the nature of early childhood teacher preparation and its impact on learning how to teach. Interpretations of the findings of this study suggest that this is a valuable and worthwhile area of inquiry and that additional research is needed if we are to gain a deeper understanding of how best to prepare teachers for the care and education of young children.

Appendix A

CONSENT FORM: DIRECTORS

Dear Director:

Currently, I am working on a doctoral program in the School of Education at Dalhousie University. The topic of my dissertation is early childhood teacher education. I want to gain a better understanding of preservice teacher preparation and its impact on graduates' teaching practices from the perspective of experienced preschool teachers. I am planning to explore this area by conducting three, focused interviews with participants and four to six observations of their teaching. Observations will be followed by informal interviews. All interviews will be recorded and transcribed and will remain confidential to each participant. The names of participants and centres will not be disclosed. Pseudonyms will be used at all times. Participants will be free to withdraw from the study at any time, without prejudice.

There is a preschool teacher, working in your centre, who is interested in participating in my study. I am asking for your permission to carry out this research in your centre. I will keep you informed of my scheduled visits. If, at any time, my observations conflict with other centre activities please contact me and I will reschedule the visit.

Enclosed please find a copy of the participant's consent form.

By signing below, you are giving me permission to carry out the research in your centre, as stated above.

Signature of Director

Date

Appendix B

CONSENT FORM: PARTICIPANTS

Dear Participant:

Currently, I am working on a doctoral program in the School of Education at Dalhousie University. My dissertation is in the area of early childhood teacher education. I want to gain a better understanding of preservice teacher preparation and its impact on graduates' teaching practices from the perspective of experienced preschool teachers. I plan to examine this area through interviews with you and observations of you while you are teaching. As a participant in the study I would like to meet with you for three, focused interviews and approximately four to six visits to your centre to observe you teaching. I would also like to meet with you after each observation for an informal interview. All the interviews will be tape recorded and later transcribed.

During the study I will show you all the transcripts and would appreciate it if you would read them to check for their accuracy. If needed, we can modify and/or make additions for purposes of clarification of any of the comments. I will also share with you my interpretations and invite you to comment on them. The audiotapes and transcripts will remain confidential. Every effort will be made to ensure your anonymity. No names of persons, centres or locations will be disclosed. Pseudonyms will be used at all times.

The results of the study may be used in (a) my Ph.D. thesis, (b) future publications, (c) presentations to professional organizations, and (d) other purposes related to my work as an educator.

You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, without prejudice.

I, _____, agree to participate in this study under the conditions stated above.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Researcher

Date

Appendix C

INTERVIEW #1

Topic: Focused biography of pretraining experiences which may have influenced one's decision to become a teacher as well as one's values and beliefs about teacher and teaching.

Introduction: During this interview I'd like to talk to you about some of your early experiences that may have influenced your decision to become a teacher of young children. The reason I'm interested in this area is that many researchers have stated that early socializing experiences play a significant part in the development of the values and beliefs which influence the way one teaches.

1. Do you have a particular community that you think of as your "hometown"? If so, can you tell me a little bit about the town and what it was like being a child in this environment?
2. Thinking back to your school years, what is the earliest memory that comes to mind? What are some of your other memories of your school years? Are there any particular incidents that you feel influenced your decision to become a preschool teacher?
3. What did you like most about your school years? Did you attend preschool?
4. When you first started working with young children did it bring back any memories of your own childhood?
5. Tell me about your favourite teacher. What was s/he like?
6. Tell me about your worst teacher.
7. Can you recall when you made the actual decision to become a teacher? What were the main aspects that attracted you to the _____ program? What personal qualities did you feel you had that would help you in working with young children?
8. Are there certain people that influenced your decision to be a teacher of young children?
9. Were there other professions that you thought you might like to study about? Did you go into your teaching program directly from high school? Did you work at any part-time jobs during your high school years? During your training program?

10. Imagine for a moment that you have a teenage daughter who is trying to decide on a career. She asks you about your work in a day care. Would you encourage her to take training in early childhood education? If you had a son who wanted to work with young children, would you encourage him to take this training?
11. Are there any other experiences during your pretraining years that you feel may have played a role in the type of teacher you are today?
12. How did you make the decision to participate in this study?

Preparation for Interview # 2

I have some things I'd like for you to think about in preparation for our next interview. The topic is your early childhood training program. I'm going to be asking you about your course work and field experiences. I'd like for you to make a list of the courses you completed in your program. If you studied for more than one year, list the courses according to the year they were taken. If you have any papers, transcripts, projects, books, evaluations, or any other artifacts that would start you thinking about your programs, you might like to peruse them. If there is anything you'd like for me to see, feel free to bring it along.

Thank you for your time. I'm looking forward to meeting with you again soon.

Appendix D

INTERVIEW # 2

Focus: Participants perceptions of their preservice teacher preparation.

Introduction: Today, I would like to talk to you about your preservice training. I know that some time has passed since your training, but I am interested in discussing the aspects that you remember about it.

1. What training program did you complete?
2. When did you take your training? (Get date of high school graduation also.)
3. Can you remember what you thought the program would be like?
4. I've asked you to bring a list of the names of the courses you completed. Were you able to remember most of them? Now, I'd like for you to number them according to how valuable they have been to you in your work as a preschool teacher. If there are courses that you feel were of little or no benefit do not assign them a number.
5. Explore the thinking behind the rankings of the courses. (e.g. Why was this course so important to you? Was this important when you took the course or has it gained in importance since you have gained some teaching experience? There are some courses that have had little or no significance to you, why is that? Do you feel they should have been included in your program? If not, what areas of study do you feel would have been more beneficial?)
6. Go through each course and explore their comments. Probe for the reasoning behind judgements and try to gain knowledge about the content and the processes involved (theoretical orientation, practical ideas, topics covered, methods used in teaching the course, forms of evaluation, assigned readings, resources available, and so forth). Try to obtain specifics and/or examples related to the information provided.
7. Now, I'd like for you to arrange the course titles into categories of your choice -- sorting them in a way that has meaning for you. Discuss the categories. Explore some of the following categories: language development, multiculturalism, family background, cognitive development, social development, emotional development, creativity, physical development, developmentally appropriate practice, observing and recording children's behaviour, behavioural management, free play, or teaching strategies.

8. Was there a lot of interaction among the students in the program? For example, did you work in study groups or attend social events together? How would you describe the people in your program? Do you remember any of the comments they made about the program? Do you still keep in contact with them?
9. How would you describe the relationship between the faculty and the students? Would they have posted office hours? Would they attend social events? Was it fairly easy to contact them? Do you presently have any contact with your teachers?
University?
10. Now, I'd like to discuss the general atmosphere of the program. How would you describe the overall atmosphere? How was day care work viewed by the people in the program?
11. How did you do as far as grades are concerned? How did you do on the evaluations of your practica? Do you remember any of your supervisors' or cooperating teachers' comments?
12. When you began teaching, how prepared were you to begin working in a day care centre? What were the areas in which you felt most confident? Were there particular areas in which you felt your training had been inadequate? Have those feelings changed?
13. What have been the most valuable aspects of your program? In what way could teacher preparation be changed to better prepare people for your job? (Suggested areas for discussion: interpersonal relationships, classroom management, instructional strategies, availability of resources and materials, working with parents, dealing with behavioral problems, multiculturalism or administrative concerns.)
14. As you reflect back on your teacher preparation, what are your feelings and/or major concerns? What are the basic skills and knowledge that beginning teachers need to know about? What is the most important thing?
15. Are there aspects about teaching in a day care that you feel are best learned on the job? Tell me about these areas.
16. Are there areas of preparing for teaching that are best learned after you have some teaching experience? How might we address these needs? What might be done to encourage and help preschool teachers to grow with experience so that their practice improves?
17. Looking back at your teacher preparation program, how has it impacted on your values and beliefs about teaching young children?

18. If you had a friend who was considering taking ____ course in preparation for work in a day care, and asked for your advise, what would you tell them? Would you encourage them to take this program? What do your think about the different preparation programs that are available? How is your program viewed by your colleagues?

19. Are you presently taking any courses? What are the benefits of continuing education? Do you have any other areas concerning your preservice teacher preparation that you would like to discuss with me?

Appendix E

INTERVIEW # 3

Topic: Teaching Practices

Introduction: Today, I'd like to talk to you about your teaching experiences, particularly as they relate to your current day care program.

Part A

1. How long have you been working in a day care centre? How long have you been working in this centre? This classroom? What other positions have you held?
2. Tell me about your centre -- the number of adults, the number of children, how things are organized, and so forth.
3. What are five to ten words that you would use to describe yourself as a day care teacher?
4. Tell me about your preschoolers. Do you have any special concerns about children in today's society?
5. There is much debate about my next question, and I'd like to hear your thoughts on the issue. There are some educators who promote a traditional teacher-directed approach to learning and others who encourage a more developmental, child-centred approach. How do you feel that children learn, and is there a particular approach that you use in your teaching to promote this type of learning? Are there particular theorists, such as Erikson, Froebel, Gesell, Kamii, Montessori, Piaget, or Skinner, who influence your teaching practices?
6. What are your overall goals for the children? What do these goals tell you about your values and beliefs about young children? What are the major influences on your thoughts in this area? (Probe for links to training through an exploration of the rationale behind their goals.)
7. How can you tell whether you are meeting your goals or not?
8. What are three most important aspects of your program?
9. Do you have a daily schedule that you follow? What does it include?
10. Take me through a typical day in your classroom.

11. What makes some days more difficult than others? How do you feel after a particularly bad day? What can you do to change things? (Probe for an understanding of why things go wrong. For example, an activity is too difficult, as it requires fine motor skills beyond the abilities of many of the children. The children lose interest and with no alternate activities available, become disruptive. So the focus would be on changes to the activity, rather than suggestions for a longer “time out” period for disruptive children. This knowledge of fine motor skills may be traced back to course work in training program and/or their own observation.)
12. How do you decide what you will do each day? Do you coordinate plans with the other teachers? How does that process work? What are the benefits of this process? What are the disadvantages of the process? (Probe for the amount of teacher autonomy in decision-making.)
13. Are any particular books, magazines, or published curriculums that you find useful when planning activities?
14. What types of records and/or assessments do you keep and why? Do you keep any other notes on the children?
15. Who orders the materials and other supplies that are used in your room? I’ve worked in different child care centres and we were always working around rather limited funding. Have you found ways of working around this problem?
16. How would you describe your relationship with the other teachers in your room? What type of a relationship do you have with the other teachers and/or the director? How often do you all meet together? (Probe for details about the atmosphere of the meetings.) What type of feedback do you receive about your teaching? If you have a change in the program you would like to implement, what would you do? Why? If initial reactions were unfavourable, what other options are available?)
17. What types of activities would you do with the whole group together? What types of activities do you do with small groups or individual children? (Probe for details on the activities. Can you describe an activity which you have done with the children? Why do you think you taught it the way you did? Why did you [describe behaviour]?)
18. Can you tell me about an activity you use to promote the children’s academic growth? (If they describe an activity to develop literacy skills, probe for another one relating to mathematical skills. Probe for the other areas of learning that could take place during this activity and how it is related to other aspects of the curriculum. If the teacher has mentioned the use of themes in planning the curriculum, explore how the theme is used.)

What's your favourite art activity? What do the children learn from participating in this activity? What aspects of your program could enhance children's creative abilities? Music? Dramatic play?

19. When the children are involved in free play, what is your role during this time? What is the value of free play for preschoolers? How do you decide how much time will be used in free play? Are there some children who have more difficulty, than others, with the free play time? Is this true for playground activities? How do you bring these activities to a close?

20. Often there is one, or more children, that may engage in disruptive behaviour. What do you usually do when a child is having a negative influence on the other children? How has your training program influenced your overall classroom management strategies?

21. Can you think of specific aspects of your curriculum that have been affected by your preservice training program? If you think of something else, about your training, please make a note of it and we can talk about that, too.

Thanks again for your time and your thoughts.

Part B

22. You have a job that can be both physically and emotionally demanding, what aspect of your work bring you the most satisfaction? Can you recall a moment when a child did something that made you feel a sense of pride in the work that you do?

23. Is the work you do with the children, in this centre, consistent with the way you feel things should be done? (Probe for some of the constraints that prevent them from doing the things they want to do.)

24. Day care is often referred to as the care and education of young children. How much of your time is spent in basic care as opposed to interacting with the children in educational activities?

25. Do you have a formal or informal support system? For example, do you meet with co-workers or other teachers to discuss your concerns? Do you belong to any professional or community organizations?

26. What are the three major influences that have contributed to the type of preschool teacher you have become? How have these influences impacted on your teaching practices?

27. Is there a particular preschool teacher that you admire? What is it about this

person that you admire and what is it that you feel makes them so special? (If personal characteristics are stressed, probe for teaching strategies and techniques.)

28. If you had the authority, the resources, and the time, what changes would you make to improve the quality of the child care that you provide?
29. Studies have indicated that teachers' wages are an important part of quality child care. How do you feel wages affect your work?
30. How involved are the parents of the children, in your program? Is your contact mostly informal talks or planned meetings?
31. If a mother of a preschooler called the centre and asked to speak with you, how would you describe your program to her? Are there certain activities/materials that you would like for her to observe, ones that you feel are an important part of your curriculum? What types of questions do you think you might ask her?
32. A few years ago there was a walk-out planned by non-profit day care centres and supported by some private centres, demanding an increase in wages received from the government. What were some of the comments expressed by politicians, parents, day care teachers, and others about the work that you do and the pay that you receive?
33. How much of your time, outside of your regular working hours, is spent on job-related matters?
34. Do you attend workshops, classes, conferences, or other professional activities?
35. If you were part of a committee that was asked to plan in-service workshops for day care teachers, what issues would you like to see addressed? How are these issues important to your work?
36. How does your time in this centre affect your life outside of the centre?
37. How important is this centre to your parents? To your community?
38. Have your views on teaching in a day care changed over the last few years? How? If your practicum supervisor from your training program observed you today, what changes do you think he/she notice about your teaching? What has influenced these changes? (Probe for the reasons for the changes.)
39. What advice do you have for beginning teachers?
40. What is the most important thing that you would like for your preschoolers to learn from you?

41. Where do you think you will be in 5 years? 10 years?

Appendix F

PRE-OBSERVATION CONFERENCE

A pre-observation conference is suggested by Kennedy, Ball, and McDiarmid (1993). Examples of some typical questions:

Can you tell me about the activities that may be happening while I am observing in your classroom?

If there is an activity planned, ask for details on the activity and why it was chosen?

Could my presence pose a problem for any of the children?

How would you like for me to respond to children's questions?

Is there a specific aspect of your program that you would like for me to observe while I am in the room?

Is there anything that I can do to help the other teachers to feel more comfortable about my presence?

Appendix G
OBSERVATION

Date: _____ **Participant No.:** _____

Number of Children: _____ **Boys:** _____ **Girls:** _____

Number of Adults: _____

Time: _____

Description of Physical Environment:

Wall Displays:

Field notes:

I used an open system (Caruso & Fawcett, 1986) which involved writing detailed descriptions about the teachers, the children and the child care setting. (Personal comments were placed to the right of my descriptive notes.)

C. Post-Observation Conference:

These conferences used an informal interview format and were based on actual events that happened during my observations. The purpose was to explore the rationale behind the actions and to identify links between what the preschool teachers did and their formal teacher preparation.

Appendix H

HEADINGS

Interview # 1: Early Years

- ▶ hometown environment
- ▶ earliest school memory
- ▶ other school memories
- ▶ influences in decision to become a preschool teacher
- ▶ aspects of work that bring back childhood memories
- ▶ favourite teacher
- ▶ worst teacher
- ▶ reasons for choosing particular preservice teacher program
- ▶ influential people in decision to prepare for teaching young children
- ▶ personal qualities that relate to qualities needed to teach young children
- ▶ other jobs and/or interests
- ▶ advice to daughter about working in day care (to son)
- ▶ other significant events in early life
- ▶ reasons for participating in this study

Interview # 2: Preservice Program

- ▶ preservice program
- ▶ dates of attendance
- ▶ recall of expectations for program
- ▶ list of courses
- ▶ rate courses and discuss reasons for ratings
- ▶ discuss content of course
- ▶ least and most beneficial aspects of content
- ▶ applicability to day care
- ▶ peer interaction
- ▶ instructor/student relationships
- ▶ atmosphere
- ▶ academic standing
- ▶ preparation for work
- ▶ most valuable aspect
- ▶ overall comments
- ▶ knowledge and skills that are acquired on-the-job
- ▶ professional development
- ▶ impact on values and beliefs
- ▶ recommend program
- ▶ other aspects

Interview # 3

- ▶ years of employment
- ▶ employment at present centre
- ▶ number and ages of children
- ▶ centre organization
- ▶ classroom staff
- ▶ words to describe yourself
- ▶ descriptions of preschoolers
- ▶ special concern for society's children
- ▶ how children learn
- ▶ the role of theory in one's teaching
- ▶ overall program goals
- ▶ what do goals reflect about personal values and beliefs
- ▶ program assessment of goals
- ▶ major influences in role as a preschool teacher
- ▶ three most important aspects of program
- ▶ daily schedule
- ▶ small group activity
- ▶ favourite activity
- ▶ a bad day
- ▶ resources
- ▶ materials and supplies
- ▶ team teaching relationships
- ▶ role of free play
- ▶ disruptive behaviour
- ▶ suggested links to training
- ▶ source of job satisfaction
- ▶ a special memory
- ▶ consistency of centre philosophy with personal philosophy
- ▶ care or education of young children
- ▶ support systems/professional organization
- ▶ major influences in classroom program
- ▶ most admired preschool teacher
- ▶ changes needed for an ideal classroom
- ▶ affect of wages on job performance
- ▶ how do you describe program to prospective parent
- ▶ affect on life after job hours
- ▶ professional development
- ▶ issues you would like to see addressed in workshops
- ▶ program's role in the community
- ▶ changing views on your work since beginning job
- ▶ advice to beginning teachers
- ▶ most important thing you would like for preschoolers to learn

▶ where will you be in 5 years? In 10?

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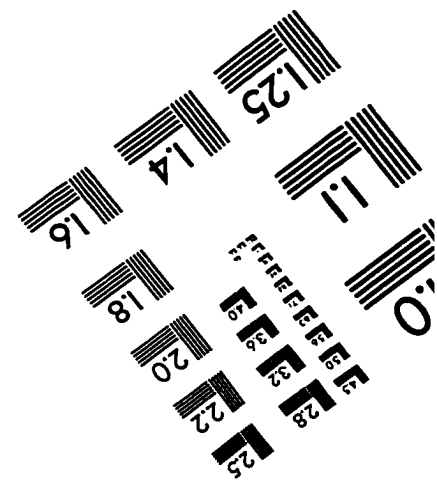
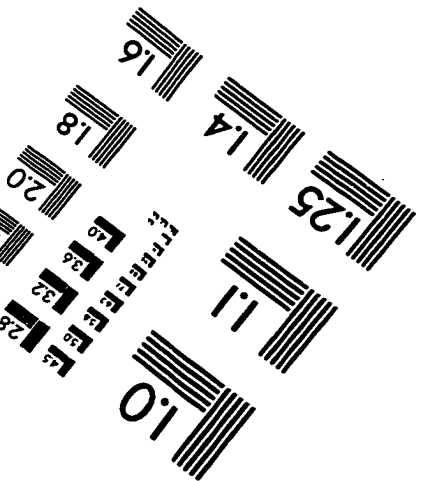
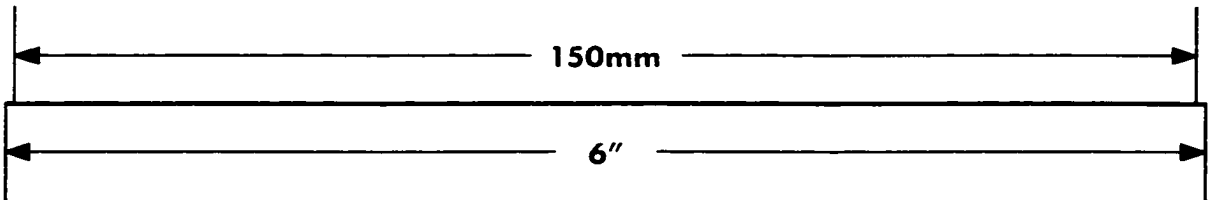
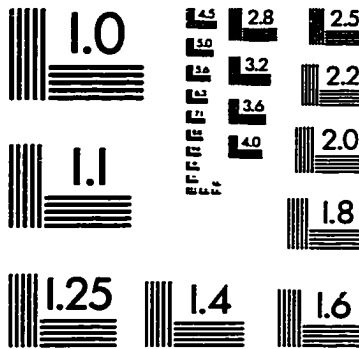
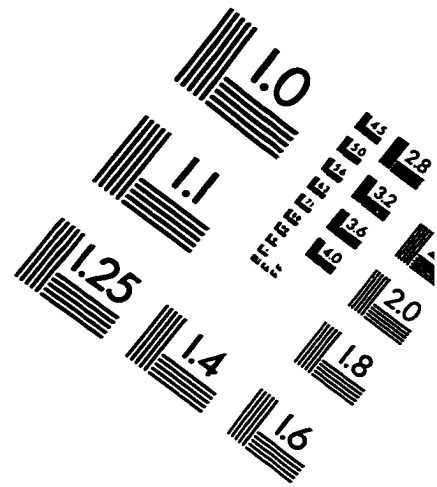
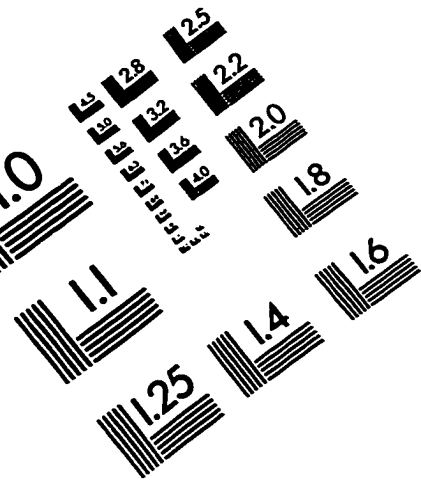
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IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (QA-3)



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