



# THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ACCOUNTABILITY MANDATES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD CLASSROOMS: EXPLORING CHALLENGES TO CONSTRUCTIVIST PERSPECTIVES

A Thesis submitted by

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For the award of

Doctor of Education

2017

## **Abstract**

The mandated reforms and accountability measures imposed upon Early Childhood Education (ECE) in the United States via the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act have had significant impact on the experience of teachers. Opinion has been divided as the educational priority of policy-makers differs from and constrains what many ECE practitioners consider as developmentally appropriate pedagogy. Many argue that developmentally appropriate teaching in ECE has been usurped by the imposition of standardized testing regimes and the time required for test preparation. In addition, explicit teaching practices and a focus on academics, rather than learning through play and other holistic practices, have epistemologically challenged constructivist approaches to contemporary practice. The governmental policy assumption has been that the measurement of a child's knowledge will improve outcomes. As a result, (and as a broad global phenomenon) ECE has become under increasing pressure to prepare young children through a service provision that requires testing to deliver outcomes that are measurable. In order to develop insight into how mandated reforms have been managed 'at the coalface' this study investigates the lived experience of a purposive sample of 10 volunteer ECE practitioners. The investigation sets out to discover how the new reforms have created dilemmas in their practice and how they manage the introduced mandates in light of their epistemological beliefs and perspectives regarding play and other holistic, developmentally appropriate educational practices.

The study takes a phenomenological case study approach that is designed to generate researcher rapport and sensitivity to the views and lived experience of participants and also to allow their voices to be heard. In addition, a constructivist grounded theory method explicates important themes identified through a theoretical lens that views a range of *dilemmas* as they arise in pedagogical practice.

This study deepens our understanding of the issues and dilemmas faced by ECE practitioners as they adapt to impositions on pedagogical practice. The findings affirm that the perspectives of teachers matter and they highlight the value attributed to the importance of play as part of ECE pedagogy. In addition, insight is presented into the complex decision-making processes required when pragmatically adapting to and navigating constraining workplace conditions.

## **Certification of Thesis**

This thesis is entirely the work of Elaine Price except where otherwise acknowledged. The work is original and has not previously been submitted for any other award, except where acknowledged.

Student and supervisors' signatures of endorsement are held at University of Southern Queensland.

## Acknowledgements

*“Play is the first great educator.” —Sir Robert Baden-Powell*

The completion of this thesis would not have been possible without the continued support from my supervisory team, Professor Karen Noble and Doctor David Cleaver. Over the course of this research journey they have furnished me with kindness, support, assistance, guidance and words of encouragement to continue forward when all I could see were more mountains to climb. They both have my eternal gratitude. I would also like to thank Professor Patrick Danaher for his support and assistance in helping me navigate the stormy waters of university life, and to Stephanie Bonner for formatting in accordance with APA guidelines. Thank you to my late Mother, Jessie Sim Wilson, and my father, George Purdue Wilson, for loving me, believing in me and encouraging me to undertake this journey. And to my late brother, David Geoffrey Wilson, for inspiring me to take the next step onwards and upwards. I would like to thank my husband, Geoffrey Stuart Price, for the unerring support he afforded me during this journey, and for never giving up on my dream. I am forever indebted to my daughter, Ripley Georgia Price, and to my son, Griffin James Price, for their steadfast belief in me and their continual support, love and inspiration. They are the brightest stars in the night sky. Thank you to my daughter, Orion Jessie McCumber-Price, being my first-born and the reason that I originally pursued my love of learning. And to her children, my granddaughter, Olivander Lulu, and to my grandsons, Luciano David, and Valentino Lawrence, thank you for bringing the next generation of inspiration into my world. Finally, thank you to all of my friends for their patience and support, especially Nikee Molony.

*“Promise me you’ll always remember: you’re braver than you believe, and stronger than you see and smarter than you think.” —A. A. Milne*

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## CHAPTER ONE

*What I learned fundamentally changed my view of No Child Left Behind. I started to doubt the entire approach to school reform that NCLB represented. I realized that incentives and sanctions were not the right levers to improve education; incentives and sanctions may be right for business organizations, where the bottom line — profit — is the highest priority, but they are not right for schools. I started to see the danger of the culture of testing that was spreading through every school, community, town, city, and state, (Ravitch, 2010, p. 102).<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Diane Ravitch is a former Education Department official in the George W. Bush administration and former advocate of No Child Left Behind, turned critic.

# **1 The Issues**

## **1.1 An Introduction to the Issues**

This thesis is concerned with mandatory accountability frameworks, specifically No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the influence and impact they have on the contemporary pedagogy, beliefs and practice of early childhood education (ECE) practitioners employed in ECE settings (kindergarten to third grade) within elementary/primary schools located in the states of Pennsylvania and Delaware in the United States (US).

### **An Introductory Vignette**

The impetus for this research arose from reflections on my own practice and experience as an early childhood educator. As I began preparing myself for employment in the US I looked for avenues to gain employment in the (ECE) sector and while I found fellow ECE practitioners to be welcoming they all offered me the same warning about the changing nature of early childhood education and developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) since the introduction of the No Child Left Behind Act. I wondered if these practitioners had not yet accepted the inevitability of change, and if they ‘got on board’ with the new program perhaps they would be able to wholeheartedly implement the new mandated requirements and adjust their practices accordingly. However, it wasn’t long before I began to realize these practitioners were trying to manage the impact of a number of associated issues and dilemmas in the implementation of NCLB. I was informed that these were not easy to solve or reconcile as I reached into the deeper aspects through discussion and observation of the professional life of these educators. On the surface and at first take, the new reforms appeared to me to be simple to manage and simply a basic adjustment to a new set of



manageable rules was all that was required – they would need to include regular standardized testing together with adherence to a raft of accountability measures. However, after deeper discussions the reality soon became clear – these mandates, in addition to associated details, like an increased workload, required a complete shift in the best way to educate young children and my curiosity about how practitioners were managing with these changes brought about by NCLB was piqued. At its heart, the new reform was asking practitioners to adjust their epistemological perspectives and deeply considered ideas about the nature of childhood, the way children learn best, and what was developmentally appropriate for them. In short – what I considered to be a suitable, contemporary pedagogy was now being challenged by mandated reforms. In addition, collaboration and further discussions with practitioner colleagues made me aware that I was not alone in concerns over these matters. Further interest and broader research set me on the road to discover how other ECE practitioners were feeling and managing the process of change. In light of this I set out to investigate the lived experience of others and with a purpose in mind to discover the effects and impact on beliefs, perspectives and epistemologies – and in addition – to the details of managing the everyday life of teaching. In designing a manageable project, I set out to work with a sample of volunteer practitioners to uncover how they manage mandated requirements, dealt with everyday decision-making processes whilst accommodating an ever-changing work environment. I sought to expand our understanding of the daily, working life of practitioners as they implement reform.

A note to the reader – this brief vignette was designed to ‘set the scene’ - to place the research into context, to reveal something of ‘where I am coming from’ and to

place bias out in the open. While I am committed to a seemingly contrary set of values and ideology, the intention was not to set out to attack recent government initiatives, but to contribute to the discussion about the best way forward for the education of our young children and – most importantly, to give voice to practitioners and to reveal what it is like ‘at the coalface’ of teaching and learning in ECE.

Throughout the thesis, the term practitioner is used, rather than teacher, as it more broadly includes the array of specialist roles taken on by the ECE professional and it better acknowledges those who are responsible for the planning, development, implementation, assessment and reporting of learning and developmental activities for young children, in a variety of educational and care settings. In the US, ECE settings are those in which children from birth to third grade are accommodated for education and care purposes, however, the reader should understand that in this study, ECE is regarded in this context from kindergarten through third grade.

To locate this study in the broader education framework of the US, it is important to outline some background details: the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was signed into law in 1965 by Former President Lyndon B. Johnson, with the premise that the first national goal should be to provide every child with a full educational opportunity by offering federal grants for text and library books, creating scholarships for low-income college students and offering new grants to districts serving low-income students, as well as creating special education centers to serve those in need. It also provided federal grants to state educational agencies with the aim of improving the quality of elementary and secondary education. In 2002, when it came time to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, former President George W. Bush introduced Public Law PL 107-110, renaming the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, No Child Left Behind Act of 2001

(NCLB). This was an Act of Congress, which reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act to help disadvantaged students, with the goal of setting standards high and using measurable goals to improve individual educational outcomes (discussed in Chapter Two).

According to the US Department of Education, the introduction of NCLB symbolized a significant stride toward improving education for children in the US, particularly because it focused attention on where students were making progress as well as where they needed further support (US Department of Education, 2015). NCLB was due to be revised in 2007, but this did not occur at this time. The debate over the reauthorization of NCLB caused repercussions for ECE practitioners, as policymakers expanded ECE services due to the perceived positive return on investment in this area of education being deemed very high (discussed in Chapter 2). There is considerable research in this area supporting the belief that participation in high quality programs in ECE provides an array of positive effects in later years (Abbott & Moylett, 1999; Ackerman, 2007; Harlin, 2009; Noble, 2008). The International Labour Organization (2012) recognizes that investment in ECE reaps such benefits as social inclusion, improved economic returns, and educational development. Research has shown that participation in ECE greatly effects important societal outcomes, including income, the rate of high-school graduation, the number of years of education completed, potential earnings, as well as a reduction in crime and teen pregnancy (Yoshikawa, et al., 2013).

## 1.2 Focus on Practitioners Negotiating Dilemmas

The statement outlining the focus of this thesis clearly puts the spotlight on ECE practitioners and how accountability measures mandated by US government initiatives effect classroom practices. In light of this, the conceptual framework guiding this study is centered on practitioners negotiating dilemmas as they relate to the enactment of ECE pedagogy in

their elementary/primary school classrooms, while managing mandated educational reform, including NCLB. This thesis gives voice to those practitioners as it provides them with the opportunity to share their beliefs, practices and professional challenges in order to illuminate those specialist ECE practices that may be threatened by mandated accountability.

ECE practitioners are in a powerful position to explore and illuminate the qualities of their professional working life. The decision to use inquiry methods inclusive of the practitioners themselves is in keeping with this research methodology (outlined in Chapter Three).

Practitioner research is aimed at extending professional knowledge and allowing practitioners to view their practices from a new perspective (Goodfellow, 2005), as such, practitioners are able to seek answers to the professional challenges they face (Goodfellow, 2008; Goodfellow & Hedges, 2007). By articulating our beliefs, we invite exploration of them and perhaps, an opportunity to challenge them. At a time when ECE is receiving worldwide attention and renewed respect as a window of opportunity to save on future spending through numerous social justice issues (Noble, 2008; OECD, 2009), it is important that, as a profession, ECE practitioners raise their collective voice to ensure the challenges they face are addressed. ECE practitioners have a responsibility to advocate for more research and knowledge in ECE, including more specifically trained practitioners and support staff (Holst, 2012).

In light of this conversation, this thesis has set out to give a sample of volunteer ECE practitioners a personal voice about the political and pedagogical issues that affect their lives as a way to deepen understanding about teaching and learning in ECE and the nature of practitioners' work. Therefore, this study promotes the exploration of pedagogical beliefs and practices by ECE practitioners themselves to illuminate what impact mandated accountability has on their pedagogy and practice with the intentionality of exploring some of the dilemmas they encounter, as they engage with the educational mandates of the government.

### **1.3 The Global Significance of the Issues**

### **1.3.1 The allure of formative development opportunities.**

The unparalleled focus on young children has seen an increasing emphasis on the importance of early childhood education and school readiness. A significant increase in the challenges ECE practitioners are facing accompanies this focus. With a growing emphasis on accountability, practitioners and policymakers are seeking more information for better decision-making in the areas of nurturing the development of young children and data collection, which is ongoing. With this in mind it is clear that ECE has attracted the attention of governments worldwide and has garnered a great deal of interest in the field of education in many countries, being increasingly viewed as a growing policy priority (OECD, 2009). Currently, there is a global trend toward equal access for all children, regardless of circumstances, within ECE. In 2000, the World Education Forum (EFA) made a commitment to provide quality education for all, including children and adults (UNESCO, 2000). One of the six internationally agreed education goals pledged to be achieved by 2015 was for the expansion and improvement of comprehensive early childhood care and education, with the highest priority focus being for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged (UNESCO, 2000). As this deadline is upon us and indeed passed, the development and education of young children has become a contentious issue around the globe, with many countries striving to bring early childhood education under the auspice and regulatory control of the education portfolio (OECD, 2009). Globally, governments are seizing on the formative development opportunities that early care and learning promise, as they seek firmer control over ECE and impose stricter accountability guidelines, which will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter Two. As accountability in education increases so does the demand for children to be academically prepared for school (Adcock & Patton, 2001; Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2000; Weigel & Martin, 2006).

Concurrently, accountability frameworks are being increasingly employed within education around the world in the context of ensuring mandated standards are achieved (DiBello & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2008; OECD, 2009). Clifford and Crawford (2009) have detailed the ECE initiatives of six countries on a similar path to that of the USA in ECE reform. These scenarios demonstrate that a common thread is occurring within ECE around the globe, with governments seeking firmer control over ECE and imposing stricter accountability guidelines, which are then linked to measurable outcomes, as funding for these initiatives is being sought from government and business sectors (OECD, 2009). The appeal of investing in ECE is the 'promise' or potential to save money on future spending (Noble, 2008).

### **1.3.2 The changing face of kindergarten practices.**

ECE is under increasing pressure to adapt service provision to better prepare young children for school and beyond and is increasingly expected to deliver measurable outcomes. In the past, kindergarten has served as the gateway between children's first educational experiences and the strictness of formal schooling (Goldstein, 2007). Now, the claim has been laid that the underlying purpose of kindergarten is changing as new accountability standards are encompassing the once child-centered domain within the school institution (Goldstein, 2007; Stipek, 2006), bringing with it many new challenges for practitioners and the ECE profession. The introduction of new accountability practices within education has created heated debate about appropriate teaching and learning practices within ECE (NAEYC, 2009), with protagonists suggesting that accountability and educational reform have impacted on the provision of ECE services in an environment where Booher-Jennings (2006) suggests, that practitioners are making huge compromises in their practices to ensure their students pass state tests. It is often left to ECE practitioners to determine the developmental appropriateness of these reforms as the initiatives and priorities of policy-makers often differ from those of practitioners. In contemporary constructivist pedagogy, child-centered practices are

recognized as valuable (Bergen, 2002; Miller, 2005; Windschitl, 2002). Constructivist ECE practitioners are trained to base their practice on observations of the needs and educational interests of each child. This approach is built on well-developed and deeply considered theory about the way young children learn and develop (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009). These practitioners are expected to develop and adapt practice to meet young children's educational interests and needs (Grinder & Kochanoff, 2007). New debate about teaching and learning practices suggest these pedagogies have been usurped by preparation for test-taking because policy-makers believe the continual measurement of children's knowledge through standardized testing will lead to the improvement of educational outcomes (Goldstein, 2007; Pruett, 2012).

## **1.4 The Aim**

### **1.4.1 Accountability in ECE.**

In ECE literature, it is clear that many practitioners are struggling with the issue of accountability (Corrie, 1999; Fullerwith, Bridges & Pai, 2007; Miller, 2005; Miller & Almon, 2009; Stipek, 2006). In light of this issue, this thesis is relevant as it is concerned with exploring accountability through the lens of the practitioners themselves. Kindergarten and first-grade practitioners, in particular, are reportedly struggling to maintain developmentally appropriate pedagogy within their classrooms as they face pressure from administrators and older grade colleagues who want to ensure that children succeed in future test-taking (Booher-Jennings, 2005; Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Corrie, 1999; Goldstein, 2007; Stipek, 2006). Traditionally, ECE practitioners have acknowledged that quality is determined by the nature of the program and the appropriateness of developmental practice over and above a focus on student outcomes, which do not consider the unique characteristics of the developmental learning needs of the young child (Jacobson, 2007).

The aim of this research is to investigate the impact of mandated accountability frameworks on the pedagogy, practice and decision making of ECE practitioners as they face various dilemmas about the nature of their work. The report by Miller and Almon (2009) *Crisis in the Kindergarten: Why Children Need to Play in School* states that many ECE practitioners believe there is not enough time to enact their constructivist pedagogy within the confines of an intense, mandated curricular and testing regime as young children are not capable of completing group-administered tests and, therefore, require individualized assessments. Miller and Almon (2009) have reported that ECE practitioners experience a lack of support, consideration and understanding of the value of child-initiated, teacher-supported, play-based experiences from administrators and older grade colleagues. Goldstein (2007) concurs, adding that many kindergarten standards are now identical in manner to older grades. The most appropriate strategies for educating our youngest learners has caused widespread debate, suggesting a need for a deeper understanding of the qualitatively different ways in which practitioners perceive the significance of accountability in ECE and its impact on practitioners' pedagogy, which this study addresses. Although kindergarten pedagogy and mandated reforms may not be well matched, practitioners still need to find ways to be effective within the educational environment, while meeting accountability standards (Goldstein, 2007). This research explores how practitioners execute this in their classrooms.

## **1.5 Research Questions**

### **1.5.1 Questions guiding the research.**

This thesis investigates issues surrounding the increasing significance and impact of accountability in ECE classrooms, which is important in the current political climate. It seeks to uncover if, and how, the policy of accountability has created challenges and dilemmas in the daily professional practice of a sample of volunteer practitioners. The qualitative approach of the study includes *phenomenological sensitivity* (van Manen, 1990) as the



intention and purpose is to focus upon lived experience and the way professional life is lived.

To address these issues, the overarching, guiding research questions are:

1. What do ECE practitioners consider to be appropriate ECE pedagogy and practice?
2. What impact (if any) has mandated accountability had, either positive or negative, on the pedagogies, practice and decision-making process of ECE practitioners?

The first research question seeks understanding of context and background by uncovering where the participants are coming from. It directs the study to the personal reflections, perspectives, and philosophical ideas that underpin their practice. The second question guides an important component of the study, which is to allow participants to express matters that concern them. It fosters the uncovering of the lived experience of the practitioners and provides an opportunity where they can express their personal perspectives about the matters under investigation. It guides the all-important gathering of narratives of experience.

While these are the overarching research questions, sub questions guide the investigation also. These are:

- How do practitioners adapt their pedagogy and practice to accommodate the increasing number of mandates, standards and expectations placed upon them?
- What patterns and similarities, surrounding the impacts of accountability, emerge from the personal narratives of the participants and also from data collected from discussions and the researcher's journal?

These two sub-questions are purposefully designed to focus and direct the analysis of data and to assist the uncovering of meaningful findings that will generate new knowledge from the perspective of the practitioners themselves about the current 'state of affairs' in ECE and to offer recommendations for the future.

### **1.5.2 Qualitative investigation techniques.**

In this qualitative research study, I have selected a constructivist approach, where theory construction assumes emergent and multiple realities (Charmaz, 2006; Charmaz, 2014), because it allows me to explore practitioners' views of accountability and the individual contextual factors that impact on their pedagogy, beliefs and practice. The framework conceptualized by Windschitl (2002) is also utilized as it was established that dilemmas were central to the work of these practitioners and it was appropriate to use this as a frame of reference to explore how these practitioners were 'negotiating dilemmas' to incorporate elements of constructivism within the classroom. The various ways study participants manage mandated requirements is explored in an environment where beliefs, pedagogy and epistemologies may be challenged. I engaged qualitative investigation techniques as they create the opportunity to collate 'rich descriptions' (Geertz, 1973) of the experience of the study participants. Meaning is then uncovered about the underlying strategies that study participants in elementary/primary school settings employ to retain their own views and deeply held principles of pedagogy, while managing the requirements of accountability. I employ case study in this research to explore these issues by means of in-depth interviews, classroom observations and clarifying discussion.

## **1.6 Significance**

### **1.6.1 Introduction.**

Teaching in the twenty-first century occurs at a time of tremendous social and economic redevelopment as larger numbers of students will go on to some form of tertiary education, more than in previous decades. This is noteworthy due to the mandated introduction of standardized testing at all levels of education and the requirement of increased testing for tertiary admission, which continue to consolidate explicit views of learning and teaching, and do not lend themselves to constructivist, collaborative ways of learning and tend to

discourage creative thinking. Ironically, the business community has begun to seek graduates who can think creatively and work flexibly in collaboration with others to solve problems — all purported benefits of constructivist learning environments (Windschitl, 2002).

### **1.6.2 Increased accountability and ECE.**

Accountability has become a critical issue across the globe, with ECE becoming the newest inductee in this regulatory environment. In fact, there are strong concerns that increased accountability and the procurement and use of child assessment data for high-stakes decisions, may cause negative effects for children (Shultz & Kagan, 2007). Recent research (Miller, 2005; Miller & Almon, 2009) claims that ECE today is a very different place from the ECE classrooms of the previous generation. The inviting play areas that once housed block construction, sand/water play, dramatic (make-believe) play, music, art and creative pursuits, extended outside playtime and open-ended exploration have been removed from ECE classrooms (Bergen, 2002; Gray, 2011; Gray, 2013; Lynch, 2015; Miller, 2005). In their place, children in mainstream ECE classrooms today are more likely to be found in didactic literacy and math instruction, test preparation or test-taking, sitting at desks in classrooms that resemble older grade classrooms, engaged in direct teaching scenarios with instructors and administrators who may not understand or appreciate the value of play (Goldstein, 2007; Gray, 2013; Miller & Almon, 2009). The child-centered constructivist philosophies, founded on decades of research in child development, affirming the principle that play and other child-centered pursuits are the primary vehicle for young children's learning (Gray, 2013; Miller & Almon, 2009) may also be disappearing (Goldstein, 2007; Miller, 2005; Zeng & Zeng, 2005). Nicolopoulou (2010) claims that play is being replaced with direct instruction intended to teach academic skills. Crawford (2004) claims that teachers are torn between providing children with developmentally appropriate experiences while facing curriculum mandates. Lynch (2015) described a recurring theme in her research, that play and play-based

practices were scarce in ECE classrooms due to the current policies and standards that do not value play, indeed that they disapprove of play in favor of more academic aims. Question One addresses this issue as practitioners' beliefs pertaining to appropriate ECE pedagogy and practice are investigated.

### **1.6.3 ECE constructivist pedagogy and developmentally appropriate practice.**

Contemporary ideas of ECE pedagogy upholds strategies to engage children in developmentally appropriate practices (DAP), which are connected to constructivist theories of learning (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1986). When looking at the fundamentals of child development and the processes of learning that have been used to inform DAP, National Association for the Education of Young Children (2009) affirm that principles of DAP are based on theories that consider development from a constructivist perspective (such as Piaget, 1970; Rogoff, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978). From this standpoint, children experience some autonomy, where learning is practical and exploratory and is integrated across the curriculum (Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006), they contribute to their own learning and development while making meaning from the daily experiences at home and school and they are most certainly active learners (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009).

Although many ECE practitioners claim to embrace constructivist ECE pedagogy, they felt that kindergarten “was becoming more academic in nature” (Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006, p. 103) and many struggled to include mandated academic skill learning into an overcrowded ECE curriculum (Goldstein, 2007; Hatch, 2002). Parker and Neuharth-Pritchett (2006) state that external factors, such as accountability frameworks, have played a vital role in influencing the way practitioners perceive instructional practices and the methods and variety of practices employed. Question Two of this thesis addresses these issues of

accountability and the effect it may have had on the pedagogies, practice and decision-making process of ECE practitioners.

#### **1.6.4 A possible disconnect.**

McMullen (1999) found a disconnection between the developmentally appropriate practices practitioners reported to engage in and the actual didactic practices that were observed, as practitioner's endeavor to meet the growing demands of accountability. Practitioners cited outside factors such as unsupportive administrators, standardized test preparation and mandated accountability as a significant influence on this discrepancy. This thesis explores these issues with the assistance of a sample of volunteer practitioners, who have given so freely of their time and shared their beliefs, challenges and dilemmas during this research journey. It is their voices that resonate throughout this research.

#### **1.6.5 Contribution to the field and significance in education.**

This thesis is significant because it provides a unique perspective, combining constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014) with the dilemma framework (Windschitl, 2002) to explore practitioners' epistemological beliefs, pedagogy and practice when working within an accountability framework. It contributes to the field of education in the following ways:

- Conceptually, it adds to the body of knowledge on ECE accountability by exploring the significance and impact accountability (specifically NCLB and beyond) has on contemporary constructivist perspectives and the epistemological underpinnings that may be challenged in this political environment.
- Research on the qualitatively different ways in which practitioners perceive the significance of accountability in ECE classrooms is limited, therefore this phenomenological study is significant because it illuminates accountability from the unique perspective of the practitioner, enlightening and inviting others to reach a deeper understanding.

- It engages practitioners in a dialogue about their views of accountability to ensure a deeper understanding of how they perceive the significance of accountability in ECE classrooms to identify what impact it has on pedagogy and decision-making, which goes beyond the practitioners in this study.
- It brings to light underlying strategies practitioners use to retain their own views and deeply held principles of pedagogy, while managing classroom challenges created by the implementation of NCLB and other mandated accountability measures.

## **1.7 Contextual Factors**

### **1.7.1 Education is America's priority.**

The implementation of NCLB has increased the scrutiny felt by students, practitioners, schools and school districts as they try to meet the constraints of providing evidence of academic achievement gains (McDaniel, Isaac, Brooks, & Hatch, 2005; Stipek, 2006). In 2011, President Barack Obama promised Americans that it was time to fix NCLB when he visited Kenmore Middle School in Arlington, Virginia. He said their education is America's top priority, therefore it was time to fix the issues surrounding No Child Left Behind (The White House, 2011). President Obama went on to state that more testing was not the answer, but it was important to find a better way to ensure that the citizens of tomorrow were engaged in developing the right set of skills for future development, such as critical thinking skills, collaborative skills and creativity (The White House, 2011). With this promise, he moved the discussion towards significant educational reform where certification would only be *one* measure of quality practitioners. The goal was to ensure practitioners were better prepared and supported, while measuring their level of success in the classroom, ensuring accountability (Brenchley, 2012). In ECE, it is understood that young children learn differently from older children and adults and how they understand the world is dependent on

exploration, using their imagination, and being able to play (Nicolopoulou, 2010), all elements of a constructivist education, not achieved through standardized testing.

### **1.7.2 Replacing the damaged NCLB brand.**

President Obama lamented the fact that according to estimates in 2011, under the system NCLB enacted, upwards of 80 percent of American schools may be designated as failing (The White House, 2011). In the US, widespread frustration with critics of NCLB was reported as it penalized schools for failing to make sure that all students were proficient in math and reading by 2014 (The Washington Post, 2015). Ravitch (2010) claims the underlying strategy of NCLB was to measure and punish. This has left the NCLB brand damaged well beyond repair, according to former Education Secretary, Arne Duncan. Due to this lack of confidence in the branding of NCLB, the new draft revision of the ESEA, which has been reworked by several Senators working together in unusual bipartisan cooperation has a new name: the Every Child Achieves Act of 2015. As the end of the reauthorization of the ESEA approached, there was renewed optimism that the new bill would soon be on the President's desk for his signature. The Washington Post (Layton, 2015) reported former Education Secretary, Arne Duncan, claiming that this draft was an important step toward the reauthorization of NCLB to ensure that every American student would benefit from closing the achievement gaps in education.

President Obama also lamented the 2011 statistics that revealed how America had fallen from first to ninth in world rankings in the percentage of young citizens who attained a college degree which, was unacceptable (The White House, 2011). The US Department of Education notes that the US has one of the highest rates of high school dropout in the world (Hewitt, 2011). And for those students who do complete high school and attend university, almost half require remedial courses later on and almost half never graduate (US Department of Education, 2015).

### **1.7.3 Funding for ECE in America**

An understanding of how the provision of funding for the early childhood sector is governed in the US is important. US citizens uphold a long-standing ideal regarding the limited role of government in their lives and place a high value on individual responsibility and volunteerism rather than legal enactment (OECD, 2006). There is no ECE system with a national policy framework in place and no federal department responsible for children's services. Early childhood issues, including early childhood education are regarded as matters for each state to administer and as such, policies and resource allocation vary widely across and within states (OECD, 2006). In contrast, the federal government is responsible for broad ECE goals and funding for services for "at risk" children, such as Head Start, which has been in operation since 1965.

## **1.8 Outline of the Thesis**

### **1.8.1 Outline of chapters.**

This thesis is written in five chapters. Chapter One has stated the issues to be explored and detailed the significance of the issues of accountability and the dilemmas practitioners may experience, including the contextual factors that impact their pedagogy, beliefs and practice and how participants construct meaning from them. Chapter Two provides a review of the current literature surrounding the issues and offers a discussion of the current political landscape, including some international perspectives and discussion on NCLB. It outlines accountability frameworks and contrasts these with Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) and constructivist viewpoints, suggesting practitioners are facing a pedagogical dilemma.

Chapter Three focuses on the research methodology and begins with an overview of the chapter. The conceptual framework of the study is then discussed, utilizing the frames of reference detailed by Windschitl (2002) to inform thinking about other possible dilemmas



practitioners may experience as they relate to the enactment of constructivist pedagogy in ECE environments, while managing mandated educational reform. Windschitl (2002) introduces his framework using conceptual entities, where practitioners pose implicit questions as they attempt to engage constructivist instruction in the classroom. Windschitl (2002) outlines four areas of possible dilemma, which I unpack in this chapter, followed by a discussion of the constructivist lens, which I employed and through which this study is viewed.

The design of the study is detailed, with consideration given to the research paradigm, epistemology, constructivist framework and the underpinning for the choices that I made designing the study. Thus, the research questions are restated and the overall aim of the study is outlined. Data collection is discussed including a discussion on grounded theory methods and the decisions taken throughout the research. The participants are introduced inclusive of background information about the relationships I formed with these women. The role of the researcher is explored, which is intrinsically linked to the ethical and political considerations I undertook at the outset of the study and continues with a discussion on the reflexivity I engaged with and that was required to carry out such an undertaking. Specific data gathering techniques are outlined as well as the delimitations and limitations of the study. Data analysis techniques are discussed in relation to using grounded theory methods and finally, ethical and political considerations are discussed in detail. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Chapter Four is comprised of the study findings, addressing the questions posed in the research in succession, the beliefs of each practitioner, the appropriate practices they consider essential and uphold and those which are usurped by mandated accountability. An exploration of the impact accountability has had on their pedagogies and decision-making follows. The issue of practitioner “dilemmas” is examined in detail with examples of practices versus beliefs within an environment where mandated accountability provides daily

challenges. The use of voice is paramount in chapter four, which serves to let the reader into the world of each practitioner to shine light on the experiences from each practitioner's unique perspective. To conclude, Chapter Five addresses the data analysis and is synthesized through discussion of the findings from the research questions, and possible conclusions are explored, and my suggestions for future research are presented.

### **1.9 A Note on subjectivity and bias.**

At the outset of this journey I made it clear that the lens from which I viewed the world would have an influence over this thesis and I committed to keep a reflective journal to make my thoughts and personal biases known to the reader. At the outset of this journey, I recognized and acknowledged that not all ECE practitioners subscribe to constructivist pedagogy or indeed, if they did, not all would be wholly constructivist in their approach. However, I had not accounted for the fact that none of the participants would claim to hold a constructivist philosophy, meaning that each participant described their classroom practices in great detail, but none would actually name a theoretical perspective on which they based these practices. Although many of them detailed their search for ways to bring these philosophical underpinnings into their daily practice. The focus of this thesis remains on the negotiation of dilemmas by practitioners as they strive to meet the educational requirements mandated by the government, while staying true to their own personal teaching and learning style.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Literature Review

*We all need to work together so that 10 years from now, America's children will have the sort of federal education law they so richly deserve — one that challenges them to achieve to high standards, and provides them with the highly effective teachers and principals who can prepare them for success in college and the workforce, (Arne Duncan, US Secretary of Education; January 8, 2012; The Official Blog of the U.S. Department of Education).*

## **2 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This study is located in the United States of America, engaging practitioners from Delaware and Pennsylvania, and addresses issues in ECE, which include DAP, school readiness, transition to formal schooling, cost saving benefits of ECE and increasing accountability through government mandates, specifically NCLB. There is deep controversy in the US surrounding the reauthorization of NCLB, which was due to be completed in 2007, and the impact it has had on ECE practitioners. The rest of the world is watching and waiting to see if there are salient lessons to be learned from this process. Although the focus of NCLB is firmly fixed on accountability via a series of mandated state testing regimes designed to measure student progress toward state approved standards, the repercussions on practitioners in early grades has not gone unnoticed by academics and educators and a great deal of literature has been written addressing this issue. The aim of this literature review is to present a detailed and critical evaluation of carefully selected and relevant literature to this particular research study and also to present significant findings to provide the reader a place from where to begin.

### **2.2 Outline of the Review**

The literature review begins by presenting an international perspective on the changing face of ECE across the globe, drawing attention to the parallels between various developing nations, where governments and policymakers are drawing the fields of early childhood education and formal care settings under the auspice of general education and educational reform, further fueling suggestions that fiscal accountability is the real, hidden agenda. It then moves to accountability frameworks and the recent linkage of funding to accountability and the dilemmas this may cause practitioners.

A review of NCLB demonstrates the outcomes-based nature of the law, firmly linking federal funding with outcomes-based results in the form of high-stakes testing. A discussion of findings relating to developmentally appropriate practice in ECE, competing instructional approaches, contemporary ECE pedagogy, beliefs held by practitioners and how these and other factors may impact decision-making, follows. The literature review then addresses whether practitioners are facing dilemmas with the implementation of NCLB. This research seeks deeper exploration of this by investigating how practitioners implement their own ECE pedagogy while meeting the mandated requirements of NCLB, as well as to manage the ever-increasing expectations of policymakers, administrators and older grade colleagues. The literature review addresses these topics individually but brings them together to demonstrate a broader contextual picture of how ECE is now closely linked to accountability and the issues and dilemmas currently facing practitioners within the education profession.

## **2.1 International Perspectives**

### **2.1.1 International policy perspectives.**

The recent trend toward universal or equal access for all children, regardless of circumstances, towards high quality early childhood education is not unique to the US. It is one that is being played out globally, with governments worldwide looking to reap the rewards of the many developmental opportunities furnished by the benefits that early care and education promise (Brown & Mowry, 2009; Clifford & Crawford, 2009). Levine (2005) reminds us that globalization and technological advancements have transformed the political, economic and social relationships of our world. This prompts a renewed look at investments in ECE. Policymakers around the world are increasingly interested in the expansion of ECE so that increased numbers of young children are prepared for future success in school (Barnett, Hustedt, Friedman, & Ainsworth, 2007) and beyond. While at the same time creating policies that facilitate the regulation of ECE and the practitioners that staff this field.

For example, policies implemented in the UK, Australia and the US have led to increased training requirements for ECE practitioners and curricular that is more clearly defined; inclusive of assessment requirements (Fenech & Sumison, 2007; Hatch & Grieshaber, 2002; Stipek, 2006).

Clifford and Crawford (2009) have outlined several countries varying initiatives toward educational reform in ECE, which are useful to offer comparison with the situation in the US: For example, in Sweden, preschool is no longer part of the social sector but has come under the auspice of the Education governing body, a move being mirrored in the US. In Germany, the strict separation of kindergarten and primary school has been eroded as education agencies are looking for more control over this once welfare program. In the US, this situation is paralleled as education reform is also moving toward quantifiable outcomes, however, preschool programs remain out of the reach of the federal government due to a long-standing position Americans hold regarding the limited role government should play in people's lives and the high value they place on individual responsibility and volunteering as opposed to legal regulation (OECD, 2006).

In New Zealand, a ten-year plan has been established to improve ECE quality, as well as increase participation rates of these services with the aim of easing the transition from ECE settings to formal schooling. In 2014, President Obama's State of the Union address directed Congress to increase access to high-quality preschool settings, which should be made available for every child in America by partnering with the states via the Preschool For All Initiative, in an effort to improve ECE quality and expand access to preschool for low-income families (The White House, 2014). Japan faces a similar situation with the transition from ECE settings to formal school, labeled the 'first grade problem', as children experience a huge shift between the child-focused learning of ECE to a stricter academic focus in formal school (Clifford & Crawford, 2009).

### **2.1.2 US perspective.**

The federal government's role in education is limited in the US due to the Tenth Amendment (Reserved Powers – powers not granted to the United States were then reserved for the states or for the people), therefore, generally speaking, most education policy is decided upon at the state and local government levels. To reaffirm, currently in the US children's services fall under the auspices of either state or local jurisdiction, meaning that there is no federal government department responsible for children's services. Therefore, across and within states, policies and resources actually vary greatly. However, for children considered at risk, such as low-income families, the federal government retains responsibility for broad ECE goals and funding of services (International Labour Organization, 2012). As policymakers have increased their interest in expanding early education and care services, new policies, which have encapsulated these services within the K-12 education systems, have proliferated, resulting in a closer examination of the role ECE practitioners play within the broader education community and highlighting the emphasis on academic achievement, designed to prepare young students for future school success. Of note, ECE issues and concerns are not only contentious in the US, but are being played out on an international stage with the focus set firmly on the future and the promise of cost savings that mandated reforms bring (Clifford & Crawford, 2009).

## **2.2 Outcomes Based Quality Measurement Tools**

### **2.2.1 Accountability frameworks.**

Accountability efforts enacted by the federal government ensure accountability in the public education system, while concurrently, Rous, McCormick, Gooden and Townley (2007) assert that many states have been involved in complementary accountability efforts to create strategies to document the impact of ECE services in each state and the outcomes for young children resulting from those services. Many states have developed, or are developing, a set

of state identified ECE standards, sharing a universal thread. These standards communicate what young children should know and be able to achieve. In the early-care/preschool arena, many states are establishing standards for measuring ECE programs and practitioners' competencies right alongside monitoring systems to measure compliance. In 2011, President Obama claimed the government needed to make improvements to prepare and support teachers for the task of teaching, inclusive of measuring success in the classroom and holding them accountable (Lee, 2011).

The push to define teaching standards to ensure a 'measure of quality' and transform professional teaching practice is premised on the expectation that these standards illustrate the complex task of teaching and learning and depict an agreement on the required expertise, knowledge, values and skills which culminate in professional practice (Maloney & Barblett, 2002). Standardized test results are used to determine the value of schools, practitioners' effectiveness, and student learning because they satisfy the policy and law makers, real estate agents, and the business community's need for numbers, simply because these are something they understand (Harlin, 2009).

### **2.2.3 Research on the benefits of ECE.**

Research detailing the array of positive effects of early care and education is well documented (Ackerman, 2007; Harlin, 2009; Lobman, Ryan & McLaughlin, 2005; Sheppard, 2007) and claims include many improved outcomes such as social and educational benefits (Abbott & Moylett, 1999; Noble, 2008; OECD, 2009), improvement in school readiness, scholastic achievement (Liu, 2007; Lunenburg, 2000), significant improvement in pre-literacy, prewriting, and pre-math skills (Herman, Post & O'Halloran, 2013) and overall better outcomes (Ackerman, 2005; Coplan, Wichmann, Lagace-Seguin, Rachlis, & McVey, 1999), supporting the growing investment in ECE (Levine, 2005; Noble, 2008). Clifford and



Crawford (2009) remind us that while the importance of ECE to the long-term wellbeing of society is widely acknowledged, its ‘promise’ is yet to be fulfilled.

Other research shows that participation in high-quality ECE programs can assist children in facing the challenges of the first formal year of schooling and future academic challenges as high quality ECE programs equate to a higher percentage of students completing high school and a lower percentage of students who require special education programs (Katz, 1994; Lui, 2007; Noble, 2008; Sheppard, 2007). Policymakers have viewed universal early education programs as the vehicle for ‘leveling the playing field’ by providing opportunities for children from all backgrounds, regardless of race, culture, religion, zip code or family income, to get a great start academically (Adcock & Patton, 2001; Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2001).

#### **2.2.4 A hidden agenda.**

Certain critics view education reform in a negative light, and as having a different agenda altogether, as political priorities focus on cost saving and future benefits to society, not the benefits for young children. For example, Grieshaber (2000) states that society’s political priorities and dominant values influence educational decision-making, while others, (Booher-Jennings, 2006; Barnett & Ackerman, 2006) suggest educational reform is actually driven by fiscal accountability and cost effectiveness, which is passed on to educational institutions, administrators and practitioners who struggle to meet politically enforced standards.

Sheppard (2007) echoes this view, citing government economists who believe that investment in ECE is a “thoughtful solution to a lot of very expensive social-justice issues” as well as discovering the cost savings afforded by investment in ECE, stating, “spending \$1 now on preschool can save \$17 down the road on costs for special education, incarceration, and an undereducated workforce” (p. 10). In the same vein, Noble (2008) notes, “Early education is one of the best investments we can make – the returns for society are measurable. Each dollar

spent on early education saves society about \$4.00 – \$7.00 down the road in other costs” (p. 1). It is this investment that attracts accountability, as government spending must always show a return on investment. Dillon (2008) reports that while President Obama has promised to expand ECE, which would reap savings for the nation later, he contends that finding support for this funding may prove difficult.

### **2.2.5 Objections to accountability.**

Detractors of NCLB have been vocal about their objections to this type of accountability, asserting that the new intention of kindergarten is to prepare young children for the complex task of acquiring academic knowledge and skills required for future mandated testing (Booher-Jennings, 2006; Ehly, 2008). It has been suggested that learning more from a younger age equates to greater success in school has actually fueled an increase in the use of direct teaching practices and the addition of standardized testing for younger children (Blaustein, 2005; Ehly, 2008). This has been labeled “accountability shovedown” (Hatch, 2002, p. 457). Pressures brought about by accountability enacted through NCLB more than a decade ago has impacted the kindergarten classrooms of America with a significant increase in the academic skill building and an increased frequency in math and literacy instruction at the expense of music, art, time for play and other holistic pursuits (Walker, 2016). Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, Berk and Singer (2009) contend that the way young children learn should be considered equally important to what they learn.

NCLB does not contend a national achievement standard because these are prescribed by each of the states, attracting criticism, as teachers and schools have been accused of ‘teaching to the test’, retaining students in-grade to avoid high-stakes test-taking, ignoring gifted learners and diverting time away from non-high-stakes testing subjects, such as the arts (Booher-Jennings, 2006; Duncan, 2009). Walker (2016) suggests that this increased awareness on the importance of ECE has encouraged greater participation in ECE where

younger children are being exposed to increased academic content and practitioners may simply be responding to these changes.

The trend to establish early learning standards for accountability has led to a shift in how ECE programs are delivered and it is claimed it has had a huge impact on kindergarten (Ehly, 2008), resulting in ECE practitioners examining the developmental appropriateness of these programs and the accompanying issues of school preparation (DiBello & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2008). Walker (2016) reports that many parents and practitioners are concerned about the heightened focus on academics as these are being taught at the expense of play and more developmentally appropriate activities. In the Executive Summary for a report by the National Early Childhood Task Force (2007) on ECE and accountability, the authors caution that accountability, especially with young children, requires care as ill-conceived accountability approaches can generate misleading information, impose challenging responsibilities and lead to fallacious decisions. They assert that accountability should not stand alone, but should be linked to program improvement.

Educational reform within ECE has created problems for practitioners as they view administrators' priorities as lacking relevance to early years learning and pedagogies. Goldstein (2007) claims that new kindergarten standards have not been designed with the young child in mind, being identical in manner to older grades, causing elementary school ECE practitioners to question the epistemology of their practice and the validity of their professional knowledge. Ehly (2008) suggests that the focus on standards and outcomes has intensified the need to cover content, usurping kindergarten's original focus, which emphasized the learning process, the development of the whole child and individuality and social and regulation skills, which are a predictor of student learning trajectories (Bassock, Latham, & Rorem 2016).

### **2.2.6 The introduction of Common Core Standards.**

In 2013, forty-six of the fifty states agreed to introduce new Common Core State Standards in math and language arts, which claimed to be internationally benchmarked against high-performing countries. It was hoped these new state standards would significantly raise the expectations for students and teachers/practitioners by introducing more rigorous student-learning standards, providing a catalyst for long-term transformation of the education system, with a focus on student-learning outcomes (Stewart, 2013).

### **2.2.7 No Child Left Behind Act (outcomes-based measurement tool).**

NCLB upholds the theories of outcomes-based education, which has at its foundation the notion that ensuring expectations are high and creating goals that are measurable can improve individual learning outcomes. This is embodied in the belief that each state will install high quality assessment systems, which will serve as the cornerstone of No Child Left Behind (US Department of Education, 2008). With the signing into law of NCLB, there was an elevated expectation that children would be ready for school and this readiness would be measured by their performance on standardized measures showing proficiency in language arts and mathematics, with the explicit intention of improving the education levels of at-risk children (Harlin, 2009). In order to receive federal funding, NCLB requires each state to create assessments covering basic skills which will be administered to all students in pre-determined grades. It is this promise of federal funding that maintains the focus on continued achievement. NCLB has not fulfilled the expectations placed upon it and it has been reported that the disadvantaged children it is intended to serve show only moderate achievement (Rouse & Barrow, 2006). Former Education Secretary, Arne Duncan stated that NCLB was a prescriptive assessment tool, using a one-size-fits-all, top-down approach to schools that were already struggling (US Department of Education, 2015). The major flaw of NCLB is its emphasis on standardized tests (Duncan, 2009), yet the debate surrounding the

reauthorization of this law has fueled the belief that ECE holds the key for lifting education standards for future generations.

## **2.3 Developmentally Appropriate Practice**

### **2.3.1 Background of developmentally appropriate practice.**

Determining the most appropriate type of learning environment and teaching strategies for ECE (eight years old and under) has been at the center of research and debate for decades. In the late 1980's, Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) position statements (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1986) were released by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). DAP were published in response to the focus on academic teaching in ECE that had caused a debate about the 'push-down' (Corrie, 1999) of elementary school curricula, and claimed to be negatively impacting on ECE programs. They were seen as a representation of standards reflective of 'best practice' (Goodfellow, 2001), guiding ECE practitioners to adopt constructivist pedagogy that facilitated holistic development in all domains (including emotional and social, moral, cognitive, language and physical).

DAP curricula are child-generated, child-centered, with the teacher acting as facilitator, using professional judgment to determine the requirements to meet the learning needs as well as the developmental needs of each child, and preparing the environment and curriculum accordingly (McMullen, 1999). DAP embody the vast array of empirical experiences gathered by ECE professional educators and also largely supported by a wide body of existing research. Since their inception, ECE practitioners have employed DAP in the design and evaluation of individually, culturally appropriate curricular that is also age appropriate (Bredekamp, 1987; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Camp, 2007). However, critics of DAP (Canella, 1997; Mallory & New, 1994; O'Brien, 2000; Swadener & Kessler, 1991) claim that it is not the most appropriate pedagogy for all young children and they call into question the

multicultural appropriateness of DAP, claiming that it reinforces stereotyping and undermines appropriate self-identity. The biggest criticism of DAP is that it originates from the mainly white middle to upper classes of European origin, which critics declare means it may favor children who are already viewed as privileged.

## **2.4 Instructional Pedagogies**

### **2.4.1 Standards versus instructional needs.**

It is significant that Samuelsson and Pramling (2013) note three general types of ECE curricula, which the first is based on social pedagogy and the work of Friedrich Froebel [1782-1852] (traditional), the second takes cues from school work and skills (academic) while the third is investigative, exploratory and integrates learning through play (developmental). They report that differences in curricula result in wide variations in outcomes, suggesting that pedagogy makes a big difference to children's development and success (Samuelsson & Pramling, 2013). La Paro, Rimm-Kauffman and Pianta (2006), in their longitudinal study, found that children in first-grade classrooms were exposed to less academic instruction and were more actively engaged in activities than their counterparts in kindergarten, but were similar in terms of teacher sensitivity.

In order to meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) as required by the guidelines of NCLB, many school districts have integrated new data assessment and technology systems to use outcome data to guide instructional and policymaking decisions (Peterson, 2007). As ECE falls under the same auspice as older grades within school districts, practitioners are required to ensure students meet the same rigorous standards and expectations even though younger students' instructional needs may be quite different from those of students in older grades. The push for accountability has been blamed for increasing the pressure to incorporate more didactic practices, including direct teaching, and utilize less child-centered practices within ECE; altering pedagogy (Goldstein, 2007; Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006). Le Cornu and

Peters (2004) discovered that practitioners faced various tensions and dilemmas when attempting to combine constructivist pedagogy with the expectations and requirements mandated by curriculum and learning outcomes, such as how to reconcile using explicit teaching techniques with their belief in constructivism or more developmentally appropriate teaching strategies. Lloyd (2007) coined the phrase “strategic compromise” as her method of dealing with competing tensions and goals, while accepting modifications to her work in kindergarten instruction, resulting in a mixed instructional compromise. Windschitl (2002) asserted that practitioners found the implementation of constructivist pedagogies challenging and therefore provided a framework to analyze the dilemmas that practitioners attempting to incorporate constructivist pedagogy may face, which was utilized in this study.

Zeng and Zeng (2005) argue that the rigid structure of formal instruction does not take into consideration the individual needs and various learning styles of young children at their level of development. It is this important pedagogical point that many ECE experts have referred to as they rail against the pushdown effect of older grade worksheets, didactic approaches, and a reduction in child-centered pedagogy, stemming directly from accountability mandates (Corrie, 1999; Goldstein, 2007; Hatch, 2002; Miller, 2005). Bowman, Donovan and Burns (2001) believe teaching and learning pedagogies that include abstract categories and worksheets, are not developmentally appropriate for young children as these require that they deal with tasks for which they lack the conceptual abilities. The NAEYC makes these important points about the alignment of standards:

Alignment is desirable, indeed critical, for standards to be effective. Yet effective alignment consists of more than simplifying for a younger age group the standards appropriate for older children. Rather than relying on such downward mapping, developers of early learning standards should base them on what we know from research and practice about children from a variety of backgrounds at a given

stage/age and about the processes, sequences, variations, and long-term consequences of early learning and development. (2009, p. 4)

#### **2.4.2 The constructivist learning environment.**

Windschitl (2002) posits that the basis for progressive pedagogies in the new millennium is likely to be based on constructivism; however, ‘constructivist pedagogy’ is “less a model than a descriptor for instructional strategies” (p. 136) while there are many educational approaches based upon a constructivist philosophy. It is difficult to characterize constructivist teaching because constructivist learning can be conceptualized differently by various theorists, contingent on where the emphasis is placed: on individual cognitive processes or the social co-construction of knowledge (Windschitl, 2002).

In this research study, I have taken the view that DAP guide ECE practitioners to adopt constructivist pedagogy which stem from the work of Piaget (1970) [cognitive constructivism] and Vygotsky (1962) [social constructivism], where learning is best achieved through concrete experiences, modeling and scaffolding. The focal point for constructivist practitioners is the holistic development of the child (Copple, 2005), ensuring development occurs in all domains: language, social/emotional, cognitive and physical while stressing the interrelatedness of these domains, based on current child development knowledge (Chen & Chang, 2006).

From this constructivist point of view, practitioners strive to create opportunities for children to ask questions, revise ideas and modify thinking (Hughes, 2002), so that opportunities for collaborative social interaction are sustained, allowing the learner to interact and co-operate with peers, awakening developmental processes that are a feature of learning (Vygotsky, 1978). Practitioners use various assessment strategies to ensure an understanding of students’ evolving ideas and the processes of their thinking in order to provide feedback (Windschitl, 2002). However, in practice constructivism is more difficult because it is actually a theory of



learning as opposed to one of teaching and it is quite different from the traditional models of education that practitioners experienced themselves in school, making it difficult to conceptualize how constructivism looks in the classroom, along with other factors which are discussed below (Windschilt, 2002).

In the constructivist classroom, practitioners strive to employ the most appropriate pedagogy for young children, where learning is embedded in relevant contexts (Honebein, 1996), the concept of a community of learners (Lubeck, 1998) is at the core, where the aim is to furnish students with various opportunities to express their ideas, ask questions and explore concepts (Olsen, 1999) in conjunction with others. Constructivist practitioners strive to employ pedagogies that enhance learning, utilizing practices that encourage autonomy and leadership (DeVries, 2002), promoting dialogue between learners, using questioning techniques, fostering inquiry skills and motivating learners to elaborate on their ideas (Brooks, 1990). However, Le Cornu and Peters (2004) found that implementing these constructivist ideals is often a challenge within the classroom environment due to various factors, including the practitioner being ultimately responsible for the overtly measurable outcomes of student learning, resistance from stakeholders, children unable to interact respectfully or work independently and the depth of understanding the practitioner has of the concept of constructivism (Windschilt, 2002). As ECE practitioners generally individualize theories of teaching and learning they may actually utilize several theories, creating an eclectic approach in their use of pedagogy, which McDevitt and Ormrod (2004) suggest is very practical, because there is no single theory which can comprehensively explain all aspects of learning and development.

### **2.4.3 The role of the practitioner.**

Recognizing that play must be supported and facilitated within the ECE environment, many ECE practitioners view their teaching role as deliberate and fundamental to children's

learning and development (Cooney, 2004; Luke, 2003). Practitioners understand that the quality of play depends on the value the practitioner places on it (Bergen, 2002; Sandberg, 2002). Therefore, understanding the potential that play offers to enhance creative learning and discovery is vital to ensure children become involved and maintain lengthy episodes of play. The practitioner assumes the role of facilitator to scaffold the construction of play scenarios, to assist with language and literacy development (Christensen & Kelly, 2003), concept acquisition and social and emotional development.

Practitioners need well-developed skills and sensitivity to guide young children's learning as they expose them to new learning in ways that arouse and maintain their interest and curiosity, encouraging them to have ownership of knowledge and skills (Goldbeck, 2001).

Planning for play opportunities, allotting time for play and becoming actively engaged in play demonstrate a belief in its value. A practitioner's underlying beliefs, philosophy and epistemology will guide how this is executed in the classroom and specialized training in ECE is recommended, as Wilcox-Herzog (2002) reports a positive correlation between specialized training and appropriate practices. Further, research indicates that professional development determines the use of these practices which are better aligned with how young children learn and develop (Berk, 1985; Vartuli, 1999). In fact, research shows that practitioners' beliefs and methods used in the classroom are often shaped by the teacher education programs they experience during tertiary education training (Chen & McNamee, 2006; Fromberg, 2003), which Deal and White (2006) view as the vehicle to better prepare practitioners to apply DAP beliefs within the classroom and are shaped by a variety of factors, including background, experience, training and specialized education (Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006; Wilcox-Herzog, 2002). Practitioners' beliefs about play may influence whether or not they feel comfortable to integrate it into the curriculum (Johnson, 2014). The challenge for practitioners is to implement this pedagogy in the classroom despite

the “ambiguities, contradictions, and compromises” Windschitl (2002, p. 132) that constructivism in practice causes, alongside managing new accountability measures inclusive of assessment.

#### **2.4.4 Scaffolding and the zone of proximal development.**

Scaffolding is a term used to describe the assistance provided to a learner by a more capable peer or adult (Wood, Bruner & Ross, 1976). This teaching strategy is a direct extension of Vygotsky’s (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which originated from his theory of mental tools. It has provided the education profession with a meaningful view of children’s play, as development of the mind in young children occurs in the social space between the child and a significant other. The ZPD is the gap between what the child could achieve alone and what the child can achieve with assistance. Mastering the mental tools of language, symbols, reading and writing changes our mental functions, leading to learning and occurs in the ZPD through scaffolding.

The purpose of scaffolding is not to change the task but to make it manageable for the child simply by providing assistance. The concept of scaffolding is to slowly minimize assistance before withdrawing it gradually, as the learner masters the task. Hedges (2000) describes it as furnishing support and guidance temporarily until children have increased in competence, then adjusting the support to match the learner’s current level of performance. Evidence suggests ECE practitioners can be very effective in scaffolding play, with the most sensitive practitioners offering just enough as the child requires it (Elicker, 1995).

#### **2.4.5 Play – a teaching strategy.**

A review of the literature suggests overwhelming support for the premise that play is essential to young children’s development and assists learning (Bergen, 2002; Berk, 2001; Berk, et al., 2004; Piaget, 1970; Vygotsky, 1978). Indeed, play is understood to be at the heart of many investigations over many decades and this research evidence supports the

centrality of play in nurturing the development of young children and confirms that play is the best vehicle for this learning (Bergen, 2002; Berk, 2001; Berk, et al., 2004; Fromberg, 1987; Fromberg, 2006; Piaget, 1970; Vygotsky, 1978). Research shows that play, and not didactic teaching practices, is the most important context in which young children obtain and practice the necessary skills for the development of cognitive and academic development (Bergen, 2002) and social competence (Craig-Unkefer & Kaiser, 2002). Kumtepe (2005) stressed that young children benefit from the process of actively engaging in the learning process and gain meaning from the interactions with their peers and adults, from concrete materials as well as the learning environment. By facilitating opportunities to engage in play, practitioners provide children with situations in which they can utilize their problem-solving abilities, strengthening their academic functioning and social and emotional development (Bergen, 2002). In ECE classrooms across the US it has been said that time for play has been usurped by test preparation regimes and didactic teaching materials (Ehly, 2008) required to prove AYP is being made.

#### **2.4.6 Empirical evidence.**

While anecdotal research clearly illuminates the notion that meaningful ECE experiences influence future learning and success in school, there has been recent research that uses empirical data to describe the changes that have occurred in kindergarten classrooms over the course of a decade. While the authors concede that this is a short time span, it is noteworthy that the increased impact of NCLB has heightened accountability and brought an increase in investment to ECE, as previously discussed. Jeynes (2006) claims that over the past several decades standardized testing has replaced the original intention of kindergarten, which had been set out by its founding father, Friedrich Froebel to ensure children and families were supported in their moral education. Bassock, Latham and Rorem (2016) compared public kindergarten classrooms between 1998 and 2010 and gathered data on time spent on

academic and nonacademic content, pedagogical approach and use of standardized assessments. Their findings correlated with the anecdotal accounts previously outlined and included increases in the use of standardized testing, a decrease in the use of dramatic play areas, science and art areas, an increase in teacher-directed activities and didactic instruction as well as an increase in practitioners indicating they believed it important to consider student performance in relation to state standards versus child directed learning. Alternatively, this study fills a gap in the research, as it seeks to explore these issues from the personal perspective of the volunteer practitioner participants, using voice as a vehicle to convey their deeply held beliefs and dilemmas in the workplace.

## **2.5 Practitioner Beliefs, Self-Efficacy and Practices**

### **2.5.1 Overview of beliefs and self-efficacy.**

Bandura (1994) described self-efficacy as ones' perceived ability or capability to perform tasks. Practitioners' beliefs are immensely influential in how they acquire and interpret knowledge (Pajares, 1992) and according to Kagan (1992, p. 65) are "tacit, often unconsciously held assumptions about students, classrooms, and the academic material." Zimmerman, Bandura and Martinez-Pons (1992) state that self-efficacy beliefs influence several factors that may have an impact on practitioners' classroom performance. These include the perseverance they display in the face of challenges, the degree of goal challenge they set, and the level of endeavor they put forth to succeed.

Bandura (1994) established four major sources of self-efficacy that stem from beliefs; the most influential way to build positive self-efficacy is to experience success by mastering experiences, which boosts one's belief in one's own self efficacy. Secondly, by observing those who have similar experience success provides a positive role model, which allows one to see that it is possible to succeed, thereby strengthening the belief in self-efficacy for personal success. Third, the persuasive efforts of others are a positive influence that affirms

the belief of self-efficacy, where verbal affirmation can convey the message and belief in one's abilities to be successful. Finally, mood and personal reactions can be an indicator of one's own personal efficacy and may influence belief in propensity for success, either positively or negatively.

Therefore, practitioners' beliefs about their own teaching ability, either positive or negative, will determine their actions in the classroom. Bandura (1994) suggested that people would commit to undertaking a task only if they believed they could actually do it. Bandura (1994) affirmed that beliefs and self-efficacy are predictors of practitioners' choices and engagement in the classroom. Practitioners with a higher level of self-efficacy tend to be more open to new ideas, willing to take risks and experiment (Jerald, 2007) than those with a low level of self-efficacy.

Research shows practitioner's practices are not always consistent with their beliefs because of external forces, which include accountability, curriculum constraints, high-stakes testing, administrative policies, colleague pressure, professional experiences, personality characteristics and self-efficacy (Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006; Willis, 2010), which this study explores. Beliefs, along with education and training, have been shown to be a determinant of classroom quality and influence the types of experiences practitioners select to include in their classroom (Kagan, 1992; Stipek & Byler, 1997; Vartuli, 1999). Research has shown that ECE practitioners with strong beliefs regarding basic skill instruction, including particularly structured, direct instruction were less likely to engage in practices that were more child-centered. However, practitioners who held strong beliefs about a child-centered curriculum also embraced such constructivist views as autonomy and independence (Stipek & Byler, 1997). Understanding the importance of practitioners' beliefs and self-efficacy and the effect these have on their classroom practices and choices along with the influence of external forces on those beliefs, has implications on the quality of classroom experiences,

making it vital to investigate how these external factors (including NCLB) impact beliefs, self-efficacy and practices within the ECE classroom environment.

Research shows practitioners' beliefs and their practices are not always consistent, specifically, practitioners' beliefs about the value of play in their classroom where their practices did not correspond with these belief statements (Ranz-Smith, 2007), due to accountability (Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006; Willis, 2010).

In ECE, beliefs are discussed in terms of DAP, focusing on the development of the whole across all domains, which differs to academic development, which is the norm in older grades (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009). It has been noted that ECE practitioners tend to hold belief systems and undertake practices according to DAP, which fulfill age specific and cognitive needs of young children (Stipek & Byler, 1997; Vartuli, 1999). However, DAP practitioners are not always the norm in ECE classrooms due to the employment of non-ECE professionals and because many ECE practitioners have difficulty implementing DAP and other constructivist pursuits in practice while meeting accountability requirements, despite the fact they might publically endorse this pedagogical method (Dunn & Kontos, 1997).

### **2.5.2 Beliefs versus practices – a dilemma.**

As research generally supports the use of child-centered practices, many ECE practitioners claim this philosophy as their own (Charlesworth, 1998; Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006). However, of note, this was not the case in this study as none of the practitioners explicitly claimed to engage a constructivist approach to teaching and learning but most affirmed constructivist beliefs to guide their practice. Hyson (1991) has suggested that practitioners may feel obliged to claim that they employ DAP and other constructivist pursuits even if their true practices are more aligned with didactic teaching methods, because DAP is viewed as being politically correct.

Parker and Neuharth-Pritchett (2006) suggest that ECE practitioners may hold misconceptions about the characteristics of DAP versus didactic practices and the implementation of both approaches within the classroom, causing them conflict. It has been suggested that both practices may actually work in harmony with one another within the teaching repertoire depending on the teaching situation or goals (Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006), which was an influencing factor in this study. A disconnect between the practices practitioners reported using (DAP) and the practices they actually engaged in (didactic) was found to be influenced by outside factors such as unsupportive administrators, standardized test preparation and other accountability mandates, suggesting that practitioners in ECE may be facing a dilemma or dilemmas (McMullen, 1999) worthy of deeper consideration.

## **2.6 Review**

### **2.6.1 Overview.**

The literature review revealed that ECE practitioners face many new demands and possible dilemmas in the new millennium, including:

1. The auspice of educational reform expanding to include early education and care;
2. The linkage of federal funding to accountability through NCLB;
3. Competing instructional approaches (including testing regimes);
4. The many ambiguities and contradictions of making sense of constructivism (DAP) in practice and as a basis for teaching and learning (Windschitl, 2002);
5. The resistance from various stakeholders within the education community to the implementation of non-traditional pedagogies (Windschitl, 2002);
6. Practitioner beliefs and self-efficacy impacting decision-making and practices;
7. ECE as a social justice undertaking (Schoorman, 2011); and
8. The pushdown effect of attributes currently reserved for later grades;



This study explores whether these dilemmas are the same ones facing the practitioners' in this study as well as investigating other possible dilemmas that may be revealed in conjunction with the practitioners themselves. It explores the underlying causes of dilemmas while examining what practitioners consider appropriate practice and whether NCLB has impacted the delivery of appropriate ECE pedagogy. It includes the implications of implementing appropriate practice within mandated educational reform for the practitioners involved as well as practitioners' decision-making practices.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Research Methodology

*Rather than assuming that theory emerges from data, constructionists assume that researchers construct categories of the data. Instead of aiming to achieve parsimonious explanations and generalizations devoid of context, constructionists aim for an interpretive understanding of the studied phenomenon that accounts for context. As opposed to giving priority to the researcher's views, constructionists see participants' views and voices as integral to the analysis—and its presentation, (Charmaz, 2008, p. 401).*

## **3 Research Methods**

### **3.1 An Overview of the Chapter**

Chapter Three is presented in fourteen sections. To introduce the chapter, an outline of the issues being addressed is stated briefly, the research questions are stated and the overall aim of the research is articulated. The research paradigm is introduced in light of competing paradigms and then discussed in detail, including information about the constructivist paradigm, which underpins this study. My reasons for using qualitative research methods are then discussed and an introduction to phenomenology follows with an explanation about my reasoning to engage with this methodology.

An overview of grounded theory methods is provided in the next section and then an introduction to constructivist grounded theory methods and the reasons for my engagement with this method are detailed. As case study was a good fit with this research design, it is introduced and explained and the interplay between case study and phenomenology discussed. Windschitl's (2002) dilemma framework, which was selected as the framework to explore the dilemmas in this study, is introduced and some of his examples are provided. This leads to a discussion about constructivism, which is followed in section nine of the chapter by an in-depth look at the data collection and analysis techniques I employed.

Purposive sampling is discussed and then the participants are introduced to the reader using their own voices with an explanation about the special characteristics of the relationship between researcher and participant. This section highlights the collaborative relationship between researcher and participant. Section eleven furnishes an explanation of the role the researcher has played in the research journey, with special attention paid to the relationships with the practitioners, the reflexive stance taken during the research and the impact of the researcher on the research, in order to make this explicit to the reader.

Section twelve outlines the ethical and political considerations of the study. In this section, special attention is afforded to the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants, and the strict adherence to the guidelines outlined in the ‘National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans’ (National Health & Medical Research Council, 1999). The next section outlines the study’s limitations and finally, section fourteen provides a brief summary of the chapter.

## **3.2 Research Design**

### **3.2.1 A brief overview of the research design choices.**

In this study, I utilize a qualitative phenomenological case study approach to address issues surrounding the increasing significance of accountability in ECE classrooms and the challenges that increased accountability presents for these practitioners. My focus being on practitioners’ negotiating dilemmas as they relate to the enactment of ECE pedagogy and practices and, more specifically, how mandatory accountability frameworks have impacted the contemporary pedagogy and epistemologies of these ECE practitioners.

Utilizing a constructivist paradigm, I address the research questions with constructivist grounded theory methods. These allow me to qualitatively explore practitioners’ implementation of constructivism and traditional pedagogies in the ECE classroom and the various ways practitioners manage mandated requirements in an environment where their beliefs, pedagogy and epistemologies are challenged. I also apply phenomenological lens (van Manen, 2007) in order to direct the inquiry, with sensitivity to lived experience. I chose this approach because the questions this research seeks to answer dictates an approach that is both subjective and personal, where the researcher becomes a part of the research. This meant employing a qualitative approach and engaging with grounded theory. While reading various texts by Charmaz, I developed a passion for her constructivist grounded theory methods, which are a perfect fit for my research questions. As a constructivist, I believe that

knowledge is experience, and reality is not single dimensional, but complex (Dash, 2005).

Drawing from feminist theories, I believe the relationship between the researcher's experience and the research process are intertwined (Stanley & Wise, 1993). I employed phenomenological research methods as they fit with my personal belief that how you view the world is your reality. This method invites the voices of the practitioners into the research and fits with my worldview.

My overall aim is to uncover underlying strategies these practitioners employ to retain their own views and deeply held principles of pedagogy, while managing the requirements of mandated accountability, specifically through NCLB.

### **3.3 Research Questions**

#### **3.3.1 Guiding questions.**

The guiding questions I use in this study are:

1. What do ECE practitioners consider to be appropriate ECE pedagogy and practice?
2. What impact (if any) has mandated accountability had, either positive or negative, on the pedagogies, practice and decision-making process of ECE practitioners?

### **3.4 Research Paradigm**

#### **3.4.1 Qualitative methods.**

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) concede that an “embarrassment of choices now characterizes the field of qualitative research” (p. 20), so to assist contemporary researchers in selecting a method appropriate to their research question they discern eight ‘moments’ of qualitative research stemming from different points in history, influenced by the social conditions of the time. These moments have continuity, meaning they have not passed, but continue to shape the researcher's methodological choices. Those of relevance to this research are outlined here.

The first moment reflects the predominance of positivism in this traditional period, which occurs approximately from the early Twentieth Century until around the time of World War II, and is characterized by qualitative methods being used by ethnographic researchers, who were considered 'objective' and 'knowing'. According to Dash (2005), positivism was the dominant paradigm that guided traditional educational and psychological research, emphasizing the use of observation and reason as a method of understanding human behavior and is based on the rationalistic, empirical philosophy whereby the underlying assumptions include the belief that the social world can be studied in the same way as the natural world, where the design is very structured and prescriptive. Many qualitative researchers reject positivist criteria when evaluating their own work and regard this stance to silence too many voices (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Critics complain that it lacks regard for the subjective states of individuals and regards human behavior as passive, controlled and determined by an external environment (Dash, 2005).

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), the second moment has been designated as the 'Modernist' moment, and occurred up until approximately the 1970's. This moment is informed by post-positivism and is characterized by researchers rejecting the tenets of positivism (Trochim, 2006) and approaching qualitative research in completely new ways while attempting to formalize qualitative research (Phillimore & Goodson, 2004). Trochim (2006) claims the post-positivist emphasizes the importance of using multiple measures and observation tools as each may boast different types of errors, while using triangulation to increase the integrity of research. It is during this moment that the birth of grounded theory, formulated by Glasser and Strauss (1967), and phenomenology begins.

During Denzin and Lincoln's (2005) third moment, termed, 'blurred genres,' occurring approximately from the period of the 'modernist up until the mid-1980's is the period in which researchers began to select from various theoretical models, while the boundaries

between different theoretical models became indistinct or blurred (Phillimore & Goodson, 2004). It is during this moment that multiple perspectives and thick descriptions are proposed, and both inform this research. The second and third moments heralded the beginning of the qualitative revolution (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). While the fourth moment termed ‘the crisis in representation’ can be described as the fracture in thinking about qualitative research, where generalization was challenged, issues of gender, race and class came to the fore as researchers began to acknowledge the presence of multiple interpretations (Phillimore & Goodson, 2004). During this stage, data collection and writing about data ceased being a linear process and the blurring of these two acts occurred as one informs the other, which is relevant to this research and is aligned with the process I engage with. For Denzin and Lincoln (2005), the fifth moment is characterized by adjustments in the way research is viewed away from the privileged, aloof researcher towards more collaborative and cooperative research that is inclusive of the participant, operating in the real world, which I embrace. Phillimore and Goodson (2004) report that rapid social change and the engagement with new social contexts render traditional research approaches redundant. As Denzin and Lincoln state, “the search for grand narratives is being replaced by more local, small-scale (studies) fitted to specific problems and specific situations” (2011, p. 20), which is a perfect fit for my research study.

Of interest to this research is the Eighth Moment: Methodological Backlash (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), beginning from 2005. Denzin (2010) states, “The paradigm wars of the most recent past play out against another set of federal interventions, those connected to NCLB legislations, positivist guidelines promulgated by National Research Councils, and audit criteria administered by governmental managers” (p.424). Willis, Jost and Nilakanta, (2007) postulate that George W. Bush brought to his presidency, a group of policymakers and social

scientists who “imposed on the federal funding and support structure a decidedly positivist mode of thought” (p. 422).

### **3.4.2 Paradigm selection.**

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) note that a paradigm is “a set of basic beliefs (or metaphysics) that represent a worldview that defines for its holder, the nature of the world” (p.107).

MacLeod (2009) posits that a paradigm is a means of looking at the world by using certain philosophical assumptions as a way to guide and direct ones thinking and action, and can be described as a lens through which the world can be viewed. Generally speaking, paradigms are belief structures or a collection of assumptions the researcher may have about the nature of reality, human knowledge and the methods that can be engaged to answer various types of research questions (MacLeod, 2009). It is this way of looking at the world that influences the choices a researcher makes when designing their research, in selecting methods to conduct the research and in the types of questions that they find interesting to investigate. Positivism was already discussed above.

Critical Theory (or Transformative paradigm) is about power and politics and is concerned with power differentials in relationships and patterns of dominance. A political lens is used to look at the world, where certain groups exert their influence and power over others. The critical theory has emancipation of those who are oppressed, as its goal. This paradigm directly addresses the politics in research by confronting social oppression wherever it happens (MacLeod, 2009).

Constructivism acknowledges that knowledge is not absolute and the researcher is part of the research, where the findings are an agreed upon co-creation between the researcher and the participants. Constructivists believe that people construct their own social realities in conjunction with one another and reality is subjective and experiential (MacLeod, 2009). To the constructivist, knowledge is not acquired from or imposed from outside but rather is



experienced and reality is multi-layered and complex (Dash, 2005). Constructivism refers to the belief that people construct their own knowledge from the experiences and interactions that take place in their life, as well as to the nature of knowledge. As this is my worldview, it is through this lens that this research study is regarded.

### **3.4.3 Constructivist paradigm.**

A constructivist paradigm underpins this study, which explores ECE practitioners' view of the impact of accountability, including NCLB, on their pedagogy, (including time for play and other holistic, developmentally appropriate pursuits), in their elementary/primary school classrooms, while managing mandated educational reform. For the social constructivist, learning means the personal and social construction of meaning, that is: reality is a social construct. From this perspective, reality is not an absolute value as the knower is responsible for his/her own truth based on their experiences and interactions (Von Glaserfeld, 1995). The social constructivist assumes that people create their own social realities, rather than seeing the world as given, they explore the world of the research participant, analyzing what they believe is reality and how they construct their perspectives and actions (Charmaz, 2006; Charmaz, 2014). This constructivist framework also reflects my belief that people actively engage in the construction of their own realities and cultural meanings and that there are multiple realities or ways of viewing the world. As such, this research journey has been a shared one between myself, as the researcher, and the participants (Charmaz, 2006; Charmaz, 2014).

## **3.5 Qualitative Methods**

### **3.5.1 Why use qualitative methods?**

The choice of data collection techniques and analysis are dependent on the ontological framework used (Somekh & Lewin, 2005) along with understandings of ontology and epistemology, which have determined the process employed. The term 'qualitative research'

is taken to mean any kind of research that produces findings as opposed to reliance on statistical quantifying (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and is considered an approach to research that has quite different underpinnings than those of quantitative research (Wiersma, 2000). Qualitative methods are suited to an individual's perceptions, beliefs, and interpretations that define their experience of life (Crowley, 1994). From my perspective, humans are active agents, setting goals and making choices, where context, culture and perceptions all influence them in different ways. There are many social worlds and each one is a human construction that is in constant change (Potter, 1996).

My decision to use qualitative research methods and engage a constructivist stance included consideration given to the underlying epistemology, to provide an opportunity to reflect on personal perceptions about knowledge and relationships within this research paradigm, while framing the research questions and guiding data collection and analysis. Constructivists borrow convictions of ethics from feminist methodologies by including theories of caring and justice that may hold potential to address issues of social justice in ways that are respectful of the relationships between researchers and participants, (Denzin, 2003). Letherby (2003, p.4) asserts that feminists are concerned with "challenging the silences in mainstream research". Burns (as cited in Somekh & Lewin, 2005, p. 67) reminds us that, "The notion of voice is central to feminist methodologies." As such, the influence of feminist research methodologies in shaping my worldview is evident by the emphasis placed on the 'voice' of each practitioner. The focus of this study remains firmly on the worldview of the participants', which is made explicit for the reader through the engagement of the 'voice' of the participants.

## **3.6 Phenomenology**

### **3.6.1 What is phenomenology?**

Phenomenology is a theoretical point of view that regards individual behavior as determined by the experience from one's direct interaction with the phenomena. It repudiates any kind of objective external reality, (Merleau-Ponty, 2012). He states that phenomenology is the 'study of essences'. During interaction with various phenomena, one interprets these and attaches meaning to the different actions and ideas and thereby constructs new experiences. The researcher must develop an empathic stance to understand and interpret the process of interpretation by individuals to comprehend their feelings, motives and thoughts that are behind the action of others (Dash, 2005). Phenomenological research requires that the researcher be thoughtful, responsive, and reflective on that which we are investigating and authentic in our language of the experience (van Manen, 1984). Using rich phenomenological description and interpretation, the intentionality of this type of inquiry invites new possibilities and contributes to the practice of phenomenology where the purpose is to describe, interpret, and analyze structures of experiences using methods that relate to one's own experience.

Smith (2016) describes how phenomenology highlights the focus on people's subjectivity, life experiences and the way they interpret the world. Moustakas (1994) believes the aim is to ascertain what the experience means for the person under investigation. The role of the phenomenologist, then, is to gain an understanding of how the world appears to others. They examine conscious experience from the first-person perspective, inclusive of the conditions of experience and then develops a descriptive or analytic psychology to describe and analyze subjective acts of consciousness, mental activity or experiences to develop a type of logic or a theory of meaning. Experience includes thought, emotion, desire, perception, imagination, and action and can be a passive experience, such as hearing, or an active or conscious

experience, such as speaking. Conscious experiences are unique in that we experience them or live through them (in the first-person experience). Therefore, in the most basic terms, phenomenology is the study of our experience — how we experience. To study conscious experience, it is necessary to reflect on these experiences, but usually this reflection occurs after the fact, moving on from the viewpoint of the first-person, (Smith, 2016). Therefore, conscious experience is the starting point for phenomenological studies to begin. A phenomenological research study is one that seeks to comprehend perceptions, perspectives and understandings of those it studies in a particular situation or phenomenon. van Manen (2007, p. 12) described phenomenology as a “project of sober reflection on the lived experience of human existence—sober, in the sense that reflecting on experience must be thoughtful, and as much as possible, free from theoretical, prejudicial and suppositional intoxications.” However, he clarified that, “phenomenology is also a project that is driven by fascination: being swept up in a spell of wonder, a fascination with meaning. The reward phenomenology offers are the moments of seeing-meaning or in-seeing into ‘the heart of things’” (van Manen, 2007, p 12). Therefore, my intention as researcher is to draw the reader to focus on the experiences of the practitioners in this study as they give voice to their perceptions and experiences, because the job of the phenomenologist is to direct “the gaze (of the reader) toward the regions where meaning originates, wells up, percolates and then infuses us, permeates us, infects us, touches us, stirs us, exercises a formative affect” (van Manen, 2007, p 12).

### **3.6.2 Influential proponents of phenomenology.**

Edmund Husserl [1859-1938] is credited with bringing the discipline of phenomenology to the fore in the first half of the 20th Century, which was followed by a wave of phenomenological writings, including famous classical phenomenologist Martin Heidegger [1889-1976], among others. Smith (2016) calls Husserl and Heidegger the two champions of

phenomenology and explains that they encompass different conceptions of phenomenology and different methods, bringing different results, which are still widely debated today.

Husserl defined phenomenology as “the science of the essence” of consciousness, centered on the defining trait of intentionality, approached explicitly from the perspective of the first person (Husserl, 1964, p. 5). (See Husserl, *Ideas I.*) Husserl (1964) engaged a transcendental turn that involved his use of the method of epoché, which hailed from the Greek notion of abstaining from belief. According to Husserl (1964), if one is to practice phenomenology it requires ‘bracketing’ (or setting aside) the question of the existence of the natural world, to focus one’s attention, in reflection, on the structure of one’s own conscious experience.

Heidegger (1926) put forth his own interpretation of phenomenology (see *Being and Time*, 1926), which he described as the art or practice of ‘letting things show themselves’. In Heidegger’s (1962) view, our being is being-in-the-world, therefore we do not study human activities by bracketing the world, instead, we interpret our activities and the meanings things have by considering our contextual relations towards things in the world. For Heidegger (1962), phenomenology resolves into what he describes as ‘fundamental ontology,’ where one must distinguish beings from their being, where the investigation begins with the meaning of being for one’s self, that is, examining our own existence within the activity of *Dasein* (that being whose being is in each case my own) (Heidegger, 1962). Heidegger (1962) believed that our basic ways of relating to things was via practical activities such as hammering, where the phenomenology reveals the situation in a context of equipment and in being-with-others.

Husserl (1964) emphasized that there is only a vague awareness of things in the periphery of attention, while Heidegger (1962) pointed out that there is no explicit consciousness of habitual patterns and indeed, it has been noted that considerable amounts of the intentional mental activity occurring is not conscious, however, it may become conscious upon reflection

as we become aware of the feelings or thoughts experienced about something. As Sartre (1943) asserts, consciousness must be intentional therefore, intentionality is the dominant structure of our experience, where phenomenology can be viewed as the study of different facets of intentionality.

### **3.6.3 The underlying reasons for choosing phenomenology.**

I chose to engage with phenomenological methods because they guide the researcher towards the foregrounding of experiences and perceptions, which may challenge assumptions (Lester, 1999). This approach was also employed because it can be applied to a single case (or as in this instance, a deliberately selected sample) under investigation and can be robust in indicating the presence of characteristics and their effects in individual cases. Lester (1999) suggests these must be applied tentatively when suggesting their reach to the rest of the population from which the participants or cases were drawn. This fits well with my aim to shine a light on, or foreground the beliefs, feelings and practices of the practitioners involved in the study and not necessarily attempt direct generalization to a wider population.

The aim of phenomenology is to describe phenomena (Merleau-Ponty, 2012), while the goal of phenomenological research is to provide rich description of lived experience and the opportunity for interpretation and explanation of the meaning of experience (van Manen, 2007), using descriptive analyses of mental phenomena (Smith, 2016). It begins without a hypothesis or any preconceptions (Husserl, 1970). My worldview is aligned with recent humanist and feminist researchers as they refute this notion of being free from preconceptions or bias and highlight the researcher's role in making clear to the reader how the researcher's interpretations have played a role in influencing findings, as well as bringing the researcher into the 'frame' of the research as a subjective actor and making her visible, rather than a disinterested and impartial observer. This point of view is more closely aligned with existential phenomenology from which stems the understanding that one cannot separate

oneself from the world and therefore cannot possess a detached viewpoint. As Heidegger (1962) asserts, one does not find answers by bracketing the world but rather seek to interpret the meaning things have from the starting point of our contextual relations to things in the world.

#### **3.6.4 Studies that informed this thesis.**

Cortez-Castro's (2015) qualitative study, using constructivist grounded theory methods, explored teacher candidates' beliefs about the value of play in their classrooms to understand what influences may have helped to shape them, in a Hispanic-serving university located along the US–Mexico border, using interviews and observations along with document analysis for triangulation. Cortez-Castro (2015) also followed methods described by Charmaz (2014) to transcribe the interviews and engage open coding and focused coding to identify patterns and form categories and concepts, as I have, that resulted in an interpretive theoretical understanding of the phenomenon, which she believes was grounded in theory regarding the participants' shifting beliefs about the value of play in the learning and development of the young students.

As a researcher, I share many qualities with others who choose to engage constructivist grounded theory methods and phenomenological methods. For example, Morgan (2007), chose to use constructivist grounded theory methods and phenomenological methods which, serve to inform the unique and individual worldview each researcher possesses, such as operating under a constructivist paradigm, where multiple realities are constructed, knowledge is a human construction and the belief that research is value-laden. In Morgan's (2007) dissertation she studied the role of reflection in teaching in elementary schools. Morgan (2007) utilized a phenomenological research design, operating under a constructivist paradigm which allowed her to construct meaning from the experiences of the participants in her study from their point of view. As interview is the primary data collection method for

phenomenological research, Morgan (2007) used focus group interviews and individual follow-up interviews with each participant, using open-ended questions, to generate data via the interactions of the participants and then delve deeper as participants revealed more information, which I utilize in this study.

After reviewing and analyzing transcripts to glean an initial understanding of what reflection meant for the participants and to identify key areas of future study, Morgan (2007) employed the specific procedures of data analysis used in phenomenological studies to ensure the focus on understanding the lived experience or central phenomenon under investigation, from the perspective of the participants, was maintained. Morgan's (2007) phenomenological research study provided insight into the role of reflection in teaching in the elementary school setting, providing various themes for the reader to consider and posited that the results of her phenomenological study could be used to inform the design of a grounded theory research study to generate a theory related to teacher reflection, grounded in the perspectives of the teachers.

Both Castro-Cortez and Morgan engaged with constructivist grounded theory methods, using intensive interviews and observations along with collecting data from other documents to triangulate findings, as I did in this study. They immersed themselves into the world of the participants to understand their unique point of view and to provide themes for the reader to identify and they both used grounded theory to propose a theory, from the point of view of the participants (all educators), as I did in this study. While each of us has variations in how we engage with constructivist grounded theory, this method is well documented and accepted as a means of developing theory from data from the ground up (Charmaz, 2014).



### **3.6.5 A summary of the philosophical frameworks for phenomenology.**

To summarize, the premise of these two philosophical frameworks are: (1) The direct approach based on Husserl's (1963) epistemological concerns, where the starting point is "the separation of the conscious actor in a world of objects" (Titchen & Hobson, as cited in Somekh & Lewin p. 123), the focus being on the rational actions of an individual's world. (2) The indirect approach is based on ontological concerns and focuses on how participants interpret meaning in their world, derived from Heidegger's (1962) view that humans are immersed in the world and not separate from it (Titchen & Hobson, as cited in Somekh & Lewin, 2005). The indirect approach to phenomenological research dovetails with my personal belief that how you view the world is your reality. Using the indirect approach enables my engagement in practices that promotes a sense of a shared world with practitioners, which permits some insight into their everyday dilemmas to unwrap the philosophical underpinnings behind their practices and to explore the phenomena in context. This approach places me in a position to explore complex details about feelings, thought processes, beliefs and participants' emotions about principles of pedagogy and the requirements of accountability, while making the view of the researcher clear to the reader. Using phenomenology for this research study is appropriate because the subject of this study is one that is fundamental to the life experiences of humans (van Manen, 2007).

## **3.7 Grounded Theory Methods**

### **3.7.1 Overview of grounded theory.**

Grounded theory is a qualitative research method, which derives its name from the practice of generating theory from the research, meaning it is 'grounded' in data. Charmaz, (2006 p. 2) puts it simply, "grounded theory methods consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories 'grounded' in the data

themselves.” Grounded theory is context-based and process-focused, designed to provide descriptive explanations of the phenomenon under investigation. It is credited as one of the most commonly used qualitative methods used in the social sciences because of its engagement of techniques that conform to the ‘good science’ model (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) as well as being the most commonly cited qualitative research method in the social sciences (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). It facilitates “the generation of theories of process, sequence, and change pertaining to organizations, positions, and social interaction” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 114). Grounded theory, in general, has a number of distinctive characteristics, including emphasis on the process and action, which results in clearly identifiable stages and phases, utilizing gerunds to indicate action or change (Glaser, 1998) and the development of identified theoretical elements that are considered a core variant (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The outcome of this is a grounded theory.

### **3.7.2 The discovery of grounded theory.**

Grounded theory was formalized by Anselm Strauss and Barney Glaser, both sociologists, in their book, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967), which was a product of their collaboration as they undertook studies of dying patients in hospitals. This collaboration prompted many analytical conversations and led to the development of systematic, methodological strategies for use in qualitative studies that social scientists could embrace for use with other topics (Charmaz, 2006). Their groundbreaking publication provided practical guidelines for action while challenging the status quo. Glaser and Strauss (1967) outlined the integral components of grounded theory:

- Collecting and analysing data concurrently,
- The construction of analytical codes as well as categories from data (not from hypothesis),
- The engagement of constant comparison during each stage of analysis,

- Advancing theory development at each step of collection and analysis,
- Memo writing is used to elaborate categories, define relationships, specify properties and determine gaps,
- The use of sampling, which is aimed toward theory construction; and
- Conducting the literature review after the development of an independent analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

### **3.7.3 Grounded theory: a parting of ways.**

While Glaser remained committed to the original methodology of grounded theory, Strauss, writing with Juliet Corbin and others, began to record important differences in his vision of grounded theory, reflecting a different epistemology and methodological interpretation. This parting of ways resulted in the emergence of two separate approaches to grounded theory, labeled “Glaserian” and “Straussian.” Strauss and Corbin’s highly structured version, which is a more generic approach to grounded theory method, has moved the method toward verification and includes their new technical procedures rather than focusing on the comparative methods of the original grounded theory strategies (Charmaz, 2006). Glaser considers his version represents a seamless transition from its inception to the present and that it remains more emergent, while Bryant and Charmaz (2007) believe it relies upon a rigid coding paradigm, which may limit the potential of this approach. It has been called the traditional or classic grounded theory method. While coding remains a cornerstone of the approach used by Strauss (1987) and Strauss and Corbin (1998) to grounded theory, Charmaz (2006) regards it as highly structured and even optional.

### **3.7.4 Constructivist grounded theory methods.**

For this research study, I selected another method of grounded theory; constructivist grounded theory methods (CGTM), most strongly associated with Charmaz (2006).

Constructivist grounded theory methods differ from the Glaserian and Straussian approaches

because, according to Bryant and Charmaz, (2007, p. 10), of the emphasis placed on “how data, analysis, and methodological strategies become constructed, and takes into account the research contexts and researchers’ positions, perspectives, priorities, and interactions.” This perspective is more closely aligned with my worldview as it “assumes that people, including researchers, construct the realities in which they participate and acknowledges that their interpretation of the studied phenomenon is itself a construction” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 187). “Constructivism assumes the relativism of multiple social realities, recognizes the mutual creation of knowledge by the viewer and the viewed, and aims toward interpretive understandings of subjects’ meanings” (Charmaz, 2000a, p. 510).

### **3.7.5 Why engage with grounded theory methods.**

Engaging with grounded theory methods as the primary method of inquiry was intentional because grounding theory that is drawn from data offers insight and provides a meaningful guide to further action, while maintaining a collaborative framework from which to obtain a deeper understanding of the experiences of the participants involved (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The research questions dictated utilizing a constructivist grounded theory approach that focuses on the construction of data and analysis, and is mindful of contextual factors, interactions between researcher and participant and the researcher within the research frame. Therefore, I acknowledge from the outset that the data and analysis are constructed from shared experiences and relationships with the participants (Charmaz, 2006; Charmaz, 2014). Charmaz (2000) argues that traditional, ‘objectivist’ expressions of grounded theory method, which viewed grounded theory as the discovery of codes and categories inherent in data, which were observed in an external world by an objective observer, is no longer practical. She suggests that researchers can utilize the flexibility of grounded theory without conforming to its rigid prescriptions concerning data collection, analysis and epistemological positions, and “can use the tools of grounded theory methods without subscribing to a

prescribed theory of knowledge or view of reality” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 187). From this perspective, a constructivist stance is one where “we can view grounded theories as products of emergent processes that occur through interaction. Researchers construct their respective products from the fabric of the interactions, both witnessed and lived” Charmaz (2006, p. 178).

### **3.7.6 Constructivist research in action.**

Utilizing this qualitative inquiry method signals to the reader that the phenomenon under investigation is the priority, where the aim is to develop theory from data (Corbin & Holt, as cited in Somekh & Lewin, 2005). These emerging theory/theories are viewed as an interpretation dependent on the researcher and the participants, as there are “multiple ways of interpreting a specific set of data” (Corbin & Holt, as cited in Somekh & Lewin, 2005, p. 49). Engaging a phenomenological perspective requires the researcher to act with tact and become sensitive to the worldview of the participants, which van Manen (1990) suggests may afford deeper learning and a deeper thoughtfulness. Engaging a constructivist stance illuminates the important concepts and allows them to emerge as they have been ‘constructed’ by the participants. Employing this method of inquiry is in keeping with my belief that reality is a subjective construct, and supported by Wiersma (2000) who describes this phenomenon as reality being in the eyes (and minds) of the beholder.

According to Charmaz (2006), the natural extension of this constructivist method is looking at how and when the experience under investigation is embedded in a larger, hidden network or situation, enhancing the distinctions between the “hierarchies of power, communication, and opportunity that maintain and perpetuate such differences and distinctions” (p. 130). This study is located within the broad education sector in the US, which is under continual publicly scrutiny. This makes the exploration on the impact of decision-making from this sector and from school district administrators on ECE practitioners’ practices and

epistemology, pertinent. By adding an interpretive dimension to this phenomenological study through case study, it can be used to form the basis for practical theory creation and permits it to support, inform or challenge policy and/or action (Lester, 1999).

### **3.7.8 Case study.**

Case study selects to view a context - a single or small number of people (for example) in order to understand them and to make small generalizations to the wider world surrounding the 'case' (in this study, the sample of practitioners) (Stake, 1995). In this way, case study was a good fit with the design of this study as this approach to research stresses social interaction and the social construction of meaning 'in situ', as its purpose is to participate with and present the "complexity of social activity in order to represent the meanings individual social actors bring to those settings" while it "assumes that 'social reality' is created through social interaction, and seeks to identify and describe before trying to analyze and theorize" (Stark & Torrance, as cited in Somekh & Lewin, 2005, p. 33). The purpose of case study is to illuminate one's understanding of an issue, however, it is often undertaken without attempting to generalize to even a limited population. In multiple-participant research, the strength of inference that can be made increases, once characteristics start to recur with more than one participant (Lester, 1999).

Researchers using case study often utilize interviews as the main source of data collection where comparison is made between interviews and transcriptions of interviews, as in this study. However, there were planned opportunities to conduct classroom observations in situ, which are useful to triangulate data as well as collecting artifacts to assist with the process of triangulation. As a case study of a given population requires purposive sampling, it was a good fit with this study, as suitably qualified early childhood practitioners were sought to participate.

### **3.7.9 Phenomenological approaches and case study.**

Phenomenological and associated approaches can be applied to single cases (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2007). While single case studies are able to illuminate issues that demonstrate discrepancies, system failures and draw attention to differences, positive inferences are more challenging to make without a small sample of participants. In this research, applying phenomenology to this single ‘case’ under investigation affords me the opportunity to build theory from the data.

## **3.8 A Framework to Explore Dilemmas**

### **3.8.1 Dilemma framework.**

Having established that dilemmas were significant occurrences in the work of the practitioners in this study, it is necessary to adopt a frame of reference from which to begin examining them. During initial research, the work of Windschitl (2002) resonated with me and I decided to incorporate his theoretical framework. In his study, Windschitl (2002) analyzed the challenges facing practitioners while attempting to implement constructivist instruction. He outlined the difficulties with constructivism and revealed how implementing the concept becomes fraught with ambiguity, contradiction and compromise. Importantly, Windschitl (2002) theorized a framework with which to analyze the challenges encountered by his participants as they attempted to make personal sense of constructivism in practice. Using Windschitl’s (2002) framework, this research study proceeds by identifying the *conceptual, pedagogical, cultural and political dilemmas* that practitioners face. In each of these dilemma categories, he posed specifically related questions that uncover the types of concerns experienced by practitioners as they engage in constructivist practice.

The four frames of reference Windschitl (2002) used to describe these dilemmas are:

- **Conceptual dilemmas:** practitioners’ attempts in understanding constructivism

- **Pedagogical dilemmas:** decisions regarding instructional approaches, curriculum planning and assessment
- **Cultural dilemmas:** addressing the accepted norms and expectations that constitute the school culture
- **Political dilemmas:** associated with resistance from stakeholders/policymakers (Windschitl, 2002, p. 132).

### **3.8.2 Studies identified that informed this study.**

Le Cornu and Peters (2004) utilized the dilemma framework posited by Windschitl (2002) to inform their study which explored the experiences of four primary school teachers in South Australia involved in a curriculum redesign project that focused on the use of constructivism in practice in the classroom. Le Cornu and Peters (2004) used a qualitative research design, whereby data was collected via initial interviews, individual interviews with participants and classroom observations. This study was one that was pivotal in informing the methodological framework for my own study as it displayed many elements that spoke to me as I sought to refine the methodology of my own research. For instance, Le Cornu and Peters (2004) strived to develop a collaborative working partnership with the participants in their study to ensure they were involved in analysis and interpretation of data. In my study, I use the framework of this study as a starting point as it was a good fit with grounded theory methods, which I chose to engage with.

Le Cornu and Peters (2004) sought insights into the challenges and dilemmas that their participants faced by engaging the theoretical framework identified by Windschitl (2002). I chose to engage with the theoretical framework of dilemmas (Windschitl, 2002) as it was a good fit with my research questions. Throughout their study, Le Cornu and Peters (2004) found that as a result of being involved in the research, many questions arose for the participants about themselves, their view of teaching and learning, as well as each other.



They challenged many previously taken-for-granted assumptions about their beliefs on teaching and learning, which led to them confronting some of the tensions and dilemmas that they each grappled with in their working lives. One finding from this study was that transformation in the classroom is emotional work, which cohere with Le Cornu and Peters (2004), reinforcing that there is an emotional dimension of educational change, where the teachers came to understand that some practices were congruent with their constructivist beliefs and some were not.

In another study that informed my research, Wien (2004) used case study to explore how eight ECE teachers in metropolitan schools in Toronto, Canada managed the increasing accountability brought about by program standards, benchmarks, progress indicators and achievement standards while attempting to value and maintain DAP in an environment that placed time constraints, increased expectations and political challenges upon these teachers. Wien (2004) utilized interviews, observations and collaborative discussions with the teachers in her study to illuminate how each of the teachers managed these challenges and dilemmas within the complexity of their working lives. The teachers in this study faced similar dilemmas to the participants in my own study, such as the dilemma of whether to use teacher-directed strategies or to focus on play and child-directed investigation strategies.

Wien's (2004) qualitative study informed my study as she engaged with case study, observations and interviews, while she acknowledged her role as researcher was not without bias as she attempted to deepen the reader's understanding of negotiating dilemmas within the ECE classroom, and illuminate the nature of teaching and learning. She drew the conclusion that it is much more difficult for teachers to engage with constructive teaching practices in an environment of increasing accountability, however, her results revealed that it was not impossible for those teachers who were able to implement curriculum and were confident in their constructivist practices.

### **3.8.3 The dilemma of constructivism.**

Utilizing this frame of reference to inform thinking about possible dilemmas practitioners may experience in their working life, firstly requires addressing the difficult task of what constructivist pedagogy means in practice. It can be said that all mental activity is constructive and therefore, in one way, all teaching is constructivist (Windschitl, 2002). Von Glasersfeld (1993) suggests that even when students are engaged in rote learning situations, or in passive learning situations they are, in fact, constructing knowledge because that is how the mind works. In this study, constructivist pedagogy refers to a range of strategies practitioners use to support and facilitate students' understandings as they participate in various activities, including problem-based activities, collaborative learning scenarios, where discourse is valued, and the traditional teacher-directed relationship between practitioner and student is transformed towards a more complex one that is interactive and unpredictable (Darling-Hammond, 1996). It lies in direct contrast to the transference instruction models, where lecture and demonstration are the preferred delivering method of knowledge to learners, and practitioners use whole class instruction and tender the right answers and the correct method to solve problems.

### **3.8.4 A caveat.**

It is important to acknowledge that not all ECE practitioners openly subscribe to constructivist pedagogy or indeed, if they do, not all are wholly constructivist in their approach. In fact, many of the practitioners in this study adopted an eclectic approach, using ideas, concepts and theories from various approaches and applying them where they worked best, cohering with McDevitt and Ormrod (2004) who suggested utilizing several theories and creating an eclectic approach in their use of pedagogy is very practical, as no one theory can comprehensively explain all aspects of development and learning.

Windschitl (2002) reminds us that there are many reasons why practitioners struggle with the incorporation of constructivist pedagogy, including:

- Constructivist approaches involve fundamental changes in how practitioners think about teaching, moving away from a focus on delivering content towards one of positioning students' undertakings towards understanding being at the center of their educational endeavors;
- Difficulty in negotiating the amount of student autonomy within a constructivist classroom;
- Negotiating how to conduct assessments that focus on the processes as well as on the products of learning and involve the students in this process;
- It can result in controversy and substantial conflict that can make success difficult or impossible to achieve; and
- Practitioners are ill equipped to manage objections from stakeholders in the school community, including parents and administrators.

Windschitl (2000) acknowledges that criticism leveled at constructivist education relates to the goals of education, which are articulated via a set of state standards and therefore may not be compatible with the diverse backgrounds and understandings of the individual students.

To address Question Two, the focus on the negotiation of such dilemmas, through a constructivist lens, reveals practitioners' views of accountability and the dilemmas they experience, including the contextual factors that impact their pedagogy, beliefs and practice and how these practitioners construct meaning from them.

### **3.9 The Constructivist**

### **3.9.1 What is constructivism?**

Constructivism refers to both the belief that people construct their own knowledge from the experiences and interactions that take place in their life, as well as to the nature of knowledge. The epistemological assumptions underpinning constructivism indicate the world does not contain unambiguous truths that are independent of one's perception, which is only known via instruction, but instead, the world is knowable only through the interaction of knower and experienced phenomena (von Glasersfeld, 1987). Therefore, learning is an act one undertakes as an individual and in negotiation with others. Knowledge is a collection of constructions that are subject to change as new kinds of evidence are discovered and learners negotiate new ideas.

### **3.9.2 Social constructivism.**

For the social constructivist, learning means the personal and social construction of meaning, that is: reality is a social construct. From this perspective, reality is not an absolute value as the knower is responsible for his/her own truth based on their experiences and interactions (Von Glaserfeld, 1995). The social constructivist researcher assumes that people create their own social realities, rather than seeing the world as given, they explore the world of the research participant, analyzing what they believe is reality and how they construct their perspectives and actions (Charmaz, 2006; Charmaz, 2014). This constructivist framework also reflects my belief that people actively engage in the construction of their own realities and cultural meanings and that there are multiple realities or ways of viewing the world. In this way, this research journey has been a shared one between myself, as researcher, and the participants (Charmaz, 2006).

## **3.10 The Process of Data Collection and Analysis**

### **3.10.1 A starting point.**

Having a place of employment as a starting point to conduct research can be very useful to a researcher, however, this was not the case for me during this study, as I was not employed in any school district. This brought challenges when seeking participants as there was no prior relationship from which to begin recruiting, resulting in slow responses to participate in the study. However, the benefit was that I had no prior knowledge or relationship with the participants or some of the settings from which they were drawn to color or prejudice data collection and analysis. The only prior relationship I had with any of the participants was that my children had been students in one of the settings and only one of the participants had actually taught any of my children. To begin the research process, approval to recruit practitioners for this study needed to be sought and obtained from the Superintendent in each School District in both Pennsylvania and Delaware.

### **3.10.2 Approval to begin.**

After applying for and being granted approval to commence this project from The University of Southern Queensland Human Research and Ethics Committee (HREC Approval Number: H11REA133), a letter of invitation (Appendix A) was mailed to twelve Superintendents in twelve School Districts in Pennsylvania and two School Districts in neighbouring Delaware to introduce myself and establish the purpose of the study to each School District Superintendent. The letter of invitation clearly outlined the purpose of the study, the procedures involved, and any risks to participants and noted that the study was strictly voluntary and participants were free to withdraw at any time without penalty. The title of the study and guiding questions were stated and the matter of confidentiality and anonymity was made explicit. Only four responses to the initial letter of invitation were received from the twelve Pennsylvania School Districts and two responses from Delaware School Districts.

The next step was to reach out to the ECE practitioners themselves and invite them to participate in the study. This was done via an initial letter of invitation to ECE practitioners (Appendix B), and included an information sheet detailing the requirements of each participant (Appendix C), which were mailed to the six School Districts (once approval was granted by the Superintendents' of each District). Next, a letter of invitation was emailed (Appendix D) via the school email system to suitable ECE participants. In total, thirty-six personal emails were sent to potential participants, including a copy of the sample questionnaire (Appendix E). From this initial letter of invitation only six affirmative responses were received, yet the study required between six and ten participants. After several months, a follow up letter of invitation (Appendix F) was mailed to the schools and then emailed to ECE practitioners within the School Districts that had granted approval. From this second letter a further four participants were recruited to bring the total up to ten ECE practitioners willing to participate in the study. A consent form (Appendix G) was issued to participants outlining the procedure and requesting a formal signature of consent and participants were given an opportunity to ask questions before signing the consent form.

### **3.10.3 Data collection overview.**

Strauss and Corbin (1998) believe the ideal way to promote an understanding of the theoretical issues begins with asking effective questions and making comparisons while searching for clear distinctions, which was a useful starting point to guide this research journey. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were used to obtain insight into the thinking processes of the ten volunteer ECE participants. Beginning with a core of exploratory questions to obtain background information from each practitioner and to 'begin the conversation' and 'set the tone', with the aim of putting the practitioner at ease to feel comfortable to share information with me in a two-way exchange. The use of these fluid interview questions and taped-recordings of the participants' responses ensures a descriptive

validity is obtained as well as providing an opportunity to crosscheck transcriptions with participants at a later date (member checking). Tape-recording of interviews also affords the researcher the opportunity to revisit data at a later date when required.

The data collection methods suggested for use in phenomenological studies are a good fit for this study. The data collection tools most often used in phenomenological studies are interviews, which relate to speech; diaries, which relate to the written word; and observations, which relate to the visual (Moustakas, 1994).

The primary methods of data collection and analysis in this study are asking open-ended questions and gathering artifacts for comparison and triangulation, which is a good fit with grounded theory methods according to Charmaz (2006). However, to enhance internal reliability and to cross-reference and triangulate findings, multiple data collection methods are used, including taking field notes when observing in the classroom situation, incorporating participant's written responses (where applicable), transcriptions of recorded audiotaped interviews and gathering a variety of supporting sources (artifacts) (Wiersma, 2000). The use of a data collection table (Appendix H) was essential to assist with tracking multiple data collection instruments over time.

#### **3.10.4 Data analysis overview.**

Grounded theory requires that theory is derived from systematically collected data and continually analyzed throughout the research process, seeking to compare and contrast possible findings. The process of journaling and memo writing began immediately after conferring with the participants and receiving their approval of the data collected. When using grounded theory methods, it is assumed that the researcher collects and analyzes data simultaneously, allowing emerging theories to guide future data collection. Engaging with constructivist grounded theory methods championed by Charmaz (2000; 2006; 2008; 2014), was therefore the perfect method for me to examine the emergence of pedagogical dilemmas

for practitioners struggling with external forces as a result of the mandated educational reform initiated by NCLB. Employing grounded theory methods created an “integrated theoretical formulation that gives an understanding about how persons”, (in this case), “experience and respond to events that occur” (Corbin & Holt, 2005, p. 49). Using constructivist grounded theory methods in this way is a co-construction between participant and myself, as the researcher (Charmaz, 2000).

Traditional grounded theory methods begin with no *a priori* assumptions, however, as this study is more closely aligned with metaphysical phenomenology and in keeping with the humanist and feminist researchers, where the notion of being bias-free is refuted, it must be stated at this point that the literature holds many negative claims regarding accountability, as does the media. While it may seem impossible not to be swayed by this opinion, it is still possible to remain open to hearing and understanding a selection of viewpoints, both negative and positive without concluding what the outcome of the data in this study would reveal. To this end, I maintain this perspective, remaining open and reflexive to alternative explanations, ensuring that reality is viewed in a holistic manner, as data emerged as grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

### **3.10.5 Data collection – interview.**

Each participant was interviewed individually, with the exception of Mallory and Jacky, who wished to be interviewed together, (pseudonyms are used in this study and will be discussed later) using the same core of exploratory questions as a starting point, with the purpose of obtaining background information from each practitioner and to ensure the practitioners’ felt comfortable and at ease to enable the conversation to flow, in order to share information. Following each initial interview, which lasted between one to two hours depending on the practitioner, the taped recordings were later transcribed and printed in order for coding to



begin. This interview/transcription/coding process continues throughout the research journey as new notes are added and memos completed when connections and comparisons are made. Practitioners were emailed copies of their own transcript for approval of the document and clarification was sought where required. Several of the practitioners continued the dialogue with me after the initial interview was concluded via email, text and conversation. There were also several practitioners who did not wish to commit to being involved in the study but chose to make comments with regard to the study that they were happy to have included in the final report anonymously. These are indicated by the bracketed phrase: (Personal Comment).

### **3.10.6 Coding.**

Charmaz (2006) describes coding as the “pivotal link between collecting data and developing an emergent theory. [Through coding] you begin weaving two major threads in the fabric of grounded theory: generalizable theoretical statements that transcend specific times and places and contextual analyses of actions and events” (p. 46). According to Charmaz (2006), when working with constructivist grounded theory, two main coding phases are used: *Initial coding* – the researcher remains open to exploring all theoretical possibilities and sticks closely to the data to discover what the research participant considers problematic – code data as actions.

*Focused coding* – more selected and conceptual and selects the most significant or most frequently occurring codes to synthesize large amounts of data. During this phase of coding, it is possible to move across interviews and observations to compare experiences, actions and interpretations. Using codes helps the researcher to “condense data and provide a handle on them” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 59) making the data more manageable.

During the process of initial coding, line-by-line coding of interview transcripts is employed, because it is useful to work quickly through the data, keeping codes simple and coding with gerunds to help focus on the action and detect processes. This reduces the data somewhat and

indicates areas of similarity between practitioners, spotlighting these as possible areas of further investigation. Using notecards to separate the data further, the process of identifying the similarities begins, as comparisons are made, yielding a large number of areas that are consistent across practitioners. During this process, it is useful to construct a table (Appendix I) to identify and categorize what areas are similar between participants and to use the language and ‘voices’ of the participants to help categorize these. Using the two guiding questions to guide what is important data is a useful strategy to employ. From this process, various dilemmas are identified across the data groups and grouped using key words or themes in each of Windschitl’s (2002) dilemma categories (Appendix J).

### **3.10.7 Analysis.**

During analysis, the collected data is continually revisited. Having taped recordings and transcriptions provides the opportunity to revisit interviews when new information comes to light to identify any connections that may have been overlooked initially. With the aim of continually looking for connections, similarities and relationships within the data while searching for emerging patterns, new concepts and linkages between practitioners emerge, showing similarities between transcripts even though this study is conducted in two different states.

The use of words delineating strong emotions, such as frustration, anger, irritation, or words with a negative connotation such as constrained, pressure, stress, or exhausted, are used consistently by the participants signaling an important area where connections and patterns emerge. Key words such as *accountability*, *dilemma*, *testing*, *drowning*, as well as key phrases such as *professional identity*, *closing the gap*, *decision-making*, *vicious cycle* are all consistently used in some way by the participants. These key words and phrases signaled to me areas where further attention is required and provides links between the responses given by the participants. It became clear that key words and words of strong emotion spotlight

areas of similarity between practitioners that warrant deeper investigation into what is going on.

The next step is to look more closely at the data through focused coding. The notecards are used again and each card is given a key word or phrase as a heading and the process of grouping together those that are the same or similar can begin, starting with a strong emotive word (such as frustration, anger, irritation) or keyword/phrase (such as constrained, pressure, stress, exhausted, accountability, dilemma, or testing). During this process of comparison, it is clear that there are many similarities between practitioners and important repeating themes begin to emerge that resonate with each participant. Again, these similarities are further sorted into the most important themes, grouped together and assigned headings from the keywords or 'voices' of the practitioners themselves. These headings include:

- Time constraints
- Appropriateness (developmental)
- Appearance (making things the same for the sake of appearance)
- Operating out of fear
- Control (very controlled environment)
- Constrained
- Developmental versus Academic
- Documentation/Measurement (hidden learning not valued)
- Burn Out/Stressors
- Inconsistent (curriculum, expectations, taxes).

### **3.10.8 Transparent stance.**

Maintaining a neutral outlook to ensure openness to the possibility of the emergence of a theory, and allowing it to develop organically without forcing one, helps to determine the direction the research takes. In this case, acknowledging an existential phenomenological

point of view, where it is clear to the reader the belief that one cannot separate oneself from the world and therefore cannot possess a detached viewpoint, becomes important at this juncture, to ensure a measure of transparency. It may be possible to maintain a neutral outlook; however, I must clarify that the government and media focus on the reauthorization of NCLB has created a negative spotlight on these issues as the count down to the reauthorization draws ever closer.

With this in mind, it is important to state that the reauthorization of NCLB did not happen in a vacuum. The media, especially print media, describes all aspects of this process on a weekly basis and the debate over this contentious issue has become heated. Parents and teachers alike discuss it openly and it is generally negatively received. Social media is awash with horror stories and comparisons with other nations abound. While the media reports that there is hope and optimism surrounding the revamping of NCLB, it is clear that many are cynical of this process undertaken by government officials. As a researcher, I believe it important to lay bare any biases that may be held, but it is true to say that while undertaking this research, the negativity surrounding the issues did not persuade me that the underlying intent for this law was negative. In fact, it seems clear the intention for mandated accountability is to effect positive change. Remaining neutral during the in-depth interviews ensures the participants are not swayed or led toward any particular response by my word or action.

### **3.10.9 Dilemmas.**

In order to bring to light the impact of mandated accountability frameworks in the lives of the participants, I understand that one way is to view them in terms of the *dilemmas* that are evident. Importantly, Windschitl's (2002) conceptual framework is most suitable to use as a reference point from which to uncover dilemmas, as his categorization of them into *conceptual, pedagogical, cultural and political dilemmas*, allows for a broad range of areas

and understandings to be explored and developed. Using these four frames of reference, similar dilemmas are grouped together into one of the four categories, and using a key word or phrase, a *representative question* is then identified in each dilemma category, indicative of the most problematic dilemmas that emerged from the interviews with the practitioners (Appendix K).

### **3.11 The Participants**

#### **3.11.1 Purposive sampling.**

Qualitative research design often necessitates researchers making a decision about the participants they recruit based on those who would be the most suitable to contribute appropriate data for relevance and depth of knowledge, or if the research requires specialist knowledge of the research issue. According to Creswell (2003), purposive sampling refers to site selection or participant selection that best assists the researcher to understand the problem and the research question, where the selected participants must be willing to reflect on and share their knowledge. This research is one such study where purposive sampling is incorporated in the design. The sampling criteria reflect the characteristics essential to the membership of the target group. In this study, those characteristics are participants who hold ECE qualifications (and/or experience in the field) and are employed in an elementary (primary) school setting in the US. The participants are selected on their particular professional qualifications and their knowledge of the phenomenon under investigation with the intention of having them share their knowledge and experiences openly with me.

The original pilot study was conducted in two preschools in Delaware, and which used a phenomenological approach to illuminate how practitioners used play to facilitate higher order thinking skills and scaffold learning in ECE classrooms. It revealed a dearth of willing participants with the required qualifications (a bachelor degree). Many of the participants reported feelings of being overwhelmed in their working life, with the added workload

brought on by increased accountability, and reported an increase in responsibilities without an increase in monetary reward or professional respect, which reduced the amount of time available to facilitate play. Of the many potential practitioners I invited to participate in the study, many stated an unwillingness to add any extra responsibilities to their workload over and above their mandated work duties. Therefore, recruiting further afield was planned to ensure a suitable number of participants were recruited (between 6-10 participants). A total of 10 participants were interviewed and at that point data saturation appeared to have been reached.

### **3.11.2 Collaborative relationships.**

Phenomenology is a method used to understand the meaning of experiences in our daily lives (Anderson, 1998). By engaging with this methodology, my aim is to build collaborative relationships with these practitioners and provide a supportive environment, as authentic responses are crucial to the outcome of this study. My intention being to have each participant understand that they played an active part in this research study and to develop in them a sense of ownership of the choices being made regarding the direction the study is taking. It was important to communicate to the participants the belief that context, culture and perceptions all influence us in different ways as it is my belief that there are many social worlds, and each one is a human construct that is in constant change (Potter, 1996).

The goal in using this constructivist framework is to ensure that the simple recording of practitioner's behavior/practices is not the objective, but rather to solicit opportunities to collaborate with each practitioner in order to gain a deeper understanding about what their practices mean to them and to understand how and why they construct these practices in the way that they do. This emphasized the subjectiveness of their practices (Wiersma, 2000), which provides the study with a measure of reliability. This collaboration also allows the opportunity to provide 'thick descriptions' (Geertz, 1973) for a richness and authenticity of

the context to draw the reader into the world of the practitioner. Throughout the research process, individual transcripts of the recorded interviews were returned to the participants via email or hard copy, providing them the opportunity for clarification, validation and approval of the document before it is considered final to ensure credibility, as it relates to the trustworthiness of findings. Artifacts are identified and collected from participants for comparison and triangulation of findings.

### **3.11.3 Introducing the practitioners.**

This study, conducted in Pennsylvania and Delaware in the US, could not have been possible without the practitioners who so generously agreed to be interviewed and permitted entry into their professional domain of the classroom setting to observe their beliefs and practice in action first hand. All of the participants stated some degree of nervousness and level of discomfort at being observed in action in their classroom, but it was important to me to ensure these fears were eased by reminding them that the aim was not to judge them or their students but to simply record what was observed. The practitioners who offered time to observe in their classroom were collegiate, supportive and welcoming. All of these women are dedicated practitioners who value education and the potential that it provides for each of their students. During this process, each participant offered her own story to shine a light on her individual pedagogy and to juxtapose this with the political mandate of the day. In the introductory descriptions of each practitioner, both interview data and classroom observations (where applicable) were included, to provide an initial introduction to each practitioner for the reader. Each and every one of these practitioners made this study possible with their generosity of time and spirit. The participant's names have been changed to protect their identity and to provide a measure of anonymity.

Mallory is employed as a second-grade teacher in an elementary school in a semi-rural setting in Pennsylvania. She has been teaching full time since she graduated from College with a

Bachelor of Science degree and has taught second grade for six years (she has been teaching for a total of 16 years). She also holds a Master of Education degree. Her belief is that children all have different educational and developmental needs and that at this stage of development, children are unable to sit still in their desks for prolonged periods of time, so her classroom is set up to allow and encourage small group work, individual work, as well as whole group instruction. Mallory incorporates constructive practices where possible, by planning for students to act out literature, retell stories, and create puppets. She includes science experiments and introduces a variety of manipulatives within the mathematics curriculum.

Jacky teaches second grade in the same elementary school as Mallory, and the two share ideas and do some of their curriculum planning together. She also shares the belief that children have different educational and developmental needs and are unable to sit still in their desks for prolonged periods of time, so she provides various opportunities for students to move about the classroom and work in various groupings. She has been working in the same school district for twenty years and as a second-grade practitioner for nineteen of them. Her undergraduate degree is a Bachelor of Science in Elementary/Early Childhood and she holds a Master Degree equivalency.

Hannah is a kindergarten practitioner in a small rural school setting, servicing approximately 200 students in south-east Pennsylvania. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Education degree and a Master of Science in Education in Reading, and has a Reading Specialist Certification. She has been teaching for over twenty years. Her classroom is arranged in small groups with plenty of carpeted floor area for the students to work together in pairs, small groups, or individually. Her bright and colorful classroom, kind manner, and creative ability are very established in the school district and many parents request her for their kindergarteners.



Jocelyn is a first-grade practitioner in an elementary school in a semi-rural county in Pennsylvania and has a Bachelor of Science degree and a Master in Education and has been teaching in the same school district for eight years. Her classroom boasts soft furnishings such as a large armchair for reading stories, a soft-lighted desk lamp and large cushions for the students to relax on while reading; all indicative of her belief that a classroom should include a sense of community, where students feel they are able to take risks in a safe environment that has routine and structure provided. She states that her philosophy is very different from her practices because of restrictive administrative guidelines, but she still tries to incorporate a lot of games within her curriculum by structuring Learning Centers (centers) as games and incorporating games for spelling and mathematics, as well having the students perform theatrical plays, something that is rare in her school district.

At the time of this interview, Louise is teaching first grade, but was first employed as the Certified Aid [which means she holds a Pennsylvania Teaching Certificate - a document prepared and issued by the Pennsylvania Department of Education, indicating that the holder has completed a professional preparation program and is qualified to perform specific professional duties. She was employed solely to assist classroom practitioners across all grade levels with the daily tasks of small group work and one-on-one learning as required], (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2016). In this role, she spent her day attending to all grade levels in a mid-size semi-rural elementary school in south-east Pennsylvania. She has an Elementary Education Degree and a Master Degree as a Reading Specialist and has been teaching for over twelve years. She states she has an eclectic philosophy, which “revolves around a child feeling safe and feeling that they are in an environment where there is trust and where all children can learn in their own learning style.” Louise taught kindergarten for a year and noted that kindergarten classrooms looked totally different when she first began teaching compared with how they look now. In the past, they were equipped with dramatic

play areas, construction areas, free choice activities and lots of manipulatives. She stated that the current kindergarten classrooms now resemble how first-grade classrooms looked in the past.

Jayne taught second grade for seven years and was a school substitute teacher before becoming the Certified Building Aid (see above) in an elementary school located in south-east Pennsylvania. She holds a Bachelor Degree in English and Political Science and a Master Degree in Teaching and believes that every child can learn if the right teaching strategy is found for that child. Her philosophy is based on a thematic approach to learning, using concrete, practical experiences to ensure the younger students' developmental needs are met. She has observed that play and imaginative, cooperative play have been removed from the kindergarten setting in recent years, and suggests that it is dependent on the practitioner's philosophy and abilities to include these constructivist aspects into the curriculum. She admits it is more difficult for classroom practitioners to incorporate these constructivist activities in the current political environment than it was in the past.

Jayda began her teaching career as a paraprofessional and enjoyed working with children so decided to undertake further study to attain her teaching certification. She holds a Bachelor of Liberal Arts Degree in Women's Studies and a Master in Education. After working in England in an all boys' school in the Special Education Department, Jayda returned to the US to work in a developmental kindergarten setting with English Language Learner (ELL) students in a large school district in Pennsylvania on the border near Delaware, with a high migrant Hispanic population. She is currently employed in a kindergarten setting in a large city in Delaware, also with a focus on ELL and a high population of migrant Hispanic students. She describes her philosophy as balanced constructivist and states that she is a pragmatist with an eclectic approach to teaching, where role modeling and experimentation are strategies she employs.

Kate is employed in Delaware in a very large school district with a high migrant Hispanic population, in one of the largest school districts in Delaware. Kate has a Bachelor of Science degree in Nursing and a Master Degree in Elementary Education. She began her career ten years ago as an Instructional Paraprofessional in a program called WRAP (Working to Reach Academic Potential) for at-risk students in kindergarten, to provide them with extra literacy by offering a full-day program (before full-day kindergarten was available in Delaware).

After completing her Master's Degree, she was employed as a kindergarten practitioner in the same school district in which she was previously employed as a Paraprofessional.

Carolyn holds her Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and a Certification for Elementary Education as well as a Master Degree in Education. She has been teaching first-grade for twenty-one years, fifteen of those in her current school, which is located on the outskirts of a small city setting in Pennsylvania. She believes that providing a positive, safe and nurturing environment is key to encouraging her students to take risks in their learning, along with setting clear, high expectations and accommodating each student's different learning style. She is very happy in her role and in her current school district and believes she has been accommodating the standards for the newly introduced Common Core Curriculum for many years.

Stella did not begin her working life in a teaching profession. Her first degree is in management in the hospitality industry but decided to pursue a career in education by completing a Master Degree in Education. She began teaching right after she earned her Master's Degree and taught fifth grade for the next five years in a school district located in a small town near industry and farmland in Pennsylvania. After a break from teaching to have her family, she resumed her teaching career as a substitute practitioner for grades K-5 in a small school district in Pennsylvania. Stella believes that the optimum learning environment occurs when students are engaged in a fair and compassionate classroom, where there is

understanding and structure. She voiced her concerns about students falling behind grade level and not receiving the extra help required due to increasing budget cuts, an increase in classroom behavior issues without paraprofessional support, and the number of extra hours it takes to do a good job outside of regular school hours.

### **3.12 Role of the Researcher**

#### **3.12.1 Reflective researcher.**

It is important that the researcher maintains a professional outlook and a non-judgmental stance in the research process, when gathering data and when clarifying data with participants, as this is critical to the continued involvement and ongoing relationships with participants. Patton (2002) suggests the researcher must be both a skillful observer and a skillful interviewer to capture as much of the non-verbal message as possible. Being a reflective practitioner (Schön, 1983) during the action (reflection *in* action) as well as during the analysis phase (reflection *on* action), was an essential tool to the success of data collection and analysis. From a constructivist grounded theorist viewpoint, a reflexive stance toward the research process is imperative and encompasses feminist methodologies (Letherby, 2011) because consideration of how theories evolve is important (Charmaz, 2006). Incorporating self-critical analysis and reflection is the art of reflexivity (Somekh & Lewin, 2005).

As a single researcher conducting this study, it necessitates a timely and consistent attentiveness to issues of bias and an acknowledgement of, and how, subjectivity relates to the analysis of data. Developing the ability to scrutinize my own research experience, decisions and interpretations invite the reader into my world to assess the extent my assumptions and positions have influenced the inquiry (Charmaz, 2006). Reflexivity during the research process ensures it remains transparent and trustworthy in the eyes of the reader, which is an explicit goal of this research.

### **3.12.2 Reflective journaling.**

I kept a journal of reflective thoughts and ideas during the research study to assist in the process of making explicit any interpretations within the research, which may have influenced how data is collected and interpreted, and is used as an opportunity to evaluate critical incidents that happen within the classroom, in conversation with the practitioners, and within the research process itself and serves as a useful analytical tool. The intention is to enable the complex task of linking understandings with theory and research, to inform practice (Noble, Macfarlane & Cartmel, 2004). Keeping a journal enables the explicit exploration of new possibilities without the constraint of underlying assumptions (Noble, Macfarlane & Cartmel, 2004).

## **3.13 Ethical and Political Considerations**

### **3.13.1 Overview of ethical considerations.**

Ethical and political considerations were crucial to me throughout this research journey and have been at the forefront of the research design especially given that the outcome of this research is dependent upon authentic responses from participants. It is vital to this study that respect for all participants, their viewpoints' and the political landscape of the time be very clearly conveyed. The choice of design for this study clearly reflects my desire to foreground the importance of ethical issues, which were addressed prior to the commencement of the study in conjunction with the supervisory team, Professor Karen Noble and Doctor. David Cleaver, to ensure respect for the participants on all levels. When conducting this research, ethical and political considerations were always at the forefront of decision-making. I am not employed in any of the schools where the participants were drawn from, making me somewhat of an outsider, but certainly not a stakeholder. Therefore, gaining the trust and respect of the participants was an important element in conducting this study. During the design phase, I was determined to remain reflexive to new ways of thinking and working,

offering a measure of transparency and trustworthiness. Time spent reflecting on personal subjectivity was an important element to this study to uncover new questions and concepts to guide the data that was collected along with interpretations of that data, and to shine a light on the practices and pedagogy of the practitioner's, giving them a 'voice' in this research.

### **3.13.2 Anonymity and confidentiality.**

Throughout the study, strict adherence to the guidelines outlined in the 'National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Human's' (National Health & Medical Research Council, 1999) has been maintained. Anonymity occurs when even the researcher cannot link a participant with the data of that person. While anonymity cannot be completely guaranteed in qualitative research, this study does not link individual responses with participants' identities, meaning that a vigorous attempt has been made by the researcher to ensure that there is no unauthorized access to the data. As confidentiality and anonymity have been a priority in this research, all participants have been provided with a pseudonym to protect their identity and all names of employers and school districts have been changed or omitted. To ensure the participants rights to confidentiality, all transcripts and hard copies of documents have been stored in a locked cabinet in a locked office at my home, and all email communication deleted from my password-protected computer. Any electronic information remaining on my computer used for the study is password protected. This has been done to ensure that there is no unauthorized access to the data and the research is only available to myself.

### **3.14 Limitations and delimitations.**

It is important to acknowledge the factors that might be considered as specific limitations to a study and to highlight how these may have made an impact on the interpretations made. Firstly, one researcher alone undertook the project. Potentially, two or more might have, through collaboration, created a different range of 'co-constructed' meanings. As a

constructivist, it was important to acknowledge that my perception of experiences, events and phenomena would be value-laden, demanding that a reflexive stance is used and clarifying feedback sought from participants. The use of constructivist grounded theory methods allows the possibility to search and re-search the data, providing time for reflection, but rendering me part of the ‘constructed theory’ as it reflects my own worldview. As stated previously in this chapter, generalization is not an intention of this research, but rather the focus is on trustworthiness, specifically, credibility (prolonged engagement with the phenomenon, persistent observation, triangulation, member checking), transferability (use of thick description), dependability and confirmability (external checking) (Lincoln & Guba, 1990).

In this qualitative study, it is important to acknowledge the delimitations, which include:

- the decision to limit the study to a small purposive sample of suitably qualified ECE practitioners because as this is a qualitative study employing grounded theory methods, I believe saturation will be reached by the time I have interviewed eight to ten participants
- to engage only one researcher and not include more, as I believe establishing a trustworthy, working relationship with the participants is best achieved by one person
- the decision to engage with purely qualitative research methods, as I believe these are the very best fit for the research questions posed and fit with my research aesthetic
- the decision to review only literature associated with accountability, specifically in ECE and appropriate pedagogy and practices in ECE and not include literature outside of the scope of this research as the field of education is so wide and diverse that it would simply clutter the information received.

### **3.15 Conclusion**

In this chapter, the research design and method for conducting the research is explained in light of competing methodologies, the data collection instrument is outlined and data analysis discussed in detail. The population and sampling is explained in light of the research objectives and the ethical and considerations are outlined in conjunction with the study's limitations and delimitations. The role of the researcher is located within the research and the trustworthiness of the study has been demonstrated. In the following chapter, the findings of this study will be detailed with appropriate use of the participants' voices.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### Findings

*It is, in fact, nothing short of a miracle that the modern methods of instruction have not yet entirely strangled the holy curiosity of inquiry; for this delicate little plant, aside from stimulation, stands mainly in need of freedom; without this it goes to wrack and ruin without fail. It is a very grave mistake to think that the enjoyment of seeing and searching can be promoted by means of coercion and a sense of duty, (Albert Einstein; 1879-1955).*

## **4 Findings**

### **4.1 Overview**

In Chapter One, it was contended that mandatory accountability frameworks are being increasingly employed within ECE, with governments seeking firmer control and imposing stricter guidelines on ECE practitioners, and that the imposition of these guidelines impacts the contemporary pedagogy, beliefs and practice of practitioners employed in ECE settings. Chapter Two detailed the current thinking on mandatory accountability, specifically NCLB, including the linkage of funding to accountability and the dilemmas this poses for practitioners. Chapter Three outlined the research paradigm and the underlying considerations for choosing this research methodology. Data collection techniques were outlined and connections linking the choice to use a phenomenological approach, as well as specifying data analysis methods and discussing the decision to engage with grounded theory methods. Investigating how and when the experience under investigation is embedded in a larger, hidden network, magnifying the distinctions between the “hierarchies of power, communication, and opportunity that maintain and perpetuate such differences and distinctions” was proffered (Charmaz, 2006, p. 130). In Chapter Three, the practitioners were introduced and thus, their voices were invited into the discussion about the possible challenges accountability may present to them.

In this chapter, Chapter Four, the findings of this research are described and explained in keeping with utilizing case study, which strives to identify and describe the social construction of the case under investigation before seeking to analyze and theorize (Stark and Torrance, 2005). The dilemmas these ECE practitioners face are described utilizing the stories from these participants to ensure their voices are clearly heard. The research questions are also addressed in detail, firstly by exploring the participants’ responses in light of Research Question One to contextualize the perceptions and experiences of the participants within the current educational climate.

(1) What do ECE practitioners consider to be appropriate ECE pedagogy and practice? This question explores the philosophical views and practices of the practitioners and how they enact their pedagogy within the current educational climate.

The second question examines the effects of accountability and the issues that accountability creates, which are identified by applying the conceptual lens adopted by Windschitl (2002).

(2) What impact (if any) has mandated accountability had, either positive or negative, on the pedagogies, practice and decision-making process of ECE practitioners? This question explores the standpoint of practitioners toward NCLB and what practices these practitioners employ to maintain (or not) their own pedagogy in light of NCLB.

The dilemmas foregrounded in this research are identified using Windschitl's (2002) four frames of reference. Windschitl (2002) organizes the dilemmas into four dilemma categories:

- **Conceptual dilemmas:** are those practitioners' tackle when they attempt to understand the underpinnings of constructivism
- **Pedagogical dilemmas:** relate to decisions regarding instructional approaches, curriculum planning and assessment
- **Cultural dilemmas:** arise when addressing the accepted norms and expectations that constitute classroom roles and school culture
- **Political dilemmas:** are associated with resistance from stakeholders/policymakers when accepted norms are questioned or challenged.

The purpose of engaging with Windschitl's (2002) framework is to create a broad theoretical engagement with the perspectives of the participants which will lead to deeper interpretative possibilities and understandings regarding practitioner dilemmas in order to view them from the practitioner's perspective. To begin with, participants' responses will be explored in light of research Question One. This will contextualize the perceptions and experiences of the participants within the current educational climate. Question Two then examines the effects

of accountability and the issues created are identified and discussed through the application of the conceptual lens adopted by Windschitl (2002).

In this study, the dilemmas identified by practitioners relate to addressing issues ECE practitioners face on a daily basis with a focus on the increasing significance of accountability in their classrooms and the challenges this presents for them. Following on from that is a report on the conceptual dilemmas, pedagogical dilemmas, cultural dilemmas and the political dilemmas that were revealed. There are many common themes shared between the practitioners and whether they are employed in the state of Delaware or Pennsylvania was of little consequence. Whether they are employed in a semi-rural setting, a suburban setting or an inner city setting also showed little significance. There are some consistent findings for all of the practitioners across the board as well as an outlier, whose contribution brought challenges and insights.

## **4.2 Philosophical Underpinnings of Practitioners Pedagogy**

### **4.2.1 Overview of pedagogy and practice.**

The first research question addresses the philosophical underpinnings of the ECE practitioners in this study. The purpose of a practitioner's educational philosophy is to make explicit his/her own unique set of principles, beliefs and ways of being in the classroom environment that encompass student performance, management and assessment. These participants all cited some early personal experience that prompted them to begin the journey toward a teaching career. They all formed their individual educational philosophies by drawing from personal experiences, beliefs and training, which are reflected in the pedagogy and practices they employ in the classroom.

### **4.2.2 Influences on choosing education as a career in action.**

The following illustrations shared by the practitioner participants reveal influential moments that steered them towards careers in teaching. Mallory stated, " If students work hard enough,

and they believe in themselves, they can accomplish anything. My third-grade teacher did this, and it was fun and she really cared about me and she really believed in me.” She explained that this teacher served as the inspiration for her own teaching aspirations. Hannah explained that a summer internship in a migrant program, that was run like a school was what opened her eyes to teaching. She believed it was this that made her realize that she would enjoy teaching after working with the students. Stella declared, “I love to be with kids, I love to be with people. I wanted to work with people.” Louise revealed that she always wanted to be a teacher, influenced by a teacher she had who she considered to be fantastic. She felt she had learned how to be a teacher from her by watching her through the eyes of a child. She stated that she always felt like she could be a good teacher. Jayne noted the person that influenced her decision to pursue a career in teaching was her first-grade teacher. She explained that she made every person feel special and, “was my driving force” in her future choices. She realized she loved to teach people, including peers, and she loved to show others, especially children, how things could be done or improved upon.

Jayda explained that she had always enjoyed helping in her own children’s classrooms when they were younger, especially in kindergarten, and that it had been a natural progression for her to become a teacher because she stated, that even as a child, she loved playing school at home and with friends. She remembered asking for a chalkboard as a gift. Kate shared her pathway to education as a career, as she also spent time with her children helping out in their classrooms, and found that very enjoyable, deciding she wanted to work with children and help them learn. She noted that she liked to see that learning taking place, particularly in kindergarten. Jocelyn explained that her mother was a teacher and that was all the inspiration she required, as it was all she had ever wanted to do since the time she was five years old. Carolyn explained her first-grade teacher was the influence in her life who helped her make the decision that she wanted a career in ECE, as she loved to come home from school and

pretend be a teacher. She revealed that she had a chalkboard and used it to imitate her first-grade teacher, as well as buy the same books that she read.

From these illustrations, it is apparent that each practitioner has a clear idea of what influenced them to follow a career path in teaching. While there is a little variance in the stories of what influenced them to choose a career in education, most of the women clearly stated that they were influenced by a beloved early grade teacher, who displayed a special love for teaching, who demonstrated a caring attitude toward their students, and was able to be a positive influence in their lives, which is a concept supported by Nespor (1987), who suggested that people tended to place value on the experiences that were meaningful to them in the past. This suggests that the participants valued the experiences provided by their early years' teachers, and therefore, ascribed meaning or value to these which was the impetus for choosing early childhood education as a profession. The other common explanation given for selecting a teaching career was being involved with young children, whether in the classrooms of their children or with other young children, was also cited as an influence for some of these women when they chose education as a profession. A passion for positively influencing young lives was apparent in the stories that each shared and was evident in influencing their own future career choices. Embodying the spirit of the teachers who had paved the way for these women was implicit in these stories. These practitioners hoped to be able to deliver a learning environment that nurtured their own students in the way they had been nurtured as young children or had witnessed their own children being nurtured by a caring ECE teacher. In the current educational environment, the participant practitioners in this study made it clear that their efforts were being thwarted by the increasing academification of education due to accountability, especially in the early years of learning.

### **4.2.3 Appropriate ECE pedagogy and practice.**

When exploring the question of appropriate pedagogy and practice in ECE environments, the implementation of developmentally appropriate programs, inclusive of effective teaching approaches to enhance student's learning, are widely regarded as the standard for young children (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2005). DAP are viewed as a representation of best practice (Goodfellow, 2001). They guide ECE practitioners to embrace constructivist pedagogy and practices in an effort to facilitate the development of the whole child in all domains (social, emotional, moral, aesthetic, cognitive, language and physical). DAP are characterized as student-generated, student-centered, where the practitioner acts as facilitator for learning, uses professional judgment to determine what is required to meet the developmental and learning needs of each student, arranges the learning environment, and plans the curriculum (McMullen, 1999).

When exploring the question of appropriate pedagogy and practice, it is useful to note only one practitioner reported drawing on a developmental theory to articulate her philosophy. In fact, none of the practitioners explicitly claimed to engage with only one philosophical starting point, and none claimed using a constructivist approach to teaching and learning. One practitioner reported being eclectic in her approach, but in truth, all practitioners detailed an eclectic stance in the classroom. All of the practitioners affirmed constructivist beliefs to guide their practice and all expressed a number of beliefs and practices that were very clearly developmentally appropriate approaches to teaching and learning. This underscored the unanimous belief that developmentally appropriate practice is still the ideal in the minds of these practitioners, despite the fact that many of them utilize more didactic methods, engage with less student-centered approaches to teaching and are far more outcome-driven because of the need for artifacts and tangible results to prove that learning has occurred.

In order to develop a broad understanding of the perceptions of each participant about the nature of constructivism and on how they implement constructivism in practice, or would implement if given the freedom to do so, it was useful to create a master list of belief statements generated by incorporating all of the responses from all of the practitioners, which were then designated (or not) as congruent with Windschitl's (2002) characteristics of practitioner activity in a constructivist classroom (Table 1). To generate this list, the participant interviews were analyzed, and categories were uncovered using the axial coding process described by Strauss and Corbin (1998) and then synthesized to create one list of participant belief statements that was then compared with the features that Windschitl (2002), described as being of importance in a constructivist classroom. The participant belief statements were then designated as either congruent with those features determined by Windschitl (2002) to be important or not congruent. The following table reveals the participant belief statements presented in an organized scheme.

Table 1

*Practitioner Belief Statements Aligned with Windschitl (2002) Constructivist Characteristics*

Practitioner Belief Statements	Congruency (Statement by Participant)
Cater to various learning styles – auditory, visual, kinesthetic, tactile	Congruent (Hannah/Louise)
Foster a community of learners	Congruent (Jocelyn)
Concrete learning experiences valued	Congruent (Jayne)
Age/developmental stage appropriate rules/expectations	Congruent (Jayne)
Student generated rules – ‘buy-in’	Congruent (Jocelyn)
Exploration and discovery important	Congruent (Jayne)
Choices should be available	Congruent (All)
Differentiated learning opportunities provided by	Congruent (Kate)



practitioner	
Whole group instruction minimized	Congruent (Louise)
Small group/cooperative work valued	Congruent (Carolyn)
Individual attention important	Congruent (Jocelyn/Louise)
Peer tutoring valued	Congruent (Kate)
Incorporate real world challenges (authentic)	Congruent (Jayne)
Thematic learning across the curriculum	Congruent (Jayne)
Whole language learning valued	Congruent (Louise)
Making connections to build on schema	Congruent (Jayne)
Student-led curriculum valued	Congruent (Louise)
Lots of discussion – make thinking explicit	Congruent (Carolyn)
Choose supportive learning scenarios	Congruent (Kate)
Establish a frame of reference	Congruent (Kate)
Foster a lifelong love of learning	Congruent (Hannah)
Create a safe learning environment	Congruent (All)
Every child can learn	Congruent (All)
Approachable, caring, kind practitioner	Not Congruent (All)
Set clear and high expectations	Not Congruent (Stella/Carolyn)
Revisit a concept to reinforce learning	Not Congruent (Jayne)
Thematic learning across the curriculum	Not Congruent (Jayne)
Visuals are important	Not Congruent (Mallory)
Offer lots of extra thinking activities	Congruent (Mallory)
Reduced worksheets	Not Congruent (Louise)

Limit teacher-directed lessons	Not Congruent (Louise)
Mini lessons important	Not Congruent (Louise/Carolyn))
Art and craft have a place for creativity and fine motor development	Not Congruent (Hannah)
Encourage parental support	Not Congruent (Jocelyn)
Dramatic play important (but no longer deemed appropriate by administration)	Not Congruent (Kate/Jayne)
Outdoor play vital (now a reward– need for more of this but no time in curriculum)	Not Congruent (Stella)
Comfortable, relaxed setting, soft furnishings, home-like environment	Not Congruent (Hannah)
Manipulatives important (no longer allowed to ‘play’ with these – now deemed learning tools)	Not Congruent (Jacky)
Learning stations or centers a priority to fulfill some of the above (not always possible)	Not Congruent (Carolyn)

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*Note.* Belief statements are designated as congruent or not congruent with Windschitl’s (2002) characteristics of practitioner activity in a constructivist classroom.

#### **4.2.4 Practitioner belief statements and Windschitl’s constructivist characteristics – a comparison**

During analysis of the practitioner belief statements (above), it is apparent that not all of the practitioner belief statements fall into the constructivist category. However, when the practitioner belief statements are then compared in reference to Windschitl’s (2002, p. 137) classroom conditions (below), some strong themes emerge between the two lists (Table 2). In the table below, keywords have been drawn from Windschitl’s (2002) Characteristics of a Constructivist Classroom (shown in the middle column) and then Practitioner Belief

Statements (taken from Table 1 above) have been situated with corresponding constructivist characteristics, in order to demonstrate how the practitioners' in this study actually displayed constructivist characteristics despite the fact that they did not explicitly claim to hold constructivist viewpoints to teaching and learning in ECE. Windschitl (2002) suggests these constructivist characteristics are indicative of practitioner and student activity within a constructivist classroom that optimize opportunities for learning in meaningful ways. In this way, it can be demonstrated that the practitioners' in this study used pedagogy, which was aligned with the characteristics of constructivist practitioners.

Table 2

*Characteristics of a Constructivist Classroom as Determined by Windschitl (2002)*

Characteristics of a Constructivist Classroom Windschitl (2002, p. 137)	Keywords/Key Ideas	Practitioner Belief Statements Aligned with Constructivist Characteristics
Practitioners elicit students' ideas and experiences about key topics, creating learning situations that help students elaborate on or restructure their current knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elicit ideas</li> <li>• Students elaborate</li> <li>• Restructure knowledge</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Making connections to build on schema</li> <li>• Establish a frame of reference</li> <li>• Revisit a concept to reinforce learning</li> </ul>
Practitioners provide frequent opportunities to engage in complex, meaningful, problem-based activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide opportunities</li> <li>• Complex</li> <li>• Meaningful</li> <li>• Problem-based</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide time for exploration and discovery with new materials concepts</li> <li>• Differentiated learning opportunities provided</li> <li>• Incorporate real-world challenges (authentic)</li> </ul>
Students work collaboratively and are provided support to participate in task-oriented conversation with others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborative</li> <li>• Support</li> <li>• Conversation with peers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>
Practitioners ensure their own thinking processes are explicit for learners to enable students to do the same through dialogue, writing, and drawings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explicit thinking processes</li> <li>• Enable students</li> <li>• Via dialogue, writing, drawings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concrete learning experiences valued</li> <li>• Whole group instruction minimized</li> <li>• Small group/co-operative work valued</li> <li>• Individual attention important</li> <li>• Peer tutoring valued</li> </ul>

Students are regularly asked to apply knowledge in various authentic contexts, to explain ideas, predict phenomena, and construct arguments rather than to focus on acquiring predetermined 'right answers'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apply knowledge</li> <li>• Authentic contexts</li> <li>• Explain ideas</li> <li>• Predict phenomena</li> <li>• Construct arguments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foster a community of learners</li> <li>• Student-led curriculum valued</li> <li>• Lots of discussion-make thinking explicit</li> <li>• Whole language valued</li> <li>• Foster a love of life-long learning</li> <li>• Choices should be available</li> </ul>
Practitioners encourage students' reflective and autonomous thinking processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflective</li> <li>• Autonomous</li> <li>• Thinking processes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incorporate real-world challenges (authentic)</li> <li>• Choose supportive learning scenarios</li> <li>• Cater to various learning styles-auditory, visual, kinesthetic, tactile</li> </ul>
Practitioners use a variety of assessment strategies to gain an understanding of how students' ideas evolve to provide feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Variety of assessment strategies</li> <li>• Understanding</li> <li>• Provide feedback</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Differentiated learning opportunities</li> <li>• Small group work</li> <li>• Student-led curriculum</li> <li>• Cater to various learning/assessment styles</li> </ul>

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The list of belief statements demonstrates that the practitioners did subscribe to certain constructivist principles, as they are defined by Windschitl (2002) of teaching and learning and tried to incorporate these, where appropriate and feasible. The responses showed how personal interpretations of constructivism aligned and related to Windschitl's (2002) theoretical understanding. It is important to note that constructivists focus on the holistic education of the student (Copple, 2005) to achieve development across all domains, including physical, social and emotional, as well as cognitive. The inclusion of DAP (where possible) was noted by many of the practitioners. They are striving to include developmentally appropriate elements because these are student-centered, where the practitioner is the facilitator working to meet the developmental and learning needs of each student, inclusive of the learning environment (McMullen, 1999). It was clear from the data that the practitioners sought opportunities for their students to engage in collaborative social interaction, which would allow them to interact and co-operate in groups, ask questions, revise ideas and modify

their thinking (Hughes, 2002); all characteristics of a constructivist approach to teaching and learning as described by Windschitl (2002). Each practitioner had a unique way of voicing these ideals, which has been revealed as I search the data and transcripts for patterns and meanings in relation to Windschitl's frames of reference about constructivism in action, and will be unpacked in greater detail below.

#### **4.2.5 The philosophy belief statements of each participant in action.**

Carolyn, who is the outlier in this study, provides differentiated instruction to her students, working in small groups, and with individualized instruction to ensure the teaching meets the learning needs of each student, as she believes that every student has a different learning style that needs to be catered for. She prefers to engage her students in open-ended responses and encourages them to think and problem solve as opposed to using worksheets, which she refers to as "busy work". She notes that her philosophy is inclusive of providing a safe environment for her students, and ensuring she provides them with a routine. She believes that every student can learn, even those receiving learning support services. She stated that she sets very high expectations, with an understanding that each child has their own learning style that she feels she should work towards understanding, while getting to know every single child. Carolyn feels it is important to make note of individual learning styles and to accommodate them all accordingly. Her goal is to challenge her students while understanding they all have different ways of learning. She feels that life is all about problem solving, and that is the basis for teaching and learning in her classroom. Carolyn is very enthusiastic about her practices and stated that she works very hard to ensure learning is linked by themes in her first-grade classroom.

Kate's philosophy is based on what she describes as hands-on, concrete experiences that are developmentally appropriate and interactive for her students. From her developmental perspective, play is very important, however, she also supports teaching academics to young

children as well, especially if there is a way to incorporate both of these into the curriculum. Her view of ECE is that young children learn from doing, from peer to peer, and from being involved in creative pursuits such as music and the arts. Being able to reach every student requires having a diverse repertoire of teaching strategies.

In Mallory's classroom, her focus remains firmly on teaching across the curriculum using language arts as the basis. She stated that at this young age and stage of development, it is important to ensure the students continue to work on mastery of the language arts, including writing, which could be used across all subject areas, including science and social studies. Jayne's statement is reflective of all of the practitioner's views that every child can learn, "I do believe that every child can learn. They learn in different ways and so you have to present the topic in different ways so that it reaches each and every student." She includes a number of manipulatives, wherever possible, to encourage a concrete understanding of what is being taught. She uses thematic lessons across the curriculum in math, science, reading and social studies to ensure all areas are being covered.

Louise describes her philosophy as being one that revolves around a child feeling safe in an environment, where there is trust and where there is an expectation that all children can learn using their own learning style, where peer to peer learning is valued, not just teacher-directed learning, but learning how to obtain knowledge and to be independent. Her belief is that the classroom needs to be an environment in which children are uninhibited to work, where they have a clear understanding of what is expected of them and are able to work independently from the teacher, without relying on her for directions, or for finding the knowledge. Louise values the ability to provide the students with a wealth of resources and providing the opportunity to work with other students for cooperative learning. Her ability to address various learning styles and to understand that some students like to work more independently

to utilize their strengths, allowed students to work in a manner they enjoy, and is the most productive.

Jacky shares that she sets high expectations for her students and really cares about each of them. She acknowledges how much she values the students in her classroom, and that she strives to create a safe learning environment for them, where there is empathy and respect. Her philosophy reflects this by allowing students to get up and move around the classroom or to stand up to complete work, if required. Her view is to support all students, especially those who may be struggling, by doing whatever they require to get them to master the particular skill. She provides what she calls “lots of extra thinking activities” and adapts her individual teaching style to the students. Her philosophy included finding new ways to include rote skills by making them fun for her students. She said that she always takes work home with her after school as she struggles to complete all mandatory work during work hours.

Hannah’s focus in her kindergarten classroom is on students having a range of experiences in ECE, because she believes that these experiences helped her students with learning as well as to develop a love of learning. She believes in ensuring the environment is safe for her students and that they feel nurtured, yet her goal is to include activities that are fun and creative, to encourage her students to take risks, generate more ideas, develop a deeper understanding, and foster that love of learning, that she holds in high regard. In kindergarten, Hannah’s focus is on teaching the fundamentals through language arts so that learning occurs across the curriculum.

Jocelyn identifies a tension between her philosophy and practices because of administrative guidelines, “I think my philosophy is very different from what ends up happening, unfortunately, because of the administrative guidelines that we’re under. I think my philosophy has always been to have a classroom that has a huge sense of community.” Creating a safe environment is something that Jocelyn said is very important to her. She

believes in keeping a routine and ensuring she provides structure for her students as she believes her students will thrive when they know what to expect from her, and what to expect in the classroom.

Stella's philosophy is based on providing active learning experiences, promoting cooperative learning, and using a mix of learning styles, while setting realistic high expectations for each student. She explains her philosophy with these statements:

I think it needs to be a very loving and compassionate classroom with a lot of loving and understanding and fairness and you listen; but very structured. I am a big proponent of structure and that the children know what the expectations are in relation to the class rules.

She believes that enrichment is useful for all of her students, as is identifying learning styles, getting students to be active in the classroom physically, engaging them in active learning, engaging them in cooperative learning, creating opportunities for role modeling, and encouraging talking and sharing. She holds realistic, high expectations for each student.

Jayda is the only practitioner who subscribes to a developmental theory and stated her philosophical standpoint. "I guess you would call me a balanced constructivist. I am a Pragmatist. I'm not all one way." She prefers to provide a structured environment where every student is valued and feels safe, is permitted to take risks and experiment, and where there is a measure of predictability. She utilizes various teaching strategies, such as modelling, including experiments and also some direct instruction, which she believes is a useful teaching tool. Jayda notes the difference in classroom climate over the last several years, where play has been removed from the kindergarten setting and has been replaced with work sheets, direct instruction and rote learning.

Jayda succinctly articulates a viewpoint held by many of the practitioners when she revealed she believed in a philosophy of creating a culture (almost like a family) in the classroom, where each class member felt a responsibility to help each other in a safe environment, where



mistakes are acceptable, and where no student feels afraid to raise their hands and take a risk. Each practitioner was striving to meet the needs of the students in a realistic manner, based on grade/district expectations, within the constraints of the standardized testing regime embodied in NCLB. While each practitioner acknowledges that they were unable to enact the perfect pedagogy for this age group due to requirements from either administrators or from the state government, they all believe that they are striving to bring the very best practices to their students within the constraints of mandated accountability.

#### **4.2.6 The philosophy belief statements of each participant summary.**

The philosophy statements of the participants are all highly personal, however, there are some similarities that are noteworthy across the group. The practitioners all state in their own words that they hold the belief that every child can learn, and that creating a safe learning environment is a high priority, where students work better when afforded structure and routine. Identifying learning styles, catering to, and supporting these is also acknowledged as important. Unfortunately, many of the practitioners' report tension between employing the philosophy they would like to use, and the practices they actually engage with, because of administrative guidelines/restraints, while trying to meet the learning needs of students within the standardized testing regime. It is of note that several participants said that the traditional kindergarten curriculum that was once commonplace in elementary schools, has been replaced with work sheets, direct instruction and rote learning. While many of the practitioners cite the desire to include hands-on, concrete experiences that are developmentally appropriate and interactive for students, this is not possible in most cases due to time constraints and fear that administrators will not understand or approve the reasoning behind such practices. Each practitioner strives to include small group work, and individualized instruction where possible, as well as orchestrating opportunities for cooperative learning and encouraging discussion and sharing of ideas with peers.

#### **4.2.7 Practitioner's view of change in ECE.**

Throughout the research process, it has become clear that many of the practitioners note a change in ECE within the school education system, moving away from experiential, play-based themes, toward a more academic curriculum, driven by mandated accountability. Kate said very succinctly, when she notes that the four-year old preschool programs are now very similar to how kindergarten used to look more than ten years ago, and how kindergarten has taken on the appearance of a first-grade classroom, in order to manage all of the state-testing that is now being required of them. The responses from participants to the changes that have occurred in ECE over the last several years are, by and large, negative in nature, with many similarities in practitioners' responses. Below are some of the participant's statements regarding the differences in kindergarten classrooms today as compared to ten years ago or more:

- My kindergarten class in the past looked totally different from kindergarten classrooms of today – it was play focused
- Kindergarten today looks more like a first-grade classroom from the past
- Even my first-grade classroom from years ago wasn't as structured and as student-sit-down as kindergarten is today
- Programs today are very routine and very scripted
- Kindergarten is lacking the dramatic play area, puppet play area, and math manipulatives for building and constructing
- Half-day kindergarten was more about social and emotional readiness and was developmentally appropriate
- In the past, practitioners could be more creative with their curriculum but now administrators have replaced creativity with more academic skills
- There is not as much play occurring in ECE today as occurred 15-20 years ago

- Half-day kindergarten was a nice transition to formal school
- Students are missing the pre-requisite skills and early experiences they used to receive in kindergarten, due to an increased focus on academics
- In the past, kindergarten used to be developmentally appropriate.

These responses indicate that the participants felt uncomfortable and unhappy about the changes that have been steadily occurring in ECE and that ECE has become more academic in nature to ensure that all of the mandated requirements are being met. They also feel they have lost their autonomy in their own classroom to revert to a more constructivist model of teaching and learning, due to edicts from administrators. The child-focused, play areas of the past are no longer available in kindergarten classrooms and, in fact, are no longer endorsed by administrators, and by and large, the participants inveighed against these changes.

### **4.3 The Influence of Accountability on the Pedagogies, Practice and Decision-Making Processes of ECE Practitioners**

#### **4.3.1 Accountability and pedagogy/practice.**

Guided by Research Question Two, this section explores how mandated accountability regimes, specifically NCLB, impacted the philosophical underpinnings of practitioners' work and the complex decisions about that work, which are made on a daily basis in the classroom environment and beyond. To address this question, it is of note that the data revealed that the practitioners utilized three separate lenses when making curriculum choices within the framework of accountability: the pedagogical lens – the values and beliefs a practitioner brings to the classroom will influence what and how they teach in the classroom the practical application lens – the 'how to' of instruction based on student prior knowledge and learning experiences

the overarching decision-making lens of the practitioner in-situ – the combination of all of the factors that influence classroom decision-making for each practitioner, based on the many variables that each practitioner encounters within the structure of the workplace.

The practitioners are all employed by various school districts, yet each is accountable to an overarching body: the state government. In this study, practitioners are drawn from two states, Delaware and Pennsylvania, therefore each practitioner is held accountable to the standards set by the state in which they are employed. These standards will be similar across schools, but differ from school district to school district and from school to school (if there is more than one elementary school in the school district, which is the case in this study). Over the top of the state governing body is the federal government, which has determined that states must set their own standards and hold school districts accountable for the results of their students.

Each of the practitioners in this study is directly accountable to her school principal and then to the district superintendent and the school board. Each school has set their own agenda and strives to meet the needs of the students within their district, meaning that practitioners in different school districts will have different goals and standards based on the students' results within their district, as well as the academic focus the school board has chosen to pursue. These goals and standards are aligned with the mandated testing requirements each state requires each child achieve and are in line with NCLB.

Each practitioner identified various elements of accountability that influence the daily running of her classroom and her pedagogy. These are conceptualized as making choices between 'best practice' (Goodfellow, 2001) and required practice. There were common themes identified in this research where all or nearly all of the practitioners reported similar examples of how accountability has affected her professional work. This creates a number of dilemmas that arose for the practitioners and wove a common thread between the

practitioners, as many of them face the same, or similar, dilemmas in their professional life.

The identification of examples that are very individual was also of note. Some of the common themes found are:

- A lack of time to enact appropriate pedagogy
- An increase in class numbers
- An increase in students with special needs being incorporated into the regular education classroom setting
- An increase in the amount of paperwork required to document student progress and affirm certain standards have been achieved
- Increased expectations coupled with a decrease in the amount of funding available for teaching and resources
- An increase in direct teaching time and seat-work to incorporate the extra workload
- Lack of time for students to develop foundation skills
- Pressure on practitioners to conform
- Implementing new curricula increased the workload of practitioners as they struggle to align it with standards
- Restrictive administrative guidelines
- Increase in classroom behavioural issues
- No time for professional sharing of ideas and knowledge
- Lack of financial resources
- Increased accountability
- Play has been sacrificed to accommodate the extra expectations
- An increase in time for testing equals a decrease in the time spent teaching.

A small proportion (three) of the practitioners acknowledge the positive elements to accountability, but each participant said that these were outweighed by the negative influence on her pedagogy. Examples of the positive influences of accountability are:

- Some testing is useful in ECE to understand where a group is functioning and to plan for future teaching
- NCLB is a good idea and practitioners want to strive to make sure **no** child is left behind
- Accountability encourages the use of higher order thinking skills
- Accountability helps practitioners stay organized.

However, most of the practitioners reported only negative influences from NCLB. On the whole, the negative responses regarding how accountability has influenced teaching practices and the decision-making processes of these practitioners far outweighed the positive influences.

#### **4.3.2 The impact of accountability in action – discussion of identified themes.**

The following themes were identified from the data and discussed using examples from the participants' experiences to provide insight into the participants' view of the impact of accountability within their various classrooms.

(1) A lack of time to enact appropriate pedagogy: Mallory said that she feels there is a lack of time to cover all that is required of her, and Kate expressed the view that implementing new curricula increases the workload of practitioners. Jayda stated that an increase in expectations, with no latitude to enact their own pedagogy, results in practitioners feeling constrained to teach in a way administrators feel comfortable with.

(2) An increase in class numbers: Kate reported a negative impact on her pedagogy by the increase in student numbers in small learning spaces, as did Jacky, who expressed her

frustration at the increase in the number of students per teacher with less available funding.

Mallory was concerned about the increase in class size that was occurring every year.

(3) Incorporating more students with special needs into the regular education classroom setting: Which coheres with Copple and Bredekamp (2009), who noted an increase in children with special needs being incorporated in the regular education classrooms. Mallory lamented the increase in students with special needs being accommodated within the regular classroom without assistance. Kate expressed her frustration with administrators who expect an increase in output and performance on test scores, with a decrease in funding which, includes students with Individualized Education Plans (IEP). For example; students with IEPs who are reading below grade level are still required take the same assessments as students without IEP's.

(4) An increase in the amount of mandatory paperwork to document student progress and affirm certain standards are achieved: Louise stated that there was increase in mandatory documentation to prove that the standards are achieved, while Kate said that kindergarten has taken on the appearance of a first-grade classroom in order to manage all of the state-testing that is now required. Carolyn noted an increase in accommodating the many different tests required throughout the school year in younger grades, and pressure from the differing expectations placed on them from year to year.

(5) An increased in expectations, coupled with a decrease in the funding available for teaching and resources: Many of the participants said that administrators expect an increase in output and performance on test scores, yet the funding for resources had decreased over the years.

(6) An increase in direct teaching time and seat work to incorporate the extra workload: Louise said that practitioners didn't dare stray from the curriculum, or introduce constructivist teaching methods, for fear of not being successful, resulting in no

documentation. Hannah lamented she reverts to using a lot more direct instruction in her kindergarten classroom because it is more efficient to get through the increase in workload.

(7) Lack of time for students to develop foundation skills: Many of the participants said they have seen a decrease in social and emotional skills as a result of not participating in dramatic play. Hannah believed that young students missing out on foundation skills and knowledge due to an increase in time used for testing. In addition to this, Hannah asserted she believes there is a direct link between the increase in focus on academic skills, resulting in a decrease in ability in gross motor skills.

(8) Pressure on practitioners to conform: Kate said that practitioners have no freedom to enact their own pedagogy, while Jocelyn voiced concerns that practitioners' pedagogy and practices were more homogenous after the implementation of NCLB due to restrictive administrative guidelines. She revealed her belief that the longer struggling students stay in regular education, the wider the achievement gap becomes between those students who aren't keeping up and those who are. Louise and Jocelyn both believe that many practitioners resort to using what they call the "cookie cutter" approach.

(9) Implementing new curricula increases the workload of practitioners, as they struggle to align it with standards: Kate said that implementing new curricula increases the workload of practitioners, as they struggle to align it with standards, or create visual aids to accompany it. Stella expressed the opinion that preparation time is viewed as golden by many practitioners because they are already overloaded and need the time to catch up.

(10) Restrictive administrative guidelines: Practitioners' pedagogy and practices are expected to be more homogenous than before NCLB. Jocelyn is concerned because her students arrived at school with a wide variety of experiences, which meant that students have individual needs that weren't being adequately addressed. She expressed her view that these have a negative impact on her philosophy, which is no longer attuned to her practices due to



restrictive administrative guidelines. Carolyn said she didn't want to be forced to be doing exactly the same activities and lessons as practitioners in other first-grade classrooms because she holds the view that each classroom consists of individual students, with various learning needs and abilities.

(11) Increase in classroom behavioral issues: Stella said that practitioners are exhausted from constantly dealing with the increase in problems within the classroom environment. She voiced her concerns about students falling behind grade level and not receiving the extra help they require, due to increasing budget cuts, an increase in classroom behavior issues, and the number of extra hours it took to do a good job outside of regular school hours.

(12) No time for professional sharing of ideas and knowledge: Stella feels that her pedagogy is negatively impacted by a lack of planning time with colleagues and a lack of time for professional sharing of ideas and knowledge. Many of the participants note a decrease in planning time in general due to budget cuts.

(13) Lack of financial resources: Many of the participants cite instances where a lack of financial support is the cause of school-wide problems, such as students falling behind grade level and not receiving the extra help they require due to increasing budget cuts, special education students in regular education classrooms without support, a lack of professional development and/or planning time, and a lack of resources for teaching in a developmentally appropriate manner

(14) Increased accountability: Jocelyn is frustrated that an increase in accountability has negatively entwined the success (or lack thereof) of her students with her own pay-grade, regardless of the circumstances of her students' success or lack thereof. For example, if she has a student with special needs in her classroom, that student would still be expected to take the same test as the other students in her classroom, and those test results would influence the

dynamics of the overall test score in a negative manner for her entire classroom, resulting in a lower pay-grade for her.

(15) Play is sacrificed to accommodate the extra expectations: Jocelyn concedes that there is not as much play occurring in classrooms today as occurred 10 or 15 years ago or more.

Louise mourns the demise of play within ECE. Hannah laments that the focus on academic skills results in little or no time for children to play, and notes the change in classroom climate over the past five years, where there is a huge swing away from dramatic play and the use of manipulatives and creativity, to a focus on work sheets and more structured seat work.

#### **4.3.3 The impact of accountability in action – further discussion from the participants.**

While many of the practitioners share very similar views of the impact of accountability, each participant has her own unique view of how accountability has impacted her pedagogy and practice more specifically. For example, Kate reports that accountability has negatively impacted her pedagogy when the school district administrators use the word ‘optional’ when implementing new curricula and programs but still expect to see them implemented within the classroom, sending a confusing message to practitioners who, Kate said, worry and need support. Carolyn said that while isn’t as much time for fun and play in the classroom, she still found ways to make her activities fun. She said that a lack of time to complete all that is required to be completed was the most frustrating thing negatively impacting her pedagogy and practices.

Mallory said that the increasing pressure being placed on practitioners is a negative influence on her pedagogy, while Jocelyn feels frustrated with the state government and the education policies, and envisions working in the private sector of education in a parochial school setting where she has the freedom to practice her philosophy explicitly. Newly introduced scripted

programs has the effect of turning students into robots, although they are more efficient, but less meaningful, according to Louise.

Hannah notes her preference is to return to a half-day kindergarten program. She believes that an overcrowded curriculum negatively impacts her pedagogy, resulting in very little time for students to develop the skills that dramatic play and other hallmarks of a constructivist kindergarten program promote. She said that her work is no longer as meaningful to her due to the increase in the amount of required paperwork that takes up valuable teaching time, which causes an increase in her stress levels. She revealed the increase in expectations on first-grade practitioners are being pushed down from third grade practitioners, and a decrease in planning time, coupled with an increase in expectations on practitioners and students. All of this means that it is impossible for her to accomplish everything that is expected of her.

Stella affirms the view that the increase of students with special needs into the regular education classroom without support, as well the increase in required testing, results in practitioners falling behind their teaching schedule and has a negative impact on her pedagogy and practices. She laments that practitioners are no longer respected for the specialized knowledge they bring to the ECE domain, but she feels they are treated like “truck drivers”, with a one-size-fits-all approach. Jayda reports that practitioners are overloaded and frustrated with the constant introduction of new curriculum right before school begins. She said that she feels all practitioners in her school environment are under scrutiny with a great deal of people blaming others for problems. She was very vocal about her negative feelings toward the administrators in her school when she said, “Admin are like a cancer; they are the enemy. Accountability has sucked the fun out of school.”

#### **4.3.4 The impact of accountability – dilemmas revealed by participants.**

Data analysis revealed four specific dilemmas that described by the participants. While many of the participants share the experience of some of these dilemmas, the following five dilemmas are discussed from the perspective of the participant who experienced it, using her own words:

1. Finding practices which develop foundational skills that administrators endorse: Jacky revealed a pedagogical dilemma that she faces on a daily basis, due to a directive appropriate curriculum and what she was allowed and not allowed to include, “A couple of years ago we were told that there was no ‘fluff’ permitted in our program, so now we have students who can’t color within the lines and cannot use scissors to cut because we’re not allowed to be doing those sorts of activities. Administration took away the fun to try to push more academics in.” She faces the dilemma of knowing her students require more fundamental fine motor skills to be able use scissors, master penmanship and draw and color effectively, but the administration in her school has decided that no such activities will occur. Her dilemma is, how to ensure these skills are mastered by young children without defying the edict her employer has enacted?
2. Time allotted for test preparation and test-taking versus time to teach skills and knowledge: Hannah uncovered a pedagogical dilemma that she faces in her classroom when she revealed her concern about the increase in time taken up for testing and test preparation, which results in her students missing out on some of the important foundation skills and knowledge. The dilemma she faces is how to ensure her students receive all of the test preparation they require to pass the tests, plus the time allotted

for actually taking the test, without sacrificing the time needed to teach the important foundational skills and knowledge.

3. Documentation requires paperwork (worksheets) as proof of achievement versus more abstract methods of learning (play): Jocelyn revealed a pedagogical dilemma whereby practitioners are moving toward using a 'cookie cutter' method of teaching. That is, every child completes the exact same activity (usually on a worksheet) in the exact same way, to ensure that the documentation that is required to prove that the learning has occurred is complete. Practitioners view this as a dilemma because they are torn between using a teaching method that is more constructivist in nature, rather than using worksheets and rote practice, which readily provides the desired documentation. Louise also experienced this pedagogical dilemma, as she saw the need for documentation to prove that the standards are being achieved. This confirms that practitioners prefer to conform to using an easier method for data collection, in the form of worksheets and drill and practice methods of teaching, because she feels it is a safe way to ensure her students produce the proof of achievement, in the form of documentation.
4. Play is not easily documented, therefore, not approved by administration as an approved pedagogical practice: Louise lamented the demise of play within ECE and revealed an important pedagogical dilemma, in that play produces, what she calls 'hidden learning', (learning that is not easily visible or easily recorded or documented). However, because practitioners are not able to successfully document all of the resultant learning from play, practitioners feel unable to justify it as an appropriate vehicle for learning to administrators, hence it is not used as a teaching method that is readily included within the curriculum.

#### **4.3.5 The impact of accountability on practitioner's decision-making processes.**

In ECE, decision-making processes are undertaken with DAP criteria at the fore and a keen focus on child development across all domains (social, emotional, moral, aesthetic, cognitive, language and physical) (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009).

DAP require the practitioner to act as facilitator, employing professional judgment to determine the developmental and educational needs of each student (McMullen, 1999), and to design and evaluate these appropriately. They allow an environment of autonomy within the DAP framework. The practitioners in this study report that accountability has an enormous impact on their daily decision-making, but also on the curriculum they plan or the curriculum that is foisted upon them by administrators, due a variety of factors. The most significant factors influencing what they include in the curriculum and how they deliver the program are:

- the time constraints to include everything that needs to be included alongside the mandated testing (time)
- the decision by administrators to use prescribed practices (explicit teaching techniques) and rote learning impact practitioner's ability or security in using more constructivist practices (prescriptive practices)
- the requirement to make teaching practices look more homogenous, from one practitioner to the next, with less variation in teaching styles and content taught (conform).

From these three significant areas of impact, it is simple to determine which examples fall into these categories from the main themes discussed earlier; time, prescribed practices, and conform.

Time:

- A lack of time to enact appropriate pedagogy

- Required testing, accountability, time constraints to include new requirements equals decrease in teaching time
- Lack of time for students to develop foundation skills,
- No time for professional sharing of ideas and knowledge,
- More special needs students in regular classroom without assistance

Prescribed practices:

- An increase in direct teaching time and seat work to incorporate the extra workload
- Prescribed practices, explicit teaching, and rote learning trounced constructivist practices,
- Increased workload with new curricula
- Increased documentation required
- Play is sacrificed in favor of extra expectations

Conform:

- Pressure on practitioners to conform
- Teaching practices homogenous with less variation in teaching styles and content taught
- Restrictive administrative guidelines
- Increased accountability

#### ***4.3.5.1 Time.***

Kate noted that in her school, administrators would often purchase commercial programs, new smart boards and other educational tools to track accountability, which practitioners were required to engage with in their classrooms. However, she lamented the good intentions of administrators would often result in more work for the practitioners, as they struggle to align these tools with the current curriculum, suggesting it is actually harder to incorporate

and accommodate new materials. Hannah said it was a shame that everything was rushed in her kindergarten classroom, causing her to worry about her students' speaking skills and language and auditory processing skills, as there was much less time to allow them to speak aloud and to share verbally in the classroom. She said the added paperwork brought with it a great deal more stress in her life, as she is rushing to complete her teaching duties in order to complete mandated paperwork. Stella noted her increased frustration as there was a higher number of students with special needs in her classroom, who are also required to take the mandated tests (often without extra paraprofessional support), which is an issue. This brings commonality with the other participants, due to the mandated testing from NCLB. While Louise feels that NCLB might be useful in some school districts, she acknowledges it has a downside because it affects the freedom of practitioners to use different teaching methods and limits their ability to introduce constructive practices because of the time required to provide appropriate documentation, proving that learning is accomplished.

#### ***4.3.5.2 Conform.***

Mallory expressed her view that while education was always fluctuating and cycling to come full circle, she feels extra pressure, because nationally, educators have the responsibility to prepare students for the task of test-taking in older grades. She was concerned that there is too much variation in testing between schools, school districts and states for accountability to be equitable and she didn't feel that it was applied in a fair or consistent manner. She is concerned that her teaching is now test-driven due to accountability. Jacky also expressed her concern and frustration due to the lack of agreed upon common assessments or expectations for students, which means that although practitioners are being asked to conform to using scripted programs (constraining practices), they are applying assessment tools differently across the states and across schools, which means each practitioner is devising their own set of tests in some cases. The result is different outcomes. Louise lamented that, because all



students are not all exactly alike, and they all learn at different rates, and learning can speed up or slow down due to personal factors at any given time, she said that using benchmarks for each grade forces practitioners to teach the quantity of the curriculum and not the quality of the curriculum, meaning they must teach as much as is mandated for accountability but not the quality of the content needed for meaning-making. She said the most efficient way for her, and many practitioners, to accomplish this is by using drill and practice, rote learning and worksheets.

Jocelyn explained that in her school district, administrators expect practitioners to alter their teaching practices to ensure all practitioners across a grade level would teach in a more similar manner; teaching the same lessons in much the same way, resulting in the same product or skill. She said that there has been a huge push across all grade levels in her school district to ensure that assessments and teaching practices are more homogenous and that practitioners ensure they cover the topics that might not have been covered before. This is in line with newly introduced curriculum standards. While she believed that it is always good to have a goal that everyone works toward, she also feels a little regret that her philosophy is actually very different in theory from what she enacts in practice in the classroom, due to the administrative guidelines that the school district is currently under. She noted that some of her practices are not acceptable to the administrators in her school, and that the administrators aren't comfortable with some elements of her teaching philosophy, because the main concern from administrators is a steadfast focus on assessment and how practitioners will measure and document the learning that occurs. Jocelyn explained that over time she had learned to remain quiet about her practices and philosophy when she is involved in meetings with the principal and other school administrators.

#### ***4.3.5.3 Prescribed Practices.***

Jayda stated that she finds teaching stressful because she feels as though she is following a ‘matrix for teaching’, where the curriculum, including what to say, how to say it, and when to say it, is all being prescribed to her. She feels that practitioners are unable to give students the amount of time they require to learn new material, because so much time is required for following the new prescribed curriculum and for assessment, inclusive of scripted programs, as well as review previous skills and knowledge. She stated that she is overloaded with various work issues that continually need to be addressed during school hours, such as; progress monitoring, which needs to be completed every other week, curriculum tasking and delivering intervention for students who require it, on top of learning the new scripted programs she is required to deliver.

#### **4.3.6 The outlier.**

Throughout this research study, some very common themes have emerged from the interviews with practitioners. The underlying thread linking the practitioners is that there has been an increase in mandated accountability, which has a negative impact on the pedagogy, practices and decision-making processes, to varying degrees, of the practitioners, which, they claim, results in an increase in stress levels and an increase in negative emotions. However, one practitioner, Carolyn, has a slightly more uplifting story than the others. She stated that she feels comfortable with the level of accountability she encounters at her school and she feels supported by the administration at her school. This can be attributed to the fact that she believes she was already meeting the mandated requirements that have been introduced by the Common Core Standards, even before they were mandated. As such, she doesn’t perceive mandated accountability effecting her pedagogy very much, and this came through as a positive for her, as she felt it validated the work she was already doing. The main impact it had on her was the amount of time it now required to complete all tasks, taking away from

the time she used to allow the students to be involved in constructivist pursuits, which was a point noted by all of the participants. She acknowledges that practitioners are nervous when they hear about change occurring, especially with the introduction of the Common Core Standards, as it brought with it a great deal of controversy and angst, however, she feels assured that it is basically what she was already doing. She feels that because she is operating in a manner where she is teaching the curriculum and covering what her students need to learn, then she is actually already doing what is required of her. She acknowledges that there may not be as much time for play and constructivist pursuits in her first-grade classroom as in previous years, but she notes that she tries to incorporate some elements of fun wherever she is able.

#### **4.3.7 The outlier in action.**

Carolyn concurs with the other practitioners about the effect of NCLB and the impact it has on time constraints. She said that teaching is hard because there is so much involved with instruction and accountability that she finds it difficult to plan her schedule out on paper and that once it is planned, it is equally difficult to stick to it. However, her view towards mandated accountability is that it hasn't really affected very much for her in the classroom. She does concede that accountability has changed the way she does things now as far as recording and evaluating student learning. Carolyn is confident that she already provides her students with all of the learning that they need and that is mandated by NCLB, but the way she approaches teaching has changed because there is an increase in expectations placed on her students with a lot less time to cover these new inclusions. She already spends time rewriting her curriculum to align it with the introduction of the Common Core Standards. She has expressed high confidence in the job she is doing but laments that education is constantly changing and it is her job to keep abreast of the new changes. She has expressed her belief that she is comfortable with the expectations that are placed on her and she knows what is

required of her. She said that she doesn't approve of busy work, but works hard to ensure her students learn to be independent thinkers.

## **4.4 Identifying the Dilemmas Arising from Mandated Accountability**

### **4.4.1 Outline.**

This thesis has sought to address issues ECE practitioners tackle on a daily basis, resulting from the increasing significance of accountability in their classrooms and the challenges this presents for them. The dilemmas they face are identified and how practitioners manage these dilemmas in an environment of ever increasing accountability is addressed, inclusive of examples in action from the practitioners themselves. The dilemmas are then categorized using the framework provided by Windschitl, (2002) and posed as dilemma questions in the way that Le Cornu and Peters (2004) did, in order to make explicit practitioner's view of dilemmas using the four dilemma categories:

- Conceptual dilemmas
- Pedagogical dilemmas
- Cultural dilemmas
- Political dilemmas.

### **4.4.2 Identifying the dilemmas.**

Grounded theory coding requires studying the action, which is achieved through the process of coding the data, recording the data as action, while seeking to uncover the causal conditions for the responses the practitioners provide. The practitioners grapple with various dilemmas on a daily basis. Using the practitioners' key action words as a starting point and seeking the properties from each practitioner's response, uncovered a total of thirty-four individual dilemmas, which practitioners conclude have arisen from the impact of accountability on their pedagogy and practice. To begin with, many of these dilemmas can be grouped together around a common theme or concept for ease of exploration, with the

underlying axis being derived from the key words of action, resulting in eight themes. These dilemma themes were:

1. Time Constraint Dilemma
2. Developmental Versus Academic Dilemma
3. The Cookie Cutter Dilemma
4. The Fear Dilemma
5. The Controlled Classroom Dilemma
6. Documentation/ Measurement Dilemma
7. Burn Out/Stress Dilemma
8. Inconsistent Expectations Dilemma.

It should be noted that some dilemmas are more difficult than others for the practitioners to articulate and navigate while some dilemmas are very similar between practitioners. As stated earlier, these themes are then categorized using Windschitl, (2002) dilemma categories framework. From this, dilemmas are grouped together using Windschitl's (2002) four categories (conceptual, pedagogical, cultural and political), reworded as questions in the same way that Le Cornu and Peters (2004) used in their study, and then articulated by giving voice to the practitioner's individual and unique perspectives.

#### **4.4.3 Conceptual dilemmas.**

According to Windschitl (2002), conceptual dilemmas are those related to practitioners' attempts to understand the philosophical and epistemological underpinnings of constructivism. Whether or not a practitioner fully understands the concept of constructivism will determine her ability to implement it into the classroom and make connections between theory and practice. The conceptual dilemma shared by the practitioners can be expressed as:

(1) How can practitioners include more developmentally appropriate practices in their teaching repertoire when they believe that administrators wholly subscribe to academic practices?

#### **4.4.4 Conceptual dilemmas in action.**

Jayda is concerned that the prescribed practices that administrators require her to use to teach her students, due to the curriculum her school district has purchased, have altered her teaching practices, creating a dilemma, as it is incongruent with her philosophy. She said that the way she is obligated to teach is not consistent with how she has been taught to teach when she was a student at university. Jayda revealed,

You are forced to teach things in a way that is not the way kids learn but you'll get into trouble if you don't. I felt like I was following a matrix for teaching, it was all being prescribed to me. It's an assembly-line mentality.

Louise voiced her concern that personal teaching styles have become constrained due to the effect of NCLB. "I definitely think the variations from one practitioner's class to another are much smaller. We are starting to teach a lot alike." Concurring, Jocelyn said that with the introduction of the Common Core Standards there is a push across all grade levels throughout the district to make practices and curriculum more homogenous. Therefore, the effect of NCLB has been to constrain these practitioners' teaching practices and this has become a concern for all of the practitioners in this study. They each expressed the view that they are no longer able to enact the pedagogy of their choice, or to engage constructivist practices, or to ensure activities were developmentally appropriate. Therefore, it can be concluded and is justified from the data that the conceptual dilemma the practitioners faced in their working life is how can practitioners include more developmentally appropriate practices in their teaching repertoire, when they believe that administrators wholly subscribe to academic practices which act to constrain their practices?

#### **4.4.5 Pedagogical dilemmas.**

When addressing pedagogical dilemmas, Windschitl (2002) describes such dilemmas as stemming from the more complex tasks of designing and creating learning experiences conscious of constructivist principles. In this environment, the traditional role of practitioner dispensing knowledge and student soaking it up has been altered and replaced with a relationship between practitioner and student that is more interactive, inquiry focused and less predictable. The practitioners in this study shared a number of pedagogical issues around similar themes. These include administrative goals that contradict practitioner philosophy, the increase in direct instruction and seat work is incongruent with student-centered learning, and an extensive repertoire of teaching/learning strategies are constrained if they cannot be effectively measured for administrative purposes. The pedagogical dilemmas that concerned these practitioners can be expressed as:

(2) How can practitioners find an appropriate balance between the increase in direct instruction versus concrete DAP experiences and constructivist approaches?

#### **4.4.6 Pedagogical dilemmas in action.**

Louise is concerned that NCLB has constrained the way practitioners allow students to be active in their own learning,

I feel like it is taking away from the creativity and some of the free learning, cooperative learning and independent learning. Because of time being a constraint it is quicker for a teacher-directed lesson than for students to work in small groups and independently.

Hannah shared her concerns about the increase in direct instruction and seatwork. She revealed that in her classroom in years past, she ensured her students had access to the role-playing toys and she introduced artwork that fostered student creativity, which she believed were so important to student development, growth and fine motor skills. She laments that

there isn't time or endorsement to include much art and craft activities anymore. She notes that she believes that what administrators don't realize is that those art and craft projects, which included cutting, gluing, drawing and the use of fine motor skills, are what readily lend themselves to reading and writing, as they are pre-cursors to writing. She believes that administrators have eliminated creativity in deference to many more academic skills. It is clear that all of the practitioners find this to be a constraining factor in their classrooms. Administrators' expectations for a more academic focus, which is justified by the data, have resulted in practitioners facing the pedagogical dilemma of, how can practitioners find an appropriate balance between the increase in direct instruction versus concrete DAP experiences and constructivist approaches?

#### **4.4.7 Cultural dilemmas.**

According to Windschitl (2002), cultural dilemmas arise in the classroom between practitioner and student (and between practitioner and administrators) because the inclusion of constructivist principles radically reorients classroom roles and expectations. In this study, the practitioners struggled with similar cultural dilemmas such as the mismatch between practitioners' DAP philosophy and the administrative requirement for increased documentation, resulting in the use of worksheets and increased seatwork. This cultural dilemma experienced by the practitioners can be expressed as:

How much explicit teaching is appropriate if practitioners value student-centered learning but still have a requirement to complete all system prescribed learning objectives?

#### **4.4.8 Cultural dilemmas in action.**

Jocelyn stated, "I learned to keep my mouth shut during meetings with administrators because, I know that the administration wasn't comfortable with the concept of some of my teaching practices," because the practices she is incorporating aren't necessarily deemed as being the most efficient method to prove that learning has been achieved. She knows she will



be asked to defend how she is measuring what is being learned and as a result, she chooses only to share what she feels is appropriate or accepted pedagogy and when not to share what she is doing in her classroom, depending on what feedback she receives from the administration. While Kate revealed her hesitancy to allow her students to do something like play in the kitchen area or build with manipulatives because of the fear she previously experienced, worrying that somebody would walk in and her students would not be engaged in something academic. The mismatch between practitioners' pedagogy and administrators' requirement for documentation is justified by the data and resulted in the cultural dilemma of, how much explicit teaching is appropriate if practitioners value student-centered learning but still have a requirement to complete all system prescribed learning objectives?

#### **4.4.9 Political dilemmas.**

Political dilemmas arise in the classroom when there is a disturbance or repositioning of power and/or authority with regard to traditional routines, curriculum or pedagogy among practitioners, students, school board members, and/or other stakeholders (Windschitl, 2002). In this study, practitioners believe they are no longer able to select the pedagogy they deem appropriate for use in their classrooms and are afraid to be caught or hesitant to utilize developmentally appropriate methods and/or equipment in the classroom for fear of an administrative reprimand. The political dilemma experienced by practitioners in this study can be expressed as:

(4) How do practitioners promote and defend the use of appropriate pedagogy within administrative directives for documentation and controlled seatwork?

#### **4.4.10 Political dilemmas in action.**

Kate noted, "There's this pressure by school districts, which is trickled down to administration, now trickled down to practitioners, so that even in kindergarten they are being assessed." Jayda suggests the messages to practitioners from administrators are inconsistent,

“There’s this really unrealistic standard that’s in place with the standardized tests but then administrators are telling you that in the classroom you need to do what the kids need,” resulting in practitioners not being comfortable with adopting pedagogy not explicitly endorsed by administrators. Louise stated, “I think there is a lot of pressure, and your reputation is on the line to ensure you get your students to where they need to be? Blood, sweat and tears!” She said that practitioners are afraid to take a risk in the pedagogy they utilize and are not comfortable to include non-academic practices such as constructivist practices, for fear that something may go awry and the required documentation that administrators are expecting would not be available. These scenarios, justified by the data, lead to practitioners feeling uncomfortable about using pedagogy that is not endorsed by administrators and results in the political dilemma, how do practitioners promote and defend the use of appropriate pedagogy within administrative directives for documentation and controlled seatwork?

## **4.5 Summary**

### **4.5.1 Overview.**

This chapter addressed the findings of the research, and included examples of the dilemmas in action that the study participants encounter in their work environment. This was followed with a report on the first research question: What do ECE practitioners consider to be appropriate ECE pedagogy and practice? This question addressed the philosophical views and practices of the practitioners’ and reported on how they enact their pedagogy within the current educational climate, inclusive of the participants’ voices. It was determined that these practitioners upheld the principles of DAP in theory, although they may not always have a

choice when it comes to enacting DAP within the culture of the school environment in which they were employed, resulting in various dilemmas for the practitioners. These dilemmas were first identified as themes, which included a lack of time to enact appropriate pedagogy, an increase in direct teaching practices to incorporate increased workload and expectations and pressure on practitioners to conform their teaching practices to a more homogenous model. These dilemmas were then discussed in accordance with the four dilemma categories proffered by Windschitl (2002) and reframed as questions in the same manner that Le Cornu and Peters (2004) had done. This was followed with a discussion on the beliefs guiding practice that were expressed by the participants, once again inclusive of their voices. The participants' view of change in ECE over time was reported and discussed, utilizing statements made by the participants.

Question Two was then addressed: What impact (if any) has accountability had (positive/negative) on the pedagogies, practice and decision-making processes of ECE practitioners? This question was explored in two parts, beginning with the impact of accountability on pedagogy and practice, followed with a report on the impact of accountability on decision-making processes. Both of these reports utilized the participants' voices once again and was then followed by discussion on the various dilemmas practitioners reported arising from mandated accountability. These dilemmas were identified using Windschitl's (2002) four frames of reference and were addressed in detail using examples revealed from interviews with the participants. Including the participants' voices when reporting the findings furnishes the reader with 'thick descriptions' (Geertz, 1973) to provide a richness and authenticity of the context, allowing the reader to be drawn into the world of the practitioner.

These dilemmas are categorized as:

- Conceptual dilemmas, which are described as those dilemmas practitioners manage when they attempt to understand the underpinnings of constructivism
- Pedagogical dilemmas that relate to decisions about instructional approaches, curriculum planning and assessment
- Cultural dilemmas that stem from challenging the accepted norms and expectations that constitute classroom and school culture
- Political dilemmas, which are associated with resistance from stakeholders/policymakers when accepted norms are questioned or challenged.

This study revealed many consistent themes, which exist between the practitioners. However, the emergence of an outlier highlighted an individual, personal way of working, which together with viewpoints and descriptions of practice, revealed further insights into the ways accountability may be managed. From the multiple dilemmas the practitioners grapple with, four main dilemmas emerged and were expressed as dilemma questions and articulated thusly:

1. How can practitioners include more developmentally appropriate practices in their teaching repertoire when administrators wholly subscribe to academic practices?
2. How can practitioners find an appropriate balance between the increase in direct instruction versus concrete DAP experiences and constructivist approaches?
3. How much explicit teaching is appropriate if practitioners value student-centered learning but still have a requirement to complete all system prescribed learning objectives?
4. How do practitioners promote and defend the use of appropriate pedagogy within administrative directives for documentation and controlled seatwork?

### **The Dilemma Vignette**

During the course of engaging with the participants in this study and after data analysis, it

became clear to me that the dilemmas identified by these participants relate to how they address issues in ECE that focus on the increasing significance of accountability from administrators via mandated initiatives and the challenges this presents for them. From the various conversations that I shared with these women, it was clear that they stare down dilemmas every day. Some dilemmas were more difficult than others to address. In fact, some of these dilemmas may not seem important from the outside looking in but it was clear to me that it is the many smaller dilemmas that continue to add up, which impact pedagogy over time, like a trickle of water on a rock face that will eventually erode away the rock.

For example, when faced with a class of kindergarteners, the dilemma becomes whether or not to allow students to engage in free play while assessments are carried out for individual students in order to complete mandated accountability initiatives, or to risk an administrator walking into that practitioner's classroom and face difficult questions, such as "How are you measuring that?" When the lack of time to complete all classwork, on top of assessments, is a growing concern, causing practitioners to make use of every minute of every school day, and is compounded when play offers no worksheets to record learning or tests to determine where learning has occurred. Therefore, attempting to make a choice about whether to allow her students to engage in free play versus giving them a worksheet to complete while she completes individual assessments, is a dilemma Hannah and other practitioners face several times a year. Hannah pointed out that allowing her young kindergarten students time for free play is the only way to ensure they remain quiet so that she can continue with individual assessments and to ensure they are engaged for a longer period of time, so she chooses to take this risk in the hope that no administrators visit her classroom during this time.

When describing the influences on why these participants chose a career in teaching they each shared a loving memory of an experience that was truly meaningful to them. Becoming an educator was a choice that each of them made and I got the distinct impression that it

meant something special to each one. It was clear to me that they felt thwarted to enact the constructivist pedagogy they had either experienced themselves as a young child or experienced via their children thriving in a loving, nurturing classroom environment when their children were in early years' education. Each had shared a heartwarming story with me of why they had become an ECE practitioner, which involved a beloved teacher who had inspired them to join the ranks of ECE professionals. However, the environment of increasing accountability has robbed them of the opportunity to enact these environments in their own classroom amidst the 'academification' of ECE via the test-taking, test preparation, direct instruction and seat-work required for accountability mandates to be met. In response to question two, what impact has mandated accountability had on pedagogy, each participant acknowledged a definite change in ECE (and especially in their own pedagogy) away from constructivist pedagogy towards a more academic pedagogy over the past two decades due to mandated accountability, and most lamented this had negatively constrained their own pedagogy.

My purpose as a researcher has been to uncover and describe important aspects of the lived experiences of the participants in this study. During the course of the project I have been personally moved by the way in which each one of them has struggled with the range of dilemmas that have been described in this chapter. I came to understand that, while the dilemmas and challenges were not overtly apparent at the outset, they did indeed create negativity in highly impactful ways. In coping with daily issues, the participants manage to draw deeply from their professional experience in ways that allow them to skillfully include the compassion they feel for the students in their classrooms. Each day they find themselves making complex decisions to ensure learning is successful and in ways that can be measured to ensure it can be proven. This often involves making difficult compromises with the pedagogy they would normally employ in order to comply with the new, mandated

accountability frameworks.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Discussion

*One of the most powerful determinants of whether constructivist approaches flourish or flounder in classrooms is the degree to which individual teachers understand the concept of constructivism. Without a kind of working understanding, teachers cannot be expected to link constructivist objectives for learning with appropriate types of instruction and assessment or to adapt constructivist principles to their particular classroom contexts, (Windschitl, 2002, p. 138).*



## **5 Discussion**

### **5.1 A Summary of the Study**

Prior to discussing the findings of the study, a reiteration of the purpose of the investigation and a brief summary of each chapter is now presented. This study has explored the perspectives and lived experience of a sample of ECE practitioners, in order to understand the impact that educational reform and new mandates for accountability, specifically NCLB, has had on their approach to professional practice. It has explored the decision-making practices of the participants, bringing an awareness and giving voice to these issues, while highlighting the importance of play and DAP in ECE classrooms. It set out to explore how this group of participants manage the introduced mandates, in light of their epistemological beliefs and perspectives regarding play and other holistic, developmentally appropriate educational practices. This investigation was informed by a phenomenological approach, which directed the focus on understanding meanings of everyday lived experience (van Manen, 1990). The conceptual framework, presented by Windschitl (2002), was revealed as the model that guided the thematic analysis of interview and observation data by assisting with the identification of specific dilemmas and challenges that impacted their work experience, their pedagogy and beliefs.

Chapter One outlined the increase of mandatory accountability frameworks that have been introduced across the US and it was contended that these mandates, specifically NCLB, have had a significant impact on pedagogy, practice and decision-making processes of many ECE practitioners. In order to develop insight into the specific experience of a sample of practitioners, the following research questions were posed:

1. What do ECE practitioners consider to be appropriate ECE pedagogy and practice?
2. What impact (if any) has mandated accountability had, either positive or negative, on the pedagogies, practice and decision-making process of ECE practitioners?

Chapter Two explored the current views regarding NCLB accountability funding mandates and how these have had a part in creating workplace dilemmas and challenges for many practitioners. The literature review justified the need for this study and for its contribution to the wider educational community. An aspect that was covered was the increase of expectation and pressure upon ECE practitioners to replace play with academic learning approaches that include worksheets and tests (Almon & Miller, 2011, Miller & Almon, 2009) in order to prove that learning had been achieved. A critical point was made that play was fast becoming a casualty of the new mandates and the effects were broadly felt as part of the rapid changes that are facing society today (Frost, 2010).

Chapter Three discussed the research paradigm and the underlying considerations taken when selecting the research methodology. The selected, phenomenological approach was described as it served the purpose of focusing on lived experience. Data collection and analysis techniques were detailed and the volunteer ECE practitioner participants were introduced.

Chapter Four included the findings that were uncovered using the specific theoretical framework proposed by Windschitl (2002). This framework focused the investigation on a specifically identified range of dilemmas and challenges faced by practitioners. In addition, the individual beliefs and pedagogies of each practitioner were detailed and, in some cases, included excerpts from participant interviews. Some details from classroom observations were also included as interpretations and insights contributed to further understandings.

Chapter Four also outlined how each participant viewed the NCLB mandated accountability changes and specifically, the impact these had made on their classroom practice, inclusive of dilemmas arising from NCLB. A notable point of difference emerged in the form of the identification of an outlier and this was discussed before focusing on the four dilemma categories. Importantly, instances from each research interview serve to give voice to the opinions and perspectives of the participants about the various dilemmas in question. This

was an important step in developing further understanding of the experience of daily routine in the working lives of the participants.

In Chapter Five, I present new meanings in the form of a discussion of findings based on analysis of the data. I offer critical comment about the implications of the study, the significance of this study, and the limitations of the study are discussed and I also suggest possible directions for future research. Interview transcript excerpts are included that highlight points for discussion and these intentionally uphold the study commitment to give voice to the participants. I begin by offering commentary on the first question: What do ECE practitioners consider to be appropriate pedagogy and practice? This question is addressed with further commentary on the patterns and similarities surrounding the impacts of accountability that have emerged from the personal narratives of the participants and from data that are used to foreground the perspective of each practitioner. The various approaches to teaching that they employ are discussed along with the philosophy that is instrumental in driving these approaches, and the unique influences that guided each practitioner to enter the teaching profession, many of which have been eroded by mandated accountability.

I continue the commentary on the second question: What impact (if any) has mandated accountability had, either positive or negative, on the pedagogies, practice and decision-making processes of ECE practitioners? Having established that dilemmas were significant occurrences in the work of the participants in this study, and having identified various dilemmas common between all of the participants, these dilemmas are discussed in detail from the unique perspective of each participant in order to answer Question Two and give voice to the impact that mandated accountability has on pedagogy, practice and decision-making and to demonstrate how these participants adapt their pedagogy and practice to accommodate these mandates and expectations placed on them in order to illuminate their work and foster a deeper understanding of it for the reader.

## **5.2 Commentary – Philosophical Underpinnings of Pedagogy**

### **5.2.1 Overview.**

The first research question directs the inquiry toward the individual philosophy of each practitioner and is important in determining if and how the ideals of DAP are retained or how specifically they have needed to adapt to the specific challenges that were highlighted in Chapter Two and the constructivist philosophies of ECE that include time for play and other holistic, developmentally appropriate pursuits. As Wien (2004) notes, to make the assumption that all ECE practitioners subscribe to this philosophical approach to teaching and learning would be a mistake, as not all practitioners employed in ECE settings are specifically trained for ECE, not all philosophically value DAP (Wien, 2004), and many may not have their preferred or ideal contextual placement. Practitioners arrive at their chosen career from a wide variety of backgrounds, cultural influences, educational institutions, belief systems, and philosophical perspectives. All of these will influence the type of pedagogy and practice that will take place in the classroom. In addition, the variations in school philosophy and culture and the degree of freedom and autonomy with which they operate adds to the complexity and it becomes difficult to use a broad-brush approach to describe teaching practices. It is important to note that practitioners' beliefs about play will influence whether they integrate it into their pedagogy (Johnson, 2014).

### **5.2.3 Commentary – influences on choosing education as a career.**

Parker and Neuharth-Pritchett (2006) suggest that practitioners actually select their pedagogy from a continuum of instructional approaches. When the participants were questioned about what influenced them to become educators, many commented that it was an early experience with a beloved teacher from their own childhood schooling or the enjoyment of helping in their own child's kindergarten or early childhood classroom. These comments cohere with Nespor (1987), who discussed how people assign great value to the meaningful experiences

with their early childhood teacher. It is important to note that the formative influences on the study participants were the early childhood practices that include autonomy, creativity, play and collaborative learning and did not include the current mandates that now restrict practices. The autonomy to choose pedagogy granted to ECE practitioners in years gone by has been eroded by mandated accountability (Goldstein, 2007) and has left the ECE profession looking less attractive to those who may have wished to teach in this field, compounding the challenges faced in the classroom. It is clear these participants were unable to enact the pedagogy they had admired and valued when noting what influenced them to enter ECE as a profession.

In addition, most of the study participants entered the education profession before the introduction of NCLB or shortly after its inception and there have been a great many mandated accountability requirements that have challenged previous ECE values (Frost, 2012). Russell (2011) asserts that the priorities of kindergarten practitioners' have shifted away from developmental focus on play and social skills and more toward academic skill development. With this in mind, it is clear that in this study, the participant's responses suggest that what attracted many of them to the profession in the first place may have lost some of that appeal as the increase in mandated accountability has actually stymied the pedagogy that they valued when choosing a career in education. Jocelyn used a negative tone when mentioning how NCLB had focused teaching narrowly on ways to manage the testing regime defined by the Pennsylvania State Standardized Assessment (PSSA) which is an example of this discontent. She said that although there is a lot less focus on testing in her first-grade classroom than there is in third-grade, when students first take the PSSA, NCLB has impacted what is reported, measured and evaluated. This has caused her pedagogy to reflect these changes and she conceded that it has intensified with the introduction of the Common Core Standards.

#### **5.2.4 ECE pedagogy and practice.**

When asked about their beliefs regarding children's learning, none of the practitioners declared a sole or explicit allegiance to a constructivist approach, which coheres with Wien (2004), although Jayda did refer to herself as a "balanced constructivist" as part of her "eclectic" philosophy. However, all of the practitioners described using a number of constructivist practices that were developmentally appropriate and aligned with those described by Windshitl (2002), even if administrators did not always endorse them. Akpan and Beard (2016) assert that constructivists provide challenges for students by using everyday, practical applications and involving students in meaningful learning situations. Each participant described using these strategies whenever they were able to do so. An example of including everyday applications to provide challenging learning is discussed in detail later in this chapter (The Documentation/Measurement Dilemma) when showing how Jacky introduces her second-grade students to real life mathematics using store coupons clipped from newspapers. Frost, et al (2012) believe that beliefs about play are the foundation on which practitioners establish pedagogy and practice, while Castro-Cortez (2015) suggests that having an understanding about beliefs on play may be useful, as beliefs help to shape pedagogical experiences and Wood (2013) confirms that understanding beliefs about play in the current political environment is important where pedagogical tensions exist. However, the participants mentioned the dilemmas of implementing DAP and constructivist approaches in their classrooms while simultaneously managing the NCLB mandates. This coheres with the research of Nelson and Smith (2004) who found that, practitioners may have the knowledge and fundamental understandings to implement DAP within their ECE classrooms, but confidence was lacking to implement it. The participants adopted pedagogy to enhance student learning through practices that encourage autonomy, promote dialogue, foster inquiry skills and motivate learners, which coheres with Brooks (1990). The

participants also want to promote a love of learning, which coheres with Samuelsson and Pramling (2013), who assert that children should be active learners. This study, similar to the one by Dietz and Kashin (2012), reveals that a significant implication for ECE practitioners is the necessity to work within prescribed curriculum and pedagogical requirements while still finding ways to include DAP. An example of challenge is where Hannah described how story time is the perfect opportunity for students to ask questions, because that's the time when students are learning new information. However, she laments the fact that there is very little time available for this to occur.

Further findings cohere with those of McDevitt and Ormrod (2004), who suggest that there is no singular theory that can comprehensively explain all aspects of development and learning and this is why many ECE practitioners will combine theories about teaching and learning into personalized eclectic approaches to pedagogy. This matches the experience of all the participants in this study and as an example, Jayda when describing her eclectic approach as "hodge podge", applies the curriculum provided by her school district whilst adding her own specifically chosen elements. Superimposing on constructivism, she reasons that students need direct instruction and practice, with rote learning in certain areas, in order to develop fundamental skills. There is no one absolute way to teach, but she has found a method that works in her context. Additionally, Jayda's practices are in line with Nicolopoulou (2010) who contends that there need not be a polarity between play and academic or direct instruction, but educational practices that include both are developmentally valuable to young children. Contributing to this argument, findings from Darnell's (2008) study indicate that rather than depicting the goals of ECE as a dichotomy between social goals or academic goals, it is more appropriate to portray the goals of ECE as a mixture of both of these experiences.

Stipek and Byler (1997) suggest that practitioners who hold strong beliefs about a child-centered curriculum also embrace constructivist views. This is evident in this study but it is noted how many participants secretly engage or wanted to engage in practices that are not endorsed, or are even discouraged, by administrators. For example, Jocelyn reported that she always takes her first-grade class outside for extra recess time when the weather permits and Jayda said that she gets into trouble with the administration in her school a lot because she teaches in ways that are frowned upon, but she continues to advocate these methods for her students because she believes they are more developmentally appropriate for her students. This is congruent with research that found that practitioners were under added pressure to ensure that alongside state standards being achieved by their young students, practitioners also felt the pressure to ensure that socio-emotional needs are met for their students in order for them to navigate the added stressors produced by NCLB (Fromberg, 2003; Goldstein 2007).

In a constructivist, grounded theory study on the beliefs of Hispanic teachers, about incorporating play into the curriculum, Cortez-Castro (2015) found that many of the candidates struggle with the experience of the educational value of play conducted in practice, compared with what they understand from the theory and rhetoric. In a similar vein, in this study, the participant practitioners report that their beliefs and practices are not always consistent, causing a disconnect between the practices they report using and the practices they actually engaged in. This is in keeping with McMullen (1999), who found a disconnection between the DAP practitioners proclaim to engage in and the authentic didactic practices that are observed when practitioners strive to meet the growing demands of accountability. Parker and Neuharth-Pritchett's (2006) findings are also similar. For example, they claim that external factors in the form of accountability frameworks play a major part in guiding practitioners' perceptions of instructional practices. These practitioners also cite external



influences such as accountability, curriculum constraints, standardized test preparation/taking, administrative policies, colleague pressure, and administrators' disapproval as the main reasons for this disconnect. Confirming this finding, Lynch (2015) concurred, stating although practitioners report wanting to use play in their classrooms the reasons they do not are related to disapproval from administrators, the school principal, parents and/or policies that do not permit play. These factors are brought to light in her 'Netnography' study, (a research methodology that adopts the practices of ethnography and applies it to an internet-based setting where researchers analyze social media discussion boards in the same way they analyze qualitative data).

### **5.3 Practitioner Dilemmas**

#### **5.3.1 Challenging dilemmas.**

The unique perspectives offered by the participants about the dilemmas they face, reveals much about the role that ECE pedagogy plays within their various classrooms and also the implications and effects of these dilemmas, as they each work within the constraints of NCLB. The findings in this study cohere with those of Le Cornu and Peters (2004), which showed that practitioners are challenged when attempting to implement constructivist ideals within the classroom because they are solely responsible for the collection of measurable data about student learning, and must manage resistance from stakeholders, and the behavior of young children, who may be unable to interact respectfully or work independently. Each of the participants in this study found that implementing constructivist ideals in the classroom is challenging and each face a range of tensions or dilemmas in their daily working life that challenges personal beliefs and working practices. These include, resistance from administrators and colleagues, resulting in the need to develop new strategies and ways of being that they believe still enhance student learning but are compatible (or appear compatible) with the culture of their particular school, as well as the expectations of

administrators, the state and those mandated by NCLB law. In addition, the practitioner being ultimately responsible for the measurable outcomes of student learning, the depth of understanding the practitioner held of the concept of constructivism (Windschitl, 2002) and, finally, students being unable to work independently, are all challenges the participants face. This finding is similar to that found in the phenomenological study conducted by Willis (2010) in North Carolina classrooms, in which the author sought to understand what challenges and barriers teachers face as they strive to maintain or establish DAP in their ECE classrooms.

Each practitioner makes daily decisions on the inclusion of DAP versus more academic focused or teacher directed instruction. These decisions are based on a myriad of factors, including time constraints, materials or tools available, assistance from paraprofessionals or other support staff, regulations as per the school board, acceptance of practices by colleagues and administrators, the class group, mandated testing regimes, and available time for planning. Many of these practitioners lament the fact that play has been vanquished within their classrooms. This supports other research that claims children's play is under attack and has seen rapid decline (Almon & Miller, 2009; Gray, 2011). The participants in this study agree it has necessitated that they adopt a much more teacher-directed, academic approach to teaching and learning.

### **5.3.2 Identifying the dilemmas.**

In this research study, the participants' dilemmas have been foregrounded using a phenomenological interpretation of their lived and first-person viewpoint accounts. As described earlier, Windschitl's (2002) 'four frames' of reference and his 'dilemma framework' provide reference points when looking for patterns and themes. Once analysis of transcripts was underway and dilemmas began emerging, the participants were asked for verification in a process of 'member checking' that Stake (1995), describes as where the

participant “is asked to review the material for accuracy and palatability” and this ensures agreement that language and interpretation are appropriate (see p. 115). The interviews with each participant were opportunities for them to give voice to their thoughts and feelings and to provide illuminating insights into their experience of dilemmas as they arose in their classroom or in their working life. Through the process of analysis and coding, the dilemmas were grouped into the four categories (discussed in Chapter 4) and expressed as:

- **Conceptual dilemmas** How can practitioners include developmentally appropriate educational concepts when administrators prescribe academic practices that require detailed documentation processes?
- **Pedagogical dilemmas** How can practitioners pedagogically balance direct instruction with concrete DAP experiences and constructivist approaches and still meet AYP?
- **(Classroom) Cultural dilemmas** [described as “a tacitly understood framework of norms, expectations, and values that give meaning to all activities occurring in schools”, (Windschitl, 2002, p. 150)]. How much explicit teaching (including worksheets) is appropriate if practitioners value student-centered learning but still have a requirement to complete all system-prescribed learning objectives?
- **Political dilemmas** How do practitioners promote and defend the use of developmentally appropriate pedagogy, within politically driven, administrative directives for documentation and controlled seatwork?

To arrive at these four main dilemma questions, responses from participants were used to identify fifteen major themes that were grouped together from common statements made by many of the participants and which emerged from the thirty-four participant-identified dilemmas. These themes were:

1. A lack of time in general

2. Increased class size
3. Increased numbers of special needs students incorporated in regular classroom
4. Increased paperwork required to document student progress and affirm standards are achieved
5. Increased expectations in conjunction with decreased resources
6. An increase in direct teaching and seatwork to incorporate extra workload
7. A lack of time to develop foundation skills
8. Pressure on practitioners to conform
9. New curricula increased workload as practitioners struggle to align it
10. Restrictive administrative guidelines
11. Increased behavioral issues from students
12. No time for professional sharing
13. Lack of financial resources
14. Increased accountability
15. Play has been sacrificed to accommodate extra expectations.

From these fifteen themes emerged eight specific identified dilemmas. These identified dilemmas will be spotlighted individually in detail, using examples taken from the practitioners themselves, to illuminate the dilemmas from the perspective of the participants, in order for the reader to gain further insight and a deeper understanding of how these dilemmas manifest themselves in the working lives of the participants, in order to address Questions One and Two of this research study. These dilemmas have been categorized as:

- Time Constraint Dilemma
- Developmental Versus Academic Dilemma
- The Cookie Cutter Dilemma
- The Fear Dilemma

- The Controlled Classroom Dilemma Documentation/ Measurement Dilemma
- The Stress Dilemma
- Inconsistent Expectations Dilemma.

### **5.3.3 The time constraint dilemma.**

The focus for the participants has moved away from aligning their practices with their beliefs toward a main concern with getting through the overloaded curriculum in the timeframe provided. This is important to ensure their students are proficient on standardized tests, therefore confirming that AYP was made, as suggested by Parker and Neuharth-Pritchett (2006), who reported that practitioner's practices are impacted by external factors, such as accountability frameworks. Wien (2004) also notes this tension in her study where practitioners had assumed total control of time in their classrooms versus providing the opportunity for some child-centered choices about time management. This was done to ensure the demanding curriculum is covered appropriately. Wien (2004) reports a series of common complaints from participants. These were, that time constraints interfere with valuable learning experiences; disregard for an appropriate pace for learning; showing little value for student choices; not 'doing the content justice'; dampens spontaneity and the teachable moment. Wien (2004) suggests that students also feel this tension as they struggle to continue working to keep pace with an overcrowded curriculum.

In this study, the participants note that the locus of power has moved from child-centered to test-centered. This confirms the finding by Jeynes (2006) who reports an increase in testing in conjunction with a more rigorous academic focus, which includes an increase in drill and practice. Jayda made it clear she struggles to cover so much more academically within the school year. She notes that the practitioners in the second-grade classrooms have been rushing through their units faster than previously, because they now have a benchmark test they needed to administer for all of the second-grade students. Jayda said that this benchmark

was not a state mandated test, therefore in her view “it was not going to count and nobody was going to see the test, except for the school”. The implication is that even though no one would see the results of this test, the practitioners still feel the pressure to rush through the curriculum in order to ensure students would meet required standards, causing the second-grade practitioners increased stress, even though it is not mandated or required, because this is the culture of teaching in the current political environment.

All of the participants in this study continually cite a lack of time to cover all that is required. Their concerns stem from the fact that much of the time is taken up with preparation for testing and assessment. The participant practitioners need to balance the time required for adequate instruction to ensure their students would pass the test or assessment with the time that is required to conduct the actual testing. This instruction time included instruction on the content of the test, designing the test (if required), pre-testing to determine what the students already know and/or can do, time for implementing the test, especially in younger grades as they must be given individually (as students cannot follow instructions on a paper test), and then remediation if required. This cyclic process continues throughout the school year for each unit of work that is taught.

The following are examples where participants have clearly articulated instances of this dilemma in action. Louise said she felt a lot of time is taken up with documenting and assessing, which in her classroom means she needs to utilize a teacher-directed, whole class lesson, as it was quicker and more efficient than having students work cooperatively in groups and/or independently. Louise said, “NCLB is hemming in the schedule and taking away some of the freedom to do different things by taking up a lot of time with documentation, proving that learning is achieved, taking time away from creativity.” In her professional life, she is striving to be more efficient but she doesn’t believe more documentation equals being more efficient or effective because of the time required to gather

the information and then document it appropriately. Hannah and Jayne both noted that NCLB processes leave little room for spontaneous, 'teachable moments' due to the test-focused nature of the accountability mandates, in line with Wien (2004).

Jacky's assertion that traditional play practices are in fast decline in the twenty-first century is in accordance with Gray's (2011) findings. Jacky believes that play is being usurped by rote practice as it is a faster means of information transferal. Stella, Jocelyn and Hannah voiced strong opinions about students entering kindergarten with less experience and background knowledge and with less parent involvement and support than in previous years, which means that not all students enter school ready to learn. The result is an increase in the number of students attending special support programs such as Title 1 (Appendix L) and requiring more of the practitioner's time and attention within the constraints of the regular classroom schedule. Jayda said her experience is stressful because of the expectation to deliver intervention to young children but she finds it difficult to provide the number of hours required due to the amount of time already used to assess, in light of the difficulty in conducting assessments of young children.

Hannah said that she has less time for creativity or enrichment to expand on ideas because of the need to include so much new information by the end of the school year. During testing times, she has to assess each kindergartener individually, as they were too young to do well on written tests, which she said was very time consuming. Therefore, in order to administer the required tests or assessments, she cuts short her teaching time. She admits that in order to keep the other students occupied, she often allows them to play, as it was the only way to keep them busy and quiet. She said that ironically, play was something that her kindergartners could do well with minimal teacher intervention. This situation was a dilemma in itself for Hannah, who wrestles with this several times a year during assessments.

The practitioners in the study by Le Cornu and Peters' (2004) also describe struggling with time constraint dilemmas, and it is noted that this is a dilemma common to many educators. However, the dilemma of how to include test preparation, testing and teaching within a constrained timeframe is a constant in the lives of all the practitioners and is a theme that resonates throughout this research. In simple terms, all of the participants in this study voice frustration and concern, because of the lack of time available during school hours to complete the required work within the constraints of the many restrictions placed on them by administrators. The implication is that this often precludes them from incorporating constructivist practices, especially imaginative play, concrete experiences, and independent and cooperative learning, into the already very full curriculum, which resonates with Russell (2011), who asserts that the focus of kindergarten practitioners has changed to encompass academic skill development, rather than the traditional developmental domains that promote play and developing social skills. Each of the practitioners said that they actively seek ways to include these activities into the curriculum, especially around a holiday, such as Christmas or Easter, to provide opportunities for their students to do something fun, utilize and develop their fine motor skills, and to allow students to work independently as well as co-operatively.

#### **5.3.4 The Developmental Versus Academic Dilemma**

A study by Fromberg (2003), found that kindergarten practitioners are required to focus on teaching specific state required standards and heavily scripted programs. Similarly, comments from the participants in the present study indicated that many are also required to use these, because administrators believe they are 'proven' to be effective. Most of the practitioners in the study by Fromberg (2003) reported discontent as the freedom to include DAP, the pedagogy of their own choosing, is replaced with mandated, scripted curriculum, which resonates with the findings in this current study. While the practitioners in the present study believe in pedagogy that finds its roots in developmentally appropriate origins as discussed in



Chapter Four, their administrators often do not value this philosophical viewpoint, and/or do not understand it. Practitioners do not always have a choice in the pedagogy they employ, especially ECE staff who work in educational environments where DAP is not understood or valued. Some of the practices that are not developmentally appropriate that the participants in this study engaged in included whole class instruction, teacher-directed lessons, rote learning and scripted instruction, which confirms Darnell's (2008) findings where practitioners attempt to meet prescribed academic standards. The administrative need to have children seated at desks in a very controlled manner is not developmentally appropriate, according to research that recognizes the importance of play. Such academic procedure ignores the theoretical value of play and how it is an important pedagogical tool that is central to growth and development (Almon & Miller, 2011). However, this example illustrates the expectation placed on ECE practitioners, as it is required in older grade classrooms, where the implication is that the training of young students to adhere to this expectation must begin from their first year in school. The dilemma of whether or not to incorporate DAP, because it is the most appropriate for young students, or to use more academic pedagogy is one dilemma the study participants wrestled with on a daily basis. This disconnect correlates with Wien's (2004) findings, as she also notes the tension between play and teacher-directed learning, stating that ECE practitioners have struggled with this concept.

An example of this is from Jocelyn, who said that she believed that administrators and older grade colleagues in her school would be uncomfortable if they knew she allowed students to participate in play activities for which she did not have a worksheet or any follow-up questions to measure and record the learning that was occurring. She also said that she believes that administrators wouldn't be happy if she permitted her students to have free time, where they could choose the activity that they were to engage in, so to circumvent any repercussions from this, Jocelyn chooses not to share this information with administrators

during grade-level meetings. She admits she is not able to enact her teaching philosophy in her first-grade classroom due to the academic guidelines her school district imposed, but she believes in creating opportunities for her students to engage in DAP, and so she seeks ways to justify these more developmentally appropriate times in her classroom over the course of the day or week. Importantly, Darnell (2008) found that most practitioners need support from administrators, policy makers, and older grade colleagues in order to enact DAP and to find ways to be able to meet accountability standards and still engage appropriate pedagogy.

Jayda, Hannah and Kate bewailed the lack of fine motor development for their students and believed this was a direct result of engaging with pedagogy that is more academic in nature, resulting in the removal of many art and craft projects and the elimination of the engagement with manipulatives, that were once a staple of the developmentally appropriate kindergarten programs that Hannah described as “encouraging little fingers to work their muscles in preparation for writing and as a precursor for many reading skills”. In response to this dearth of fine motor skill development, many of the participants incorporate Learning Centers into their weekly programming to circumvent the lack of quality play, use of manipulatives, and student guided choices in their classrooms, but each clearly communicated that they must be mindful of the choice of activities that they provide for their students to avoid activities that might resemble play or be mistaken for play by administrators. Centers were no longer an avenue for practitioners to ensure young students had opportunities to explore and play amidst the overcrowded curriculum, providing a change of pace for the students, instead, the bulk of the Centers are more play-based, fine motor activities have been replaced with much more academic in nature activities. In the past, Centers have often consisted of open-ended activities where students were encouraged to explore materials and work together in small, cooperative learning groups. The participants report that now the focus is squarely on mathematical concepts and reading concepts with a more academic, worksheet-based focus.

Kate notes that the students in her kindergarten class perform better once they have been given the opportunity to move around the classroom during more open-ended activities. She believes these are developmentally appropriate for children and are successful strategies, as they provide opportunities for students to engage in large motor skill development. These activities also expended energy, which help the children to be able to better focus on the planned academic work that follows. Kate said that her students need these opportunities to be active to better prepare them for academic success. She firmly believes that her kindergarten students still need time set aside for play. She made the comment that the behavior of her students declines steadily in the afternoon, and they are unable to continue to sit still without this free play time. She indicated that by the afternoon in a full-day kindergarten program, her students were tired and unable to continue to concentrate, noting that many of them went home to take a nap after the rigors of school. Kate realized that once she introduced Math Centers into her curriculum, her students were better able to cope with the rigors of the long day because this allowed them time and freedom to be active in the classroom as they move around. In this way, Kate is sensitive to her students' needs and is cognizant of her role in providing an environment sensitive to the cognitive, social, emotional and physical needs of her students, which is the role of the practitioner in a child-sensitive program (Kumtepe, 2005).

Hannah explained the use of Centers in her kindergarten classroom from her perspective,

I do Centers, which the kids enjoy, and there is definitely more freedom and more movement there and there are more manipulative things that they can do, but it is still all academic. There really is not a center where they are manipulating blocks or anything like that. I am going to try to do a little bit more of that. It worries me because I think if an administrator comes in they'll say, 'Well, why are they doing

that?’ But I believe they still need to have certain things that are developmentally appropriate for them.

When clarifying her reason for the inclusion of Centers in her curriculum, Hannah asserted that Centers were DAP and they provided her kindergarteners with developmentally appropriate curricular.

### **5.3.5 The cookie cutter dilemma.**

A number of the participants note that administrators wanted all practitioners in the same grade level to align their curriculum across that grade level so that all were teaching the same concepts and the students are acquiring the same skills to ensure that students are exiting the grade with the same skills and knowledge. Jocelyn explained that the purpose was to ensure parents saw similarities occurring across each grade level. To this end, many of the participants report rewriting the curriculum in their school district to bring everyone into line. Louise labeled this the ‘cookie cutter approach’ to teaching, and Jayda complained, rebranding it as an ‘assembly line mentality’. Mallory, Jacky, Hannah, Louise and Jocelyn all remarked that administrators have suggested it looks better if there are more similarities, rather than differences for parents to see across each grade level. At the same time, the introduction of the Common Core Standards also brings an impetus to standardize things across grade levels, exacerbating this cookie cutter approach.

As a result of the Common Core Standards, Jocelyn reports that in her school district there has been a huge push to all grade levels across the district to ensure that practices are more closely aligned. However, she said the dilemma when implementing this ‘one-size-fits-all’ practice, that it undermines the creativity of educators, who have exciting ideas about how to make teaching and learning interesting and challenging for their students, which is constrained when expectations result in assembly line pedagogy and practices.

When practices must be aligned, much individuality and personal creativity is lost and some practitioners become disheartened and lose interest in teaching. The effect requires a more mechanical approach that is disconnected from spontaneity and from their preferred practices. The practitioners in this study report that as a result, they find their students also become disinterested and disconnected from what they are learning when practitioners are forced to teach in a way that is not congruent with their own beliefs. Teaching and learning can become more robotic and didactic with the overuse of scripted programs. Copple and Bredekamp (2009) claim that children engaged in overly academic classrooms are less likely to enjoy the opportunity to make choices and develop a deep appreciation of learning, will miss out on gaining a sense of accomplishment and will not experience the joys that learning should bring to them.

In ECE, it is developmentally appropriate to consider the individual needs of students. Therefore, trying to use a one-size-fits-all approach is not considered developmentally appropriate, as young children mature and develop at different rates and that development is the foundation of their cognitive, social and physical maturity (Brazelton & Greenspan, 2006). Both Louise and Jocelyn caution against using the cookie cutter approach in ECE, where every student churns out the same answers or projects each time. Both of these practitioners embrace the belief that each student is an individual with individual needs and talents and should be treated as such and celebrated for these talents. As Carolyn explained in her statement regarding her collaboration with her first-grade colleagues,

We mesh so well and we're always sharing ideas and not keeping from each other, we meet every week and share different ideas, but I don't feel we should be doing the exact same things because we don't have the exact same kids.

### **5.3.6 The fear dilemma.**

Many of the participants revealed that how they work in environments where they are not comfortable to share some of their more constructivist teaching practices or beliefs with administrators, and sometimes not even with colleagues, for fear they may not be articulate enough to justify these practices. Darnell (2008) suggests this is a dilemma practitioners' face as they wrestle with whether to implement DAP while still being obligated to meet prescribed academic standards. Some of the participants, Jocelyn, Hannah, Louise and Jayda in particular, said that they would deliberately minimize the DAP they employ in their classrooms or they would choose to minimize them when reporting to administrators and colleagues to avoid situations where they would be in a situation to justify how learning was occurring or how they were measuring that constructivist learning. Hannah and Jocelyn said they feel fearful of being caught by administrators when they allow students to use manipulatives, or allow students to engage in free play, or if they permit engagement in non-academic activities, even for short periods of time. The dilemma, in this instance, is whether or not to risk the use of such materials or learning activities to advance the students' understanding or longevity of learning. Practitioners risk being caught permitting or encouraging these practices, or indeed, endorsing it, which they fear could result in uncomfortable questions about the practice in question, a reprimand from administrators for allowing it, or ultimately, the loss of one's job.

For example, Kate revealed that kindergarten practitioners in her school are hesitant to allow students to play or to use manipulatives due to a growing fear that an administrator may walk in and it wouldn't look like students were engaged in academic learning. Jayda declared,

You almost have to sneak fun things in if you want to include non-academic activities. You feel like you have to get permission from the principal and get

clearance, which has taken away the practitioners' ability to do what they think is right. You'll get into trouble if you don't seek permission first.

### **5.3.7 The controlled/constrained classroom dilemma.**

In the past two decades, the transformation of kindergarten classrooms has been quite dramatic as described by each of the participants. They describe how developmentally appropriate play areas, designed to encourage dramatic play, develop fine and gross motor skills, enhance imaginative thinking and elicit dialogue and promote language skills, are replaced by desk filled classrooms. These are designed to promote individual seatwork and prepare the children for the culture of school, where they will work alone and where the classroom will be quiet and orderly. The goal is to prepare the student for the challenges of the next grade and on towards college.

The dilemma for these participants is complicated. They describe having two choices:

1. Striking a balance between incorporating DAP into the classroom and ensuring administrative directives from administrators are complied with or,
2. Follow administrator directives and not include DAP.

Jayda said the ways she tried to balance developmentally appropriate methods she believes are more appropriate for young children in the classroom, while still abiding by the constraints set out by administration. She said,

If it's during math you can get away with letting students play-learn with some manipulatives and for the higher tiered groups you can have students at their table working with language arts manipulatives, but it's still very structured, they have to stay at their desk. Nowadays it's very controlled. You make sure students sit at their desks and they meet with their group and there are very controlled activities at the desks. The students are not really allowed to get up.

Louise stated that in her view it was the need for documentation that was driving the more controlled seatwork activities and worksheets in her classroom because they result in an end product that can be used for documenting progress and recording results to meet AYP. From Jayne's perspective, she believed that NCLB has constrained her teaching practices because she is under the constant pressure to ensure her students are able to pass each test. While Jayda revealed the kindergarten program in her school was executed like a first-grade and second-grade classroom. She said that the newly established preschool program, designed for four-year-old students, is executed like a kindergarten classroom should be. Jayda bemoans that, "It looked more regimented than an actual preschool, and I'm thinking, Oh God, these poor kids!"

### **5.3.8 The documentation/measurement dilemma.**

Louise clearly illustrates the dilemma practitioners face when they choose between practices that really engage a student in learning, but may not generate a tangible way to measure that learning, as opposed to choosing practices that easily lend themselves to producing measureable ways to document learning, such as worksheets or tests. She said that practitioners might not easily choose a developmentally appropriate avenue for learning because it is, "hidden learning that we might not be able to document, but is happening through the play and the imagination." Louise explained her reason for using worksheets was because it was quicker, easier and more efficient to assess student understanding, which allows the practitioner time to decide if there is a need to reteach or remediate or if they can move on. The time saving factor means she can cover more work with her students in a shorter amount of time, even if that work was more superficial learning, not a deep understanding of the concept. With so much to cover, she needs to document the learning that occurred as quickly and effectively as possible. This finding confirms Darnell's (2008)



assertion that practitioners move away from DAP toward more inappropriate practices, because they are better able to meet the demands placed upon them.

In Jayda's school district, the kindergarten practitioners create assessments of their own to measure and document student learning. This is designed to ensure each practitioner is assessing their students with the exact same measuring tools as the other practitioners, in the hope of providing consistency across the grade level, and to standardize the report card process. In this way, the administrators could feel assured they were confirming each practitioner was measuring the same things and scoring the students in the same way.

Mallory lamented, "We're supposed to prepare these kids for the task (of future learning) and I understand that we need some way to test everybody that's consistent, but now everything is just preparing for a test."

To clearly illuminate this dilemma faced by the participants, this example from Jacky's second-grade classroom is very clear, as she utilizes constructivist practices at the end of a unit of work to reinforce student understanding of a concept and to satisfy herself they could transfer the learning into a practical everyday context. She believes student learning is enhanced if they can use concrete materials and work alongside peers to solve problems, utilizing scaffolding techniques (Lewis, 2010). The following is an example where Jacky engages the children in mathematics concepts by using concrete materials. During this particular unit, she gave each student one store coupon with pictures of food items that she had cut out from various grocery store catalogues or circulars. She then arranged the students into groups of three. After allowing a little time for the students to explore the new materials and interact with peers about what she had given to them, she encouraged students to compare with each other what they had received. Then Jacky began asking the students open-ended questions to find out how many of them knew what they had been given and if they knew how coupons and discounts worked. She encouraged them to share their responses with

the whole class and was careful to provide positive feedback and elicit more responses from her students.

Some of the students tentatively raised their hand to answer Jacky's questions. When called upon, one of the students responded with the correct answer, and Jacky then related the coupons back to a Social Studies unit they had been working on. The discussion about the coupon continued, eliciting more details from the students. Jacky then went to the whiteboard at the front of the classroom and modeled how to work out how much money could be saved if using a coupon in a store. She then posed the problem for the students to find one thing that was the same on all of the coupons they had in their group. This task encouraged more discussion between students, which she was keen to promote. She called on various students to provide an answer. The answers were varied, revealing thought processes and group dynamics. Continuing this process, she asked if they could find two items the same and then three that were the same, calling on students in various groups to share their answer.

Working together to determine if there were more items the same on the coupons, the students talked in their groups and remained on task, eager to answer questions and solve the problems that Jacky posed for them. It is clear that the students are used to working in small groups with concrete materials to solve problems as they work well together. Jacky then drew their attention to the purpose of the coupon; to provide the shopper with a discount. In their groups, the students discussed the various amounts offered for discount on the coupons, the expiry date and what that might mean, and they noticed all of the coupons had a bar code.

Jacky modeled how to calculate the amount of money that could be saved by using a coupon and drew their attention to how some coupons encourage the shopper to spend more money. Taking turns, the students were able to work out how much money they could save if they used their coupon at the store. Jacky then discussed the amount of money the shopper could save if the coupon was used on Double Days (a day when all coupon amounts are doubled).

This brought more conversation from the students as they worked out how much more money could be saved on Double Days.

Jacky utilizes concrete materials that cost her nothing, by cutting coupons from the grocery store circular, to provide her students with a concrete learning experience. She modeled the method for finding the discount on the whiteboard, and she brought Social Studies, Mathematics and Language Arts together in one themed lesson. Jacky complained that administrators in her district had removed practitioners' decision-making ability by instructing them that they were not permitted to complete art projects, or, to use Jacky's words, "do fluff", with the students unless it was connected to the curriculum. Jacky believes she is able to find a way to make concrete experiences connect with the curriculum, if she believes these experiences are worth including, which she achieved during this experience. The one drawback she saw is the time it requires to provide these experiences, often with little or no documentation to account for the learning that has occurred. This accurately describes the dilemma these participants face, if they choose to provide a more constructivist-based learning experience for the students, as opposed to a worksheet. In this instance, Jacky believed it was worthwhile to do so. She notes that at the completion of the lesson she could have made an anecdotal record of what had occurred during the lesson to use for future planning, but with time being a scarce resource, she concedes that she may not have time for that and it may have to be completed once she got home.

### **5.3.9 The stress dilemma.**

In Chapter Four, the impact of accountability in action was discussed from the perspective of identifying major themes. These themes have also produced the foundation for a number of stressors identified by the participants in this study, and examined from the perspective of various dilemmas in their working lives. While each participant listed various common stressors, some were unique to individual participants. As described here, there were many

stressors that were shared between a number of the participants. I have included the examples provided to me from the participants themselves to illustrate how stressors can be viewed as dilemmas.

### ***5.3.9.1 Time Constraints.***

The pressure of time constraints is a stressor that each participant reported as a factor influencing pedagogy, practice and decision-making. For example, Stella cited constraints upon time as being a factor that brought stress to her and her colleagues. Specifically, she noted the lack of preparation time, or time away from students, to properly prepare for the lessons ahead. In her working environment, practitioners are given a scheduled twenty-five-minute lunch-break but, she reported that much of the lunch-break time is taken up by walking students to and from the lunchroom, using the restroom, regrouping for the next lessons of the day and, if the students do get to go outside for recess (weather dependent), often times practitioners are on duty outside and do not get to use that lunch-break time in the classroom. For Stella, the dilemma was, which decision should she make regarding how best to utilize her lunch break, and what to omit to ensure that everything that was required to be completed, was actually completed? She said that some days that meant not eating lunch, while others she didn't drink anything, as she would not have the chance to make a bathroom break until after school had finished and the students had vacated her classroom. In this way, her working conditions cause her undue stress.

Carolyn said that the most frustrating stressor for her was that there isn't enough time to complete all that she wanted to teach. She commented on the fact that there is a lot more for her to teach now than was required twenty years ago when she first began her teaching career. She explained that over this time period there has been an increase in expectations on students and staff, and there has been a significant decrease in the time available to complete the content that practitioners are required to complete. The dilemma for Carolyn is what to

teach and what to omit in the limited time available. She said that for some lessons, she must go into a great deal of detail and depth in order for appropriate learning expectations to be achieved, while others could be more superficial learning. This dilemma is one that many of the participants share.

Jayne claims a major stressor for her, and other practitioners in her school, is due to the fact that NCLB is test-focused, which she believes constrains teaching practices, because it robs practitioners of valuable teaching time and creativity, as the focus is on test preparation and test-taking, with the result being that practitioners feel rushed and have to skip over important teaching moments. She said that many important teaching moments are easily missed due to a lack of time to revisit these with students, or to stop when they crop up and pay them the attention they require and deserve. The dilemma is whether or not to spend time on teaching test-taking skills and ensure that test preparation is complete prior to taking the test, or to teach the curriculum in more depth and revisit areas of student weakness for remediation or even student interest, regardless of the necessity for testing.

#### ***5.3.9.2 Increase in Student Numbers.***

An increase in the number of students per class, and specifically, an increase in those with special needs in regular education classroom (see Darnell, 2008), has also been cited as being a stressor in the working lives of many of the participants. For example, Mallory reported that NCLB means she has more students in her class, but with less financial support. She, and other practitioners, report the increase of special needs students, including students with behavior management issues, in the mainstream classroom, without the engagement of a paraprofessional to assist with those students, resulting in extra attention for those students from the classroom practitioner, diverting attention away from the task of teaching. Stella made note that if a paraprofessional is available to assist with the student with special needs, the paraprofessional will often require teacher assistance of their own to carry out the job of

caring for and assisting the student with special needs. The dilemma is how to include the extra number of students and students with special needs, while still meeting all of the needs of all of the students. Stella shared an anecdote regarding a student with special needs in her classroom, and the struggles of the paraprofessional employed to assist. When the student was unable to follow along with the regular lesson and began exhibiting behaviors that were disruptive to the rest of the students, Stella said her dilemma is whether or not to continue teaching the lesson to the rest of the class, or to stop and assist the paraprofessional, who is struggling with her student with special needs, and who may be losing control of himself in the classroom. Stella shared that this is a very stressful dilemma for her, partly because she doesn't always know what the appropriate thing to do is and partly because of the time it uses up that she could be teaching.

#### ***5.3.9.3 Increase in Expectations and Paperwork.***

An increase in the expectations and mandated paperwork has been reported as being a stressor for many of the participants. For example, Jacky reported that she, and others at her school, felt they were at risk of burnout because they had to take work home with them to complete on a regular basis as they don't have the planning or preparation time away from the students during school hours to complete that work anymore. She stated that, whilst she always wanted to do her best for all of her students, it means that she is unable to simply walk out the door at the end of a long workday without taking unfinished work with her to complete at home, such as grading tests or designing assessments. With a family to care for, she acknowledges that she experiences a great deal of guilt when she has to "ignore the needs of her own children to complete work for school" whilst she is at home. Jacky's dilemma is one shared by all of the practitioners. This dilemma is that if all of the required paperwork is not completed during work hours, then how much work is appropriate to take home, especially if it has a negative effect on one's own family?

#### ***5.3.9.4 Increase in Direct Teaching.***

An increase in direct teaching time with a focus on test preparation and test-taking is a stressor reported by many of the practitioners. Jayda explained that one of her biggest stressors is that young students, especially in kindergarten, are difficult to assess because they don't know the culture of school yet and are unaware of what is expected of them. Providing proper assessment is time consuming and challenging, due to the time required for completion, and practitioners often need to assess individual students without receiving any assistance from the building aid or paraprofessionals to accommodate the rest of the students in her classroom. Hannah disclosed that quality teaching time is often sacrificed or rushed because of all the time for testing that is required of her kindergarten class, who often require individual assessments. Then she must enter the results into the report cards in the computer system, which she said is also very time consuming. Her dilemma is how to complete individualized assessments in an efficient manner, while ensuring the other members of her class are engaging in meaningful learning?

#### ***5.3.9.5 Lack of Financial Resources.***

A lack of financial resources is a stressor that every participant said had become a huge issue over the past decade or more. Kate revealed that having an increase in the number of students with behavior issues in her regular education classroom created challenges that added to her stress, as already noted by others, however, in her situation, it is compounded because of a lack of funding, as there is no building aid or paraprofessional to assist anymore. Kate is not alone in reporting this stressor, as most of the participants commented that a lack of funding is an issue for them and also for their colleagues in the various school districts. Hannah concurred with this stressor, indicating that there is an increase in the need for classroom assistance, but along with budget cuts, came the cut in funding for paraprofessional assistance in her school district. The lack of funding is an issue that all of the practitioners cited as

adding stress to their working lives. The dilemma in this instance is, how do practitioners complete all that is expected of them, with more students to cater for, with a lack of resources, financial or otherwise, to ensure all of the needs of the students are being met?

### ***5.3.9.6 Restrictive Administrative Guidelines/Lack of Professional Sharing.***

Jayda said that another source of stress for her and her colleagues is the fact that administrators don't value their professional work. She gave the example,

There's this mentality that the practitioners have to be controlled because if left to their own devices everything would go to pieces. It's as if practitioners don't know what's best for their students and practitioners are just 'cattle' that need to be directed.

Jocelyn added weight to this stressor from a different perspective, stating that she believes rumors about the performance of practitioners is a cause for stress, as older-grade colleagues in her school often made competitive comparisons about the abilities of their students in the form of judgments. She feels these comparisons denigrate the practitioners as they refer to which practitioners work the hardest or produce the most successful students, directly relating to how proficient those students were when the new school year began. She said that only the principal would truly understand what was happening in all of the classrooms, and that the individual teachers are not privy to what was being taught or what the issues are in the broader context. Despite this, she stated that the negative rumors continue, regardless. The practitioners view this situation as a dilemma, because they feel the pressure to perform but they don't necessarily feel valued. This may result in practitioners questioning their own ability to enact constructivist pedagogy and practice as Windschitl (2002) suggested.



### **5.3.10 The inconsistent expectations dilemma.**

There are many inconsistencies reported in the professional lives of the practitioners in this study, for example they reported inconsistencies in standards and expectations across schools, across school districts and between states. This dilemma means that many of the practitioners are unsure of what is actually expected of them and their students from one year to the next. Mallory revealed that after working in her current school for 14 years, she is able to disclose that what was important one year is totally different two years later and so forth. While she acknowledges that education is always fluctuating, cycling, and coming full circle, she said that she is dismayed that in today's educational climate she has observed that everything is so focused on preparing students for the testing regime brought about by accountability, specifically NCLB. She indicated that the inconsistencies in the education system and the variations in expectations are very frustrating for her and for her colleagues. Many of the participants in this study share this belief, confirmed by Darnell (2008), who noted that there has been a great deal of change occurring, especially in the transition period between kindergarten and first-grade. In particular, there has been a shift toward more teacher-directed pedagogy.

Jacky, Kate, Stella and Mallory all agree that the variations between schools, school districts, and states mean that students are not being assessed equitably and with consistency, as different accountability systems are being employed to gauge student learning. For example, Jayda explained that standards are set by the state government and must be met in order for the school district to prove they have achieved AYP and receive their funding. However, she believes some of the standards are very unrealistic for young students, especially in light of the fact that practitioners have to meet student's individual needs as well as the state mandated requirements, which many of the practitioners believe are often incompatible.

Kate and Stella note that different school tax arrangements vary widely between states, which means that in some states, households pay more for education than in other states. Some states enjoy the benefits of private and Charter schools (who are not required to meet the same standards as public schools) but some states do not. The variations in each state's mandated testing requirements and the resulting inconsistencies in measuring student progress increases, makes it almost impossible to equitably assess which states, districts and schools are providing students with a world-class education and which states are simply teaching-to-the-test, resulting in wide variations of standards for practitioners to strive to attain throughout the entire country. The dilemma the participants are grappling with when considering the inconsistent expectations, is that it is difficult for them to know what to concentrate on in their classrooms, when the expectations are not clear or are continually changing, or differ from one geographical area to the next. Embracing a new philosophical system that has a new focus every year and that aligns with new accountability mandates has become stressful for many of these participants, as they strive to accommodate new curriculum materials from one year to the next.

## **5.4 The Outlier**

### **5.4.1 Teaching is a passion.**

Carolyn is the participant identified as the most satisfied with her working life, as she enjoys each phase of the process of teaching, and stands out as being the one practitioner who doesn't feel as if she has sacrificed her constructivist teaching practices. She is less focused on play and, indeed, said she is hesitant to use the word play when she describes allowing her first-grade students to explore the math manipulatives she uses in her classroom to enhance their learning.

They all have a math box, which has a ruler and snap cubes, clock, money, things like that. I explain to them that they are teaching tools, not toys and we use them to learn,

not play. The students are excited about them. I used to let them get them out during recess but now I don't let them do that anymore because they're not for playing. I don't let them use their math box items for playing anymore.

She was the only practitioner who reported freely utilizing Colorforms, foam blocks and Legos for construction activities, as well as working with students on 100 piece puzzles as learning tools. It is apparent that she does not fear her administrators questioning her about the use of these materials, as she is very comfortable that these are learning situations that are developmentally appropriate for her first-grade students.

In fact, Carolyn's view towards mandated accountability is that it hasn't really altered her practices very much over the twenty years she has been teaching. She feels supported by the administration in her school district and describes this as a positive relationship, which coheres with Ransford, et al., (2009). She reported that in her school, practitioners keep in close communication with the parents, working together in a partnership. She is the only practitioner who said that she enjoys taking her work home, and happily hand makes the resources she requires, sharing the labor of doing so with her husband and son. In fact, she proudly shared the story of her husband constructing learning tools for her mathematics program that she personally designed.

Carolyn believes that she is doing a good job, doing what she needs to do for the students in her classroom. She stated,

It is not work, I am going to teach. It's something I love. I cannot picture doing anything else. Maybe that's why I always love to do the 'kid stuff'. I participate on mismatch day (dressing up). I feel very strongly about this: you need to know the kids. You have to get to know your kids!

Carolyn identified herself as a teacher first and foremost in her life. Teaching is her passion and she said believes she has the support of her administrators, and the support of her family

as well as the parents of her students. She is able to articulate the reasons for including DAP in her program and believes she has the support of the administration. She actively collaborates closely with her colleagues and they hold regular meetings for the first-grade practitioners. This belief system and support system sets her apart from the other participants in this study and as such, is identified as the outlier, confirming Bandura's (1994) belief that people will commit to undertaking a task only if they believe they can actually do it. It also confirms Jerald's (2007) statement that practitioners with a higher level of self-efficacy tend to be more open to new ideas, willing to take risks and experiment, which Carolyn does in her role as first-grade practitioner.

From these findings, it is clear that what sets Carolyn apart from the other participants is a clear edict from her district administration regarding her professional duties and a feeling of support from school administrators, as well as the opportunity to meet with colleagues once a week to discuss and plan together; something many of the other practitioners did not have in their working lives. While she concurs with other participants that the increase in the number of requirements was converse to the amount of time given to comply with these, she still believes she is able to deliver, and to deliver very well, meeting the individual needs of all of her students.

## **5.5 Vanquish Play**

### **5.5.1 The absence of play.**

A significant and notable finding that emerged from this study is that the demise of play was not identified as a current dilemma by any of the participants in this study. As stated earlier, many of the practitioners lament that play has already been vanquished from their ECE classrooms, from their own pedagogy, indeed from within ECE in elementary schools, because NCLB has constrained the traditional, constructivist pedagogy and practices, requiring that practitioners adopt a more academic approach to teaching. While many of the

participants noted with some sadness that play has already been removed from ECE classrooms, and its value in ECE pedagogy is deeply threatened (Almon & Miller, 2009). This demise of play and constructivist ECE pedagogy over the past several years, and the absence of DAP within current ECE classrooms in the various school settings of this study, coheres with Bassock, Latham and Rorem's (2016) empirical study. Each one of the participants note, that while they face the dilemma of how they might include time for explorative learning and developmentally appropriate play in their classrooms, by doing so, they risk backlash from unsupportive administrators if they do so. Also, they cannot be sure to equip students with the required test-preparation and academic skills required for future mandated tests. It is, however, evident that this is not the major dilemma they are grappling with. Instead, it is increasingly clear that the unraveling of appropriate constructivist practices has gone beyond merely sidelining play, to replacing it with very academic pedagogies and practices that administrators have enacted to ensure the procurement of the required documentation, to ensure the school receives AYP on state mandated tests, even if young children are not required to take the state tests for a number of years.

The battle to include play in ECE classrooms has been fought and lost some time ago. The fight is now to ensure the objectives set out in the mandated curriculum are achieved by students, meaning that the knowledge and skills set out in this curriculum are delivered to students efficiently, confirming Darnell's (2008) findings, guaranteeing the school district attain AYP, thus, safeguarding the employment of each practitioner and securing the much-needed funding from state and federal programs. While this situation isn't ideal to any of the practitioners in this study, it is clear that they have made their peace with it and believe they are making a positive difference in the lives of their students, despite accountability constraints.

## **5.6 The Construction of a Theory and Possible Future Study**

### **5.6.1 A theory emerges.**

When evaluated against the theories of Windschitl (2002), it may be argued that these participants do not wholly engage with constructivist practices in their classrooms. In fact, he has stated that one determinant of successful implementation of constructivist approaches in the classroom lies with the individual practitioner and her understanding of the concept of constructivism, (Windschitl, 2002). While these participants did not claim to be constructivist, but had selected their pedagogy from a continuum of instructional approaches, as suggested by Parker and Neuharth-Pritchett (2006), the data shows that many of their beliefs do lend themselves to a constructivist approach to teaching. The following features characterize practitioner and student activity in a constructivist classroom, according to the ideas of Windschitl (2002) and are practices these study participants reported employing in their classrooms:

- Practitioners obtain students' input when planning important curriculum and then plan learning opportunities accordingly to help students elaborate on and strengthen their skills and knowledge.
- Practitioners furnish students with a wide variety of resources, information and the tools (technological and conceptual) necessary to negotiate learning.
- Practitioners ensure their own thinking processes are explicit for learners to observe to encourage students to follow suite through the use of language, writing and/or drawings.
- Practitioners promote reflective and autonomous thinking from their students.
- Practitioners engage with a range of assessment strategies in order to comprehend the way that students' ideas are developing and then provide feedback on these processes.

- Students have opportunities to engage in meaningful, problem-solving scenarios to enhance their thinking.
- Students have opportunities to work collaboratively with peers and have support while they engage in task-oriented discussions.
- Students have opportunities to apply knowledge in diverse and authentic contexts, where they can explain ideas, predict phenomena, and rationalize their answers based on evidence, not simply to focus on getting the right answers.

During this investigation, it was revealed by several study participants that they felt a level of distrust towards administrators. Several of them were vocal about the inequitable structures of power that existed within their working environment. Specifically, they mentioned the power held by school principals, the district administrators and the state government who, they believed, lacked the inside knowledge and understanding of their contexts, or even the expertise that they themselves had developed within their own teaching experiences and further education. This distrust may be explained by an observation by Connell (2009, p. 214) that wealthy countries, including the US, have been involved in the “construction of an imposing new apparatus of certification and regulation for teachers.” Jayda, in particular, was very passionate about this distrust, stating, “administrators are like a cancer, they are the enemy.” She claimed administrators do things on a whim.

They made the teachers get together over the summer and create a new curriculum, completely ‘hodge-podge’, thrown together, and they totally got rid of the structure.

You have to get permission from the principal and get clearance before you do anything and it’s taken away the teacher’s ability to do what they think is right.

She also communicated that another source of stress for her and her colleagues is the fact that administrators don’t value their professional work.

Both Jocelyn and Hannah revealed their feeling of distrust toward the state government as they reported issues with the way the state government interfered with education. Hannah stated,

I think the government has just been so involved in education but they don't understand what education is about. We have studied and trained and then the government get involved in education and they tell us what we need to do when we're the ones who know. We are the experts.

Given the challenging professional environments in which these practitioners find themselves, the choices they make are not surprising. When the important experiences, perceptions and dilemmas of these practitioners have been foregrounded, it becomes apparent that many of the dilemmas are carefully navigated by experienced and caring practitioners who have to make difficult decisions on a daily basis, often in isolation from colleagues, which affect the outcomes of the diverse group of students in their care.

Not all of these decisions rest comfortably with these participants, but they work as best they can within the constraints of their school districts and Public Law PL 107-110, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which is an act of the US Congress that reauthorizes the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and is based on the premise of setting high standards and measurable goals to improve individual educational outcomes. The participants I engaged with over the course of this study were pragmatically striving to strike a balance between what they believed was appropriate for ECE and what they were required to do to ensure they met AYP and covered all of the mandated curriculum content. A theory emerging from the analysis of data is that ECE practitioners need to engage in complex decision-making processes in order to pragmatically adapt to, and navigate, constraining workplace conditions. This has been referred to as “doing what works” by Webster and Son (2015, p. 80) who reported similar findings in their constructivist grounded theory case study on the use of



technology in university classrooms in Korea, as participants chose to ‘make it work’ rather than doing what they knew was based on best practice, education and experience.

### **5.6.2 Significance and possible directions for future research.**

This thesis is significant because it has provided a unique perspective that combines constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014) with the dilemma framework (Windschitl, 2002) to explore practitioners’ beliefs, pedagogy and decision-making practices while working within an accountability framework. This thesis addressed questions relating to accountability in ECE and used the voices of those engaged in the research process to explore accountability mandates and decision-making processes of ECE practitioners. A significant component has been the examination of the issue of play in ECE. While it has been shown to be an important vehicle for learning (Goldstein, 2007; Gray, 2013; Miller & Almon, 2009), it is being increasingly challenged by accountability mandates brought about by NCLB and the introduction of the Common Core Standards (Almon & Miller, 2009). It is timely, given the global recognition that play is currently receiving (Almon & Miller, 2009) and adds weight to these conversations about the significance of play in learning and development. This study investigates practitioner decision-making in light of accountability mandates, which is largely unexplored, and gives voice to practitioners who are in a strong position to illuminate the dilemmas they face in their working life, assisting colleagues to navigate the changing societal trends of our time.

The dilemmas described by the study participants, while reflecting on their own lived experiences and stories from the field, may not be generalizable to a wider population or to other education contexts or situations, and this is a limitation of this study. However, the intention of the study was to develop a deeper understanding of the perspectives of the participants in the study and the purpose of taking a phenomenological approach was specifically designed to bring new insights into individual lived experience (Charmaz, 2006).

As NCLB is replaced with the Every Child Succeeds Act, educators and administrators will continue to face challenges as they navigate this new form of mandated accountability, and as the important virtues of play continue to be rung out in ECE circles, the future for ECE is uncertain. However, Copple and Bredekamp (2009) assert that the knowledge base for ECE is continually growing in such a way as to assure that the field is well placed to polish and validate understandings of best practice, conveying the promise of hope and new possibilities, while at the same time raising important questions about its place within the elementary school system in the US. Copple and Bredekamp (2009) maintain that future directions will include researchers and educators collaborating on how best to unify the best strategies from ECE integrated for early years in elementary classrooms, providing a beacon of hope for educators who desire to have their voice heard. ECE practitioners and supporters should not silence the conversation about the importance of play and constructivist ECE theories with those in administration and government positions, but continue to do what they can to foreground the importance of DAP to the growth and development of young children, as the value of play is recognized by scholars and researchers as the best vehicle for learning in the early years (Cortez-Castro, 2015). This study provides a voice to the practitioners involved with this study and illuminates their individual perspectives on these matters, with the hope that it continues the conversation about the importance of DAP to ECE and the development of our youngest students.

The possibility of longitudinal studies increases with the longevity of accountability (specifically NCLB) and the effect it has had on education in general, practitioner pedagogies and decision-making going forward. As it was a public law, Public Law PL 107-110, it has played its part in the political and educational landscape for the past decade and more. Now it is time to shift the focus to the future years to come, during the transition to the Every Child Succeeds Act, which will transition the power away from the federal government to enable

each state to take control with more power over accountability, which is in effect in Pennsylvania from August 1, 2016 (for more information on how Pennsylvania will enact changes under ESSA see Appendix M). With the benefit of time and hindsight, looking back to its inception in 2001, some important questions may be answered in regard to the outcomes and future prospects of those students who remained quiet and still, behind desks in kindergarten and did not have the benefit of engaging in dramatic play with peers, nor developed and honed fine and gross motor skills with manipulatives and through outdoor play activities, nor practiced social skills that were once a hallmark of ECE programs. What will the educational and social outcomes of this cohort of students be in five years' time, in ten years' time and beyond? Has the '*academification*' of ECE born fruit and lived up to the promise of a high return on investment as predicted? Another possible avenue of research may be to look at the self-actuality of ECE practitioners as they adapt their pedagogy to incorporate these new administrative guidelines to determine if teacher burnout indeed becomes a major factor in their lives, as many of these practitioners suggested or, as Jocelyn has done, if they leave the field of education for greener and less stressful pastures?

## **5.7 Conclusion**

### **5.7.1 The voice of the practitioners.**

The focus of this thesis was to illuminate how ECE practitioners managed accountability measures mandated by government initiatives and the effect these have on classroom practices. More specifically, it targeted how practitioners negotiated dilemmas (Windschitl, 2002) as they related to the enactment of ECE pedagogy in their elementary/primary school classrooms and while managing mandated educational reform, including NCLB. ECE practitioners remain in a strong position to explore and illuminate the nature of their professional work using inquiry methods that provide them with a voice and illuminates their professional perspective, as this research demonstrates. As practitioners articulate their

beliefs, they allow a deeper exploration of them and an opportunity to understand and challenge them, raising their collective voice to ensure the challenges they face in their professional world are addressed.

### **5.7.2 Focus on outcomes.**

There is extensive research supporting the idea that participation in high quality programs in ECE manifests in a collection of positive outcomes for both students and society in later years (Abbott & Moylett, 1999; Ackerman, 2007; Harlin, 2009; Noble, 2008). This literature has focused attention on the development and education of young children around the globe. The increased demand for young children to be ready academically is the driver of this increased accountability (Adcock & Patton, 2001; Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2000; Weigel & Martin, 2006).

In the twenty-first century, practitioners face conflicting agendas, as government intervention in ECE is expanding on a global scale, with the assumption that formative developmental opportunities provided by early care and learning programs promise greater outcomes, cost savings and future benefits (Noble, 2008), while they attempt to maintain developmentally appropriate pedagogy to support the social, emotional and cognitive development of young children. As jurisdictions seek firmer control over ECE by imposing stricter accountability guidelines, such as NCLB, practitioners are faced with frameworks that are increasingly being introduced under the premise of ensuring mandated standards are achieved (DiBello & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2008; OECD, 2009), such as the case with NCLB. In light of this, practitioners must make decisions on how to implement these mandated standards within the ECE classroom, while still meeting the needs of young children and continuing to retain their constructivist pedagogy.

Miller (2005) and Miller and Almon (2009) claimed many ECE practitioners believe there is not enough time to enact their constructivist pedagogy within the confines of an intense,

mandated curricular and testing regime, as young children are not capable of completing group-administered tests and, therefore, require individualized assessments. The participants in this study bore this out and were, in fact, striving to maintain some aspects of developmentally appropriate pedagogy (but not all) within the framework of increasing accountability, enacted through NCLB. It was found that challenging dilemmas often arose when the practitioners attempted to combine constructivist, ECE pedagogy with the expectations and requirements mandated by curriculum and learning outcomes, as suggested by Windschitl (2002). In their working environment, the participants encounter pressure from administrators and older grade colleagues, whose goal it is to ensure that students succeed in future test-taking, as claimed by Booher-Jennings (2005), Goldstein (2007) and others to meet AYP.

While these practitioners tackle various dilemmas about the nature of their work, they never waiver from setting about ensuring their students have the best possible educational experience each can provide. Many of these practitioners have such strong convictions about the nature of their work that they admitted to secretly engaging in practices that were frowned upon, or not endorsed by administrators, to ensure their students developmental needs were accommodated, as Stipek and Byler (1997) had similarly claimed.

### **5.7.3 Constraining dilemmas.**

As described earlier, while the demise of play was not indicated as a major dilemma for the participants, as they believed there was nothing they could do to remedy this situation, they did express disappointment and angst when describing how NCLB had constrained their preferred forms of pedagogy and practice. Disappointment, along with frustration, was also expressed on how it necessitated that they focus, on what they regard as an inappropriate spotlight, on academics and also in the mandated requirement to gather administrative documentation about student learning. Analyses of the interview material revealed that the

most problematic or dominant dilemma was that the participants struggled with the amount of time it took to teach, prepare for the testing regime, test, and provide remediation for all of their students, including those with special needs accommodated within the regular education classroom. Problematically, the need to focus on getting students ready for passing the mandated tests, (and within a constrained amount of time) meant that they had to bypass much of what they believed was DAP and also important and necessary to their ideals of a holistic ECE education.

#### A Final Vignette – Death by A Thousand Cuts

At the outset of this research I revealed to the reader that I had imagined that mandated accountability, enacted through NCLB, (had at first glance) appeared to be a few simple-to-manage rules with some basic adjustments within the classroom, which would necessitate only superficial changes by practitioners. However, after spending time involved in deep discussion with the volunteer participants as well as time observing in their classrooms, it became very clear to me that the impact of NCLB on their pedagogy, and indeed their daily working lives, had manifested itself over time by significantly altering and constraining their pedagogy and the way they now approach teaching within the ECE classroom.

As I worked to discover the effects and impact on their beliefs, perspectives and epistemologies and to bring to light the details of how they managed the daily tasks of teaching, the participants shared with me their lived experiences and I began to understand that these changes didn't happen overnight but only in what I can metaphorically describe as *death by a thousand cuts*. The picture became clearer to me that little by little, as they scrambled to implement new curricula, their workload increased as they struggled to align this new curriculum with

constantly changing standards. The increase in the required paperwork took up valuable teaching time, resulting in increased stress levels, and there was a swing away from encouraging dramatic play and the use of manipulatives and creativity towards a focus on worksheets and more structured seat work. At the same time, there was an increased focus on academic skills as well as an increase in what needed to be covered and mastered, resulting in explicit teaching practices, before allowing time for play.

Slowly but surely there was an increase in time taken up for testing, which resulted in students missing out on some foundation knowledge and skills. The curriculum became overcrowded with no time for the children to develop the social and emotional skills resulting in an increase in classroom behavior issues. There were increased numbers of students per teacher in the classroom plus an increase in students with special needs being accommodated within the regular classroom, without the extra support that was once provided, due to increasing budget cuts. Hence, I came to realize that constructivist pedagogy had suffered, not one swift blow, but death by a thousand cuts.

By working closely with these practitioners to uncover how they manage mandated requirements and deal with everyday decision-making processes, whilst accommodating an ever-changing work environment as they implement reform, I discovered a lack of planning time with colleagues for professional sharing of ideas and knowledge, plus the increase in required testing meant practitioners fell behind in their teaching schedule, resulting in more direct instruction because it proved to be more efficient to get through the increased workload. Many of the practitioners shared with me the fact that work was no longer as meaningful because there was no latitude to enact their own pedagogy because of restrictive

administrative guidelines and the pressure on them to conform. Sadly, the practitioners concede that ECE professionals are no longer respected for their specialized knowledge.

A closing note to the reader – this final vignette was designed to ‘take you behind the scene’ – to summarize the lived experiences of the practitioners who were so generous of their time and laid bare their professional story so that we may better understand ‘where they are coming from’. These women carefully navigate problematic dilemmas, guided by their experience and compassion and face difficult decisions, often in isolation. It is no surprise that they engage in complex decision-making processes on a daily basis in order to pragmatically adapt to and navigate constraining workplace conditions. As stated in the introductory vignette, my intention was not to attack recent government initiatives, but to contribute to the discussion about the best way forward for the education of our youngest children and to give ‘voice’ to the ECE professionals who work steadfastly ‘at the coalface’ of teaching and learning in ECE throughout this time of continual reform.

#### **5.7.4 A penultimate thought.**

This study combined several qualitative research elements to foreground the experiences of the participants. Phenomenological methods were deemed appropriate for directing the focus to the lived experiences and perceptions of the participants, from their own perspective and it was chosen because as it can be applied to a single case under investigation. The addition of an interpretive dimension to the phenomenological approach provided the basis for practical theory.

Conducting a research project of this nature was no small undertaking, for while attempting to enter into the practitioners’ individual perspectives and experiences, it was important to



constantly strive to make clear to the reader any personal ideas and prejudices about the phenomenon under investigation. It was important to hold in mind how the phenomenologist must act with tact and sensitivity to the views and experiences of the participant while investigating the essence of their meaning, and also when presenting interpretations as rich descriptions that allow readers to enter into and share in this world. Taking risks as a researcher has produced some salient lessons for future research, within the limitations of this study, and brought about an understanding of what it means to be an ECE practitioner in an evolving landscape of increasing and ever-changing accountability. I am left in awe and with a huge amount of respect for the way the participants have the ability to continue to do good work and to provide each of their students with a safe, educational learning environment, despite the pressures of mandated reformation. The challenge to find ways to provide developmentally appropriate experiences for their students will continue, as this group of determined and dedicated educators choose to do what they do because it is their passion to teach. With practitioners' such as these, the future for a developmentally appropriate ECE will continue to shine – even if it needs to radiate a little more secretly behind classroom doors.

### **5.7.5 Epilogue.**

In the days and months following the conclusion of the interviews with each practitioner, it is true to say that change is the only constant in their lives. After the initial research stage was complete, the volunteer participants have disclosed their new classroom assignments and changes in the protocol employed within their school districts. Each one continues to strive to give her best to the students in her care, most facing uncertainty from year to year. One school district has begun replacing retiring practitioners/teachers with substitute teachers in order to save money on paying health benefits and to minimize the number of practitioners/teachers who attain tenure, ensuring more cost savings.

Mallory has been moved to teach in a kindergarten classroom but she and Jacky still plan curriculum and work together.

Jacky has been moved to teach in a kindergarten classroom.

Stella continues teaching as a substitute teacher for grades K-5. She is happy to only work two to three days per week in various classrooms, but now chooses her work assignments carefully.

Jocelyn has retired to start her family and has decided if she is to return to teaching in the future, it may be for less money in a private school, if the political influences remain as they are within the public education system.

Jayne is employed in the same school, but is now teaching second grade.

Jayda is currently employed in a kindergarten classroom in a large school district with a focus on ELL and a high population of migrant Hispanic students. She does not have a permanent position and must apply from year to year, and finds the disruption of moving between grade levels, and even between schools, stressful.

Hannah is still teaching kindergarten in the same school district, but due to budget cuts, she has been moved to a different school.

Louise is teaching first grade. Louise has taught second grade, kindergarten and fourth grade and finds the disruption of moving between grades and schools very demanding, with little time for adjustment.

Kate continues to work in a kindergarten setting in a large school district with a high migrant Hispanic population, but does not have a permanent position from year to year.

Carolyn is happy, continuing to teach first grade in her current school.

On December 10, 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was signed by President Obama and was a bipartisan measure which reauthorized the 50-year-old Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which is the US national education law, providing a well-

established commitment to equal opportunity for all students (US Department of Education, 2015). By signing this bill, the US government reaffirms the American ideal that every child in the US is entitled to a world class education, regardless of income, race, or the zip code where they live (US Department of Education, 2015).

When it was introduced, NCLB was deemed a significant step forward for American students in many ways, especially because it sought to shine a light on areas in which students were already making progress and included areas where they required additional support, despite income, race, zip code, home language, disability or background. The law was due for revision in 2007, but created such division in the community and political arena that it was not reauthorized until it could be repaired, however, over time, NCLB's perceived prescriptive requirements proved increasingly unmanageable for schools, administrators and educators (Ravitch, 2010). Recognizing this situation, in 2010, the Obama administration joined the call from families and educators to develop a better law with a clear goal of ensuring that students were fully prepared for success in college and future careers (US Department of Education, 2015). Educators, parents and community members demanded action to scale back prescriptive interventions and provide states with more opportunity to develop their own accountability systems, utilizing multiple measures of measurement and empowering educators as classroom professionals (Rosales & Walker, 2015).

#### **5.7.6 A final comment.**

The future is still not fixed, as there are many changes still to come as the Every Student Succeeds Act replaces No Child Left Behind (see Appendix N for listed details of the changes). With the changing of the guard as the US welcomes a new president, President Trump, all eyes are on Washington to see what changes sweep the nation within the education arena. Akpan and Beard (2016) believe that the transference of oversight from the federal government back to the states could have a positive effect for constructivism within

the educational arena as it may provide increased flexibility for educators to reduce the time and energy spent preparing for future testing, adapt lessons to be more student-focused, as it ends AYP. Replacing the testing regime will take time and thought though, as the states begin the task of creating their own accountability systems. However, many practitioners will approve of the initiative to include less high-stakes testing and reduce the stringent level of accountability. Time will tell whether this new legislation has gone far enough to defang NCLB but there will be many reflections and salient lessons learned about its effectiveness for legislators, educators and the community. It has been an important learning opportunity. Importantly, while the cogs and wheels that drive the legislation of formal education move around, and as this study has shown, the conversation about what is appropriate education for young children must continue and, most importantly, the voices of practitioners on the coalface must be included in the decisions.

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*Children express and represent their ideas, thoughts, and feelings when engaged in symbolic play. During play a child can learn to deal with emotions, to interact with others, to resolve conflicts, and to gain a sense of competence – all in the safety that only play affords. Through play, children also can develop their imaginations and creativity. Therefore, child-initiated, teacher-supported play is an essential component of developmentally appropriate, (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009).*

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## **Appendices**

The foundations of brain architecture, and subsequent lifelong developmental potential, are laid down in a child's early years through a process that is exquisitely sensitive to external influence. Early experiences in ... care settings, and in communities interact with genes to shape the developing nature and quality of the brain's architecture. The growth and then environmentally based pruning of neuronal systems in the first years support a range of early skills, including cognitive (early language, literacy, math), social (theory of mind, empathy, prosocial), persistence, attention, and self-regulation and executive function skills (the voluntary control of attention and behavior). Therefore, investment in early learning and development is more efficient and can generate more benefits than costs relative to investment later in the life cycle, (Yoshikawa et al., 2013, p. 3).

## Appendix A

### Letter of Invitation to School District Superintendents



University of Southern Queensland

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Dear Superintendent,

My name is Elaine Price. My family and I recently moved to Pennsylvania, USA from Queensland, Australia where I am currently completing an online Doctoral Degree in Education at the University of Southern Queensland, majoring in Early Childhood Education. As part of my studies I am completing a research study involving early childhood education practitioners holding at least a Bachelor Degree or having attained five years' experience in the field.

The title of this project is: *The significance of accountability mandates in early childhood classrooms: Exploring challenges to constructivist perspectives.*

The aim of this qualitative study is to explore issues in early childhood education addressing the following questions:

1. What do ECE practitioners consider to be appropriate ECE pedagogy and practice?
2. What influence (if any) has No Child Left Behind had (positive/negative) on the pedagogies, practice and decision-making process of ECE practitioners?

I am seeking a total of eight to twelve participants from early childhood settings to participate in this study and was wondering if there may be any ECE practitioners in your school district who may fit the criteria and be willing to volunteer their time and expertise to participate? Participation in this study is strictly voluntary as authentic responses are crucial to the outcomes. Participants may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty.



Participants will be invited to participate in an interview/s with the researcher to share views on early childhood education pedagogy and what effect (if any) they perceive accountability (No Child Left Behind), school readiness and academic test scores (where applicable) have on their ability to teach effectively as well as on young children's learning. It is anticipated that each participant will engage in discussion via this interview process, clarify any details and exchange feedback with the researcher. This will require between one to two hours of the participant's time and some short follow-up telephone calls and/or emails as well the researcher spending some time observing in the classroom environment. (The researcher has her clearances on file with the business office). Participants will be asked to keep a reflective journal detailing their thoughts, feelings, ideas, frustrations and other feedback they believe is pertinent.

The confidentiality of each participant and that of their place of employment is assured in this study. No photographs will be used. Participants will be given a pseudonym (or can choose one if they prefer). No organization or place of employment will be named or identified in this study. Participants and their place of employment will be assured anonymity during the final reporting of the study.

If there are any practitioners within your organization who may be interested in participating in this study they can contact me directly on (Cell) 302 740 9107, or email me at [misstrinity@me.com](mailto:misstrinity@me.com)

Thank you for your kind assistance in this matter.

Yours sincerely,

**Elaine Price.**

Doctor of Education Candidate

If you have any ethical concerns with how the research is being conducted or any queries about your rights as a participant, please feel free to contact the University of Southern Queensland Ethics Officer on the following details.

Ethics and Research Integrity Officer

Office of Research and Higher Degrees

University of Southern Queensland

West Street, Toowoomba 4350

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## Appendix B

### Initial Letter of Invitation to ECE Practitioners



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PHONE 302-740-9107  
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Good Morning,

My name is Elaine Price and I live in the (XXXX) area and my children attend school in this district. I am currently completing an online Doctoral Degree in Education at the University of Southern Queensland in Australia, majoring in Early Childhood Education. As part of my studies I am completing a project involving early childhood education practitioners (kindergarten through second grade) who may be willing to participate in a short interview with me to share their views on education and what effect (if any) they perceive accountability, school readiness and academic test scores (where applicable) have on their ability to teach effectively, as well as on young children's learning.

It is anticipated that you will share your views via an interview process, clarify any details and provide feedback. This will require between 60-90 minutes of your time with a short follow-up telephone call and/or email with the possibility of me spending some time observing in your classroom (this is optional but would be helpful).

You will be invited to **either** keep a brief journal for to jot down your thoughts, feelings or ideas about accountability **or** follow up with a meeting discussing your experiences with accountability (NCLB) and how it affects the decisions you make (or have made in the past) in your classroom.

The aim of my project is to explore issues in education (specifically K-2) addressing the following questions:

1. What do practitioners in grades K-2 consider appropriate teaching practice?

2. What influence (if any) has No Child Left Behind had on the teaching methods and decision-making process of K-2 practitioners?

Your confidentiality and that of your place of employment/school district is assured in this project. No photographs or videotape will be used. You will be given a pseudonym (or can choose one). No organization or place of employment will be named or identified in this project.

***On January 9, 2012, I received consent via email from the Superintendent to proceed with this project and this letter is attached.***

I have also attached the questionnaire so that you can determine if this is something you might be interested to help me with. If you choose to help, please contact me on 302-740-9107 to make a time for us to meet.

If you wish to email me with any ideas or thoughts about my project I would welcome them.

I have included a Consent form so that if you choose to participate you can print **Page 3** of the Consent form and return it to:

Elaine Price  
325 Sofia Blvd  
Blandon PA 19510

If you are interested in being interviewed for my project I would certainly appreciate your time.

You can contact me on (Cell) 302 740 9107, or email me at [misstrinity@me.com](mailto:misstrinity@me.com)

Any assistance at all that you can offer will be greatly appreciated!

Thank you.

**Elaine Price.**

Doctor of Education Candidate

If you have any ethical concerns with how the research is being conducted or any queries about your rights as a participant, please feel free to contact the University of Southern Queensland Ethics Officer on the following details.

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## Appendix C Participant Information Sheet



University of Southern Queensland

### The University of Southern Queensland Participant Information Sheet

HREC Approval Number: H11REA133

**Full Project Title:** *The significance of accountability mandates in early childhood classrooms: Exploring challenges to constructivist perspectives.*

**Principal Researcher:** Elaine Price

**Other Researcher(s):** N/A

I would like to invite you to take part in this research project.

#### 1. Procedures

Participation in this project will involve

- I will use interviews or a questionnaire to discuss topics in contemporary elementary teaching, specifically K-2 (ECE), including your beliefs and practices and how you manage accountability to external agencies (such as meeting AYP). In addition, I am interested in what influence (if any) you perceive accountability, school readiness, and/or academic test scores have on your teaching practices, and how this is managed in your classroom. I anticipate that you will participate in a brief interview and may be asked to clarify details and exchange feedback via telephone or email. This will take approximately 60-90 minutes. The inclusion of any other materials you deem appropriate to assist in responding to the questions is most welcome. If possible, I would like to observe for 60 minutes in your classroom.
- The benefits to participants are minimal, however, by participating in this study you will be sharing your knowledge and expertise with other interested parties, which may contribute to research in the field of education.
- There are no apparent risks for participating in this study.
- My supervisory team, Associate Professor Karen Noble and Dr. David Cleaver have direct responsibility to monitor this study. Submission of bi-annual progress reports made to the University of Southern Queensland Faculty of Education and the Ethics Committee will also serve as a means to monitor this study.

#### 2. Voluntary Participation

Participation is entirely voluntary. **If you do not wish to take part you are not obliged to.** If you decide to take part and later change your mind, you are free to withdraw from the project at any stage. Any information already obtained from you will be destroyed. If you have any questions regarding my study, please email me at [misstrinity@me.com](mailto:misstrinity@me.com) or call me on 302-740-9107 and I will be happy to answer any questions.

Your decision whether to take part or not to take part, or to take part and then withdraw, will not affect your relationship the University of Southern Queensland or your relationship with your employer.

**Please notify the researcher if you decide to withdraw from this project.**

Should you have any queries regarding the progress or conduct of this research, you can contact the principal researcher:

*Elaine Price*  
*Doctor of Education Candidate*  
*325 Sofia Blvd, Blandon PA 19510*  
*Phone 302-740-9107*  
*Email [misstrinity@me.com](mailto:misstrinity@me.com)*

*Or you can contact the Principal Supervisor, Associate Professor Karen Noble at: [karen.noble@usq.edu.au](mailto:karen.noble@usq.edu.au).*  
*If you have any ethical concerns with how the research is being conducted or any queries about your rights as a participant, please feel free to contact the University of Southern Queensland Ethics Officer on the following details.*

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Ph.: +61 7 4631 2690  
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**Appendix D**  
**Follow Up Letter of Invitation Sent Via Email to Possible Candidates**  
**(Inclusive of Interview Questions and Participant Consent Form)**

Good Morning,

My name is Elaine Price and I live in the area and my children attend school in this district. I am currently completing an online Doctoral Degree in Education at the University of Southern Queensland in Australia, majoring in Early Childhood Education. As part of my studies I am completing a project involving early childhood education teachers (kindergarten through second grade) who may be willing to participate in a short interview with me (or to complete a questionnaire via email) to share their views on education and what effect (if any) they perceive accountability, school readiness and academic test scores (where applicable) have on their ability to teach effectively, as well as on young children's learning.

It is anticipated that you will share your views via an interview process **or** email questionnaire, clarify any details and provide feedback. This will require between 30 - 60 minutes of your time and possibly a short follow-up telephone call and/or email with the possibility of me spending some time (about 1 hour) observing in your classroom (this is optional but would be helpful).

You will be invited to **either** keep a brief journal for 2 weeks to jot down your thoughts, feelings or ideas about accountability **or** to write a short account of your experiences with accountability (NCLB) and how it affects the decisions you make (or have made in the past) in your classroom. This part is optional but would be extremely helpful to my study. Any assistance you can offer would be appreciated.

The aim of my project is to explore issues in education (specifically K-2) addressing the following questions:

3. What do teachers in grades K-2 consider to be appropriate teaching practice?
2. What influence (if any) has No Child Left Behind had on the teaching methods and decision-making process of K-2 teachers?

Your confidentiality and that of your place of employment/school district is assured in this project. No photographs or videotape will be used. You will be given a pseudonym (or can choose one). No organization or place of employment will be named or identified in this project.

***On January 9, 2012, I received consent via email from Dr. Eaken to proceed with this project and this letter is attached.***

I have also attached the questionnaire so that you can determine if this is something you might be interested to help me with. If you choose to help, simply answer the questions and email the responses to: [misstrinity@me.com](mailto:misstrinity@me.com)

If you wish to email me with any ideas or thoughts about my project I would welcome them. I have included a Consent form so that if you choose to participate (either via email or by interview) please print **Page 3** of the Consent form and return it to:

Elaine Price  
325 Sofia Blvd  
Blandon PA 19510

If you are interested in being interviewed for my project I would certainly appreciate your time.

You can contact me on (Cell) 302 740 9107, or email me at [misstrinity@me.com](mailto:misstrinity@me.com)  
Any assistance at all that you can offer will be greatly appreciated!

Thank you.

Elaine Price.

[misstrinity@me.com](mailto:misstrinity@me.com)

## Appendix E Sample Questionnaire

### **STUDY SAMPLE QUESTIONNAIRE FOR ELAINE PRICE**

**These questions are representative of questions that may be asked to prompt discussions  
and talking points with participants**

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty or explanation. **You may also refuse to answer any question at your discretion (simply leave it blank).** You will be provided with a pseudonym that will be used for the duration of the study to ensure your confidentiality. I appreciate your participation. Thank you for your time.

**Part 1: This section is designed to gather demographic information.**

1. State your name.
2. Briefly outline what influenced you to choose a career in teaching.
3. List your teaching qualification/s and institute from which they were obtained.
4. List the number of years have you been employed in education and in what capacity/role/grade level taught?
5. State what grade level you are currently teaching and the requirements to fulfill that role.
6. State the number of years have you been with your current employer.

**Part 2: This section contains open-ended questions, intended to elicit more detailed responses.** (You may answer them individually or as a collective, as some of them are grouped together under similar topics.)

7. Briefly outline your views on teaching (philosophy).
8. Outline your beliefs on children's learning and your views on the practices/environment most conducive to learning.
9. Outline the aspects of children's learning that are important to you.
10. Outline the aspects of children's learning that are spotlighted by accountability.



11. Is play important in your classroom? For example, do you use any strategies that incorporate play as a method to foster learning?
12. Describe the practices/methods you use to assist/enhance children's learning.
13. In your current employment situation, do you participate in or adhere to any form of accreditation/accountability/school readiness/government policy? If yes, please describe.
14. Outline how these programs/policies might affect how you implement the curriculum.
15. Describe how these programs/policies affect your inclusion of play (if applicable).
16. Do these programs/policies affect your method of teaching? Please describe.
17. What are your views on these programs/policies?
18. Do these programs/policies constrain or enhance teaching? Please describe.
19. Are there any expectations from older-grade colleagues placed on what is taught or methods of teaching in your classroom? If so, please explain.
20. Do these programs/policies affect your relationship with colleagues teaching older grades? If so, in what way?

**Part 3: I would like to invite you to discuss any other issues regarding education in general or K-2, play or managing political or educational change or any other aspects not previously covered.**

**Thank you for your kind participation. I appreciate your assistance.**

**Elaine Price.**

Cell: 302-740-9107  
misstrinity@me.com

## Appendix F

### Follow Up Letter of Invitation Mailed to Schools



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Hello,

You may have already received an invitation to participate in my study. I wanted to let you know that it is not too late. I am still looking for participants and would really appreciate hearing your views on accountability. Your responses will be completely confidential and would assist me to complete my study on the possible effects of No Child Left Behind on teacher's decision-making. Any assistance you could offer would be greatly appreciated!

Please read on to see if you might be interested in participating...

My name is Elaine Price and I live in the local area and my children attend school in this school district. I am currently completing an online Doctoral Degree in Education at the University of Southern Queensland in Australia. As part of my studies I am completing a project involving practitioners teaching kindergarten through second grade who are willing to participate in a short interview with me to share their views on education and what effect (if any) accountability and academic test scores have on their ability to teach in the classroom, as well as on young children's learning.

I invite you to share your views via a short interview, clarify any details and provide feedback if you wish to. This will require only 60 - 90 minutes of your time and possibly a short follow-up email or phone call.

The aim of my project is to explore issues in education (specifically K-2) addressing the following questions:

1. What do practitioners in grades K-2 consider appropriate teaching practice?
2. What influence (if any) has No Child Left Behind had on the teaching methods and decision-making process of K-2 practitioners?

Your confidentiality and that of your school/school district is assured in this project, as they will not be named. You and your school will be given a pseudonym. No photographs or videotape will be used.

If you wish to email me with any ideas or thoughts about my project I would welcome them.

I have included a Consent form so that if you choose to participate you can print Page 3 of the Consent form and return it to:

Elaine Price  
325 Sofia Blvd  
Blandon PA 19510

If you are interested in participating in a short interview for my project I would certainly appreciate your time.

You can contact me on (Cell) 302 740 9107, or email me at [misstrinity@me.com](mailto:misstrinity@me.com)

Any assistance that you can offer will be greatly appreciated!

**Elaine Price.**

Doctor of Education Candidate

If you have any ethical concerns with how the research is being conducted or any queries about your rights as a participant, please feel free to contact the University of Southern Queensland Ethics Officer on the following details.

Ethics and Research Integrity Officer  
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Email: [ethics@usq.edu.au](mailto:ethics@usq.edu.au)

## Appendix G Consent Form



University of Southern Queensland

### The University of Southern Queensland Consent Form

HREC Approval Number: **H11REA133**

**TO:** *Elementary School Teachers*

**Full Project Title:** *The significance of accountability mandates in early childhood education classrooms: Exploring challenges to contemporary constructivist perspectives.*

**Principal Researcher:** Elaine Price

- I have read the Participant Information Sheet and the nature and purpose of the research project has been explained to me. I understand and agree to take part.
- I understand the purpose of the research project and my involvement in it.
- I understand that I may withdraw from the research project at any stage and that this will not affect my status now or in the future.
- I confirm that I am over 18 years of age.
- I understand that while information gained during the study may be published, I will not be identified and my personal results will remain confidential.
- I understand that the tape recordings (if applicable), transcripts, and/or completed questionnaires will be stored in a locked cabinet in my office and stored on my password protected computer and only the researcher will have access to it.
- I understand that I may be audio taped during the study.

**Name of participant**.....

**Signed**..... **Date**.....

*If you have any ethical concerns with how the research is being conducted or any queries about your rights as a participant, please feel free to contact the University of Southern Queensland Ethics Officer on the following details.*

Ethics and Research Integrity Officer  
Office of Research and Higher Degrees  
University of Southern Queensland  
West Street, Toowoomba 4350  
Ph.: +61 7 4631 2690

## Appendix H

### Multiple Data Instrument Collection Table

#### Data Collection Tracking Table Used to Track Multiple Data Collection Instruments

<u>Participant</u>	<u>Interview</u>	<u>Classroom Observation</u>	<u>Artifact</u>	<u>US State Employed</u>
Carolyn	Yes	No	Yes	Pennsylvania
Hannah	Yes	Yes	Yes	Pennsylvania
Jacky	Yes	Yes	Yes	Pennsylvania
Jayda	Yes	Yes	No	Delaware
Jayne	Yes	Yes	No	Pennsylvania
Jocelyn	Yes	Yes	Yes	Pennsylvania
Kate	Yes	Yes	No	Delaware
Louise	Yes	Yes	Yes	Pennsylvania
Mallory	Yes	Yes	Yes	Pennsylvania
Stella	Yes	No	No	Pennsylvania

## Appendix I Categorizing

**Question 2: What influence (if any) has accountability had (positive/negative) on the pedagogies, practice and decision-making process of ECE practitioners?**

Initial Code	Properties	Examples of participant's words	Participant
<b>CONSTRAIN</b>			
Time Constraint <b>Decision Making process =DCM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No time for instruction</li> <li>• Hard to come up with schedule</li> <li>• Hard to stick to schedule</li> </ul>	It's hard because of the time constraint	Carolyn <b>DILEMMA</b>
Time Constraint	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No background knowledge</li> <li>• No experiences</li> <li>• Less parent involvement</li> </ul>	Now it all has to be done yesterday! Everyone is in panic mode!	Jayda
Move too fast	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some teachers assume too much (of students)</li> <li>• They think they've got it – move on</li> <li>• 75% of what you learn is introduced in 1<sup>st</sup> grade</li> </ul>	That's intimidating that you have to get through so much	Carolyn
Assembly line mentality <b>DCM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Methodical</li> <li>• Not trying to cover too much</li> <li>• Strong foundation skills</li> <li>• Focus on beginner skills</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	It's an assembly line mentality where every child is supposed to be ready for college. You're never going to win when that's your standard	Jayda <b>DILEMMA</b>
Stressor on Practices <b>DCM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• District admin isn't giving clear messages</li> <li>• Teachers feel insecure</li> <li>• Causes stress and concern</li> <li>• Teachers overloading to keep up with everything</li> </ul>	When the district says things are optional you never know if they actually mean optional: teachers worry and need support	Kate <b>DILEMMA</b>
Prescribed practices <b>DCM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prescribed way to teach</li> <li>• Inconsistent from what teachers are taught on how to teach</li> <li>• Matrix for teaching</li> <li>• There is so much to cover, so many programs to pull from</li> </ul>	Am I ever going to be able to go home?	Jayda <b>DILEMMA</b>

Make things more the same <b>DCM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Common Core Standards</li> <li>• Created a new curriculum</li> <li>• Huge push across the district</li> </ul>	A huge push to make things more the same	Jocelyn <b>DILEMMA</b>
Smaller variations in teaching styles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Starting to teach alike</li> <li>• Taking away the creativity</li> <li>• Taking away the cooperative learning</li> <li>• Taking away the independent learning because of time being a restraint</li> </ul>	Quicker for a teacher-directed lesson than students to work in small groups and independently	Louise <b>DILEMMA</b>
Time being a restraint <b>DCM</b>			
“NCLB – Hemming in the schedule” <b>DCM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taking some of the freedom away to do different things</li> <li>• Taking up a lot of time</li> <li>• Documentation = proving = time</li> </ul>	Some schools are losing out because of the time taken away from teaching (NCLB)	Louise
Quantity of work Versus quality of curriculum <b>DCM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Benchmark testing forces teachers to focus on quantity of work</li> </ul>	A child may be forced to fail if they needed more prep time before a test (needed quality of teaching not quantity of work)	Louise <b>DILEMMA</b>
NCLB Constrained teaching <b>DCM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NCLB takes time away from some of the great teaching time</li> <li>• NCLB constrained teaching because of being test-focused</li> </ul>	You have to get the kids to pass this test	Jayne <b>DILEMMA</b>
Expect more and more	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NCLB impacts because they expect more and more with less funding</li> </ul>	More kids with less money	Mallory
Teach to the test <b>DCM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teach to the test</li> </ul>	Now, it’s all we do. Everything we do is for a test and that’s not realistic	Hannah
Scripted Programs <b>DCM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less freedom</li> <li>• More scripted programs</li> <li>• Fluctuation in philosophies</li> </ul>	It’s like being a robot	Louise
Stifled <b>DCM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Over testing of skills and concepts</li> <li>• Increased standards</li> </ul>	I feel stifled a lot of the time with all the standards They don’t need	Hannah

Increased information <b>DCM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less time for creativity</li> <li>• Less time to expand on ideas</li> <li>• No enrichment</li> <li>• Pushing students</li> <li>• Can't spend time</li> </ul>	to be tested on every skill and concept Everything is so <b>rushed</b> Constantly pushing and going faster	Hannah
Push students hard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No time to expand on ideas</li> <li>• No time for the little things</li> </ul>	I think I <b>push</b> pretty hard because of all the standards	Hannah (K)
Eliminate NCLB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Govt doesn't understand what education is about</li> </ul>	I wish they would <b>eliminate NCLB</b> , I really do!	Hannah
Burn out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good teachers can't let work go</li> <li>• Take problems home</li> <li>• Take work home</li> </ul>	You take it home and you <b>burn out</b>	Jacky <b>DILEMMA</b>
No fun	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They took away the fun</li> </ul>	We are <b>not</b> able to do the <b>fun</b> , even just an art project	Mallory
No "fluff"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No fun to "push more in"</li> <li>• Kids without basic skills (cutting, coloring)</li> </ul>	We were told <b>"You may not do the fluff"</b> so now we have kids who can't cut or color	Jacky
Stressful to assess	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Turn out a progress monitor every week</li> <li>• Hard to assess when they don't know what is required of them</li> <li>• Stressful because you need to provide intervention for them</li> <li>• Difficult because it takes so much time to assess</li> </ul>	It's <b>stressful</b> because you cannot give them the amount of time they need because so much time is used to assess	Jayda
"Look Better" <b>DCM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Admin felt teachers needed to teach the same things</li> <li>• Rewrote the curriculum to bring everyone in line</li> </ul>	We started to realize it would be better if we were all doing more similar things	Jocelyn
Afraid to get 'caught' <b>DCM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hesitant to allow play</li> <li>• Concerned that admin will walk in</li> <li>• Won't look like academics are being covered</li> </ul>	Teacher is <b>hesitant</b> to let kids do something like play /use manipulatives because <b>afraid</b> if	Kate <b>DILEMMA</b>



Measuring learning <b>DCM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Philosophy not enacted due to academic guidelines</li> <li>Admin not comfortable with no worksheets, no questions</li> </ul>	<p>somebody walks in and they're not doing something academic</p> <p>I know I would be asked, "How are you measuring that?"</p>	Jocelyn <b>DILEMMA</b>
Keep mouth shut <b>DCM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Admin not happy if kids have free time in day</li> <li>Learned to "keep mouth shut"</li> <li>Choose not answer or offer answer</li> <li>School starts to become "unfun"</li> </ul>	<p>I learned to keep my mouth shut because admin wouldn't be happy about it</p>	Jocelyn
Choose not to share <b>DCM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Getting caught for allowing kids to read books off level</li> <li>Choose not to share what lessons were done/not done</li> <li>Keeping mouth shut</li> <li>See the value in doing things not standardized/tested or measured</li> </ul>	<p>I would choose not to share depending on feedback I was getting from admin</p>	Jocelyn <b>DILEMMA</b>
Teachers pressured into doing more	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unrealistic expectations</li> <li>Increased standards</li> <li>Increased pressure on teachers and students</li> </ul>	<p>We basically hold Kindergartners to first grade standards</p>	Jayda
"Cookie Cutter"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not an assembly line</li> <li>People have different backgrounds</li> <li>Different families</li> <li>Different IQ's/EQ's</li> <li>Different learning styles</li> <li>No formula to teach</li> </ul>	<p>When something becomes that "cookie cutter" we are not an assembly line making widgets to sell. These are people that we are working with...</p>	Jocelyn

**Causal Conditions:** Lack of time, Admin overseeing instruction, NCLB, more students and less funding, increased testing, assessment, concerned about image, getting caught allowing "play/fun", teacher burn out, increased standards, see the value in things unmeasured, prescribed or scripted curriculum, inconsistent from philosophy or beliefs, so much to cover and so many choices, Common Core have created a huge push to cover more, teacher-directed easier than student directed, no time for cooperative or small group or independent

learning, testing forces the focus onto quantity of work not quality, kids lack basic skills causing older grade colleagues to complain

**Phenomenon:** accountability (NCLB, Common Core Standards, benchmarks), teaching and learning, working within a school system

**Strategies:** Choose to keep quiet, look for secret ways to incorporate fun into the curriculum, take work home to allow more time in class, find ways to show the value other than measuring, find ways and time for cooperative or small group or independent learning, tow the line, teach to the test, don't allow play or fun, rush through the curriculum

**Context:** elementary classrooms, home, meetings with admin  
Temporal context: over the period of the teaching career

**Question 2: What influence (if any) has accountability had (positive/negative) on the pedagogies, practice and decision-making process of ECE practitioners?**

Initial Code	Properties	Examples of participants' words	Participant
<b>Accountability</b> No time for play	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More that needs to be mastered now</li> <li>• Opened people's eyes</li> </ul>	There might not be as much time for play, but you can still make it fun	Carolyn
Sucked the fun out <b>DCM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sneak fun things in</li> <li>• Have to get permission from the principal and get clearance to do fun things</li> <li>• Taken away teacher's ability to do what is right</li> <li>• Forced to teach things in ways kids don't learn or you get in trouble</li> </ul>	<p>You almost have to <b>sneak</b> fun things in</p> <p><b>Forced</b> to teach things in ways kids don't learn or you get in trouble</p>	Jayda
Administrators are the Enemy: Like a cancer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of funding for teachers</li> <li>• Money to purchase unneeded equipment</li> <li>• Us and them</li> </ul>	It's almost like the <b>Administrators are the enemy; like a cancer</b>	Jayda

Very Controlled DCM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>mentality</li> <li>No art work on walls</li> <li>Admin want students to sit at tables</li> <li>No walking around</li> <li>Very controlled</li> <li>Looks regimented</li> </ul>	<p>What is it coming to? They are only 5 years old!</p> <p>It was depressing! “I believe in creating activities to practice skills, to move around, try them out and play with them” “Oh God, those poor kids!”</p>	Jayda DILEMMA
No toys to play DCM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Try to make lessons fun</li> <li>Very structured</li> <li>Must stay at table</li> <li>Some ‘stuff’ for indoor recess</li> </ul>	<p>The school doesn’t really allow that. I’m not allowed to! I feel it’s important, especially when the kids are young.</p>	Jayda
Sneak in DCM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Boring, regimented programs</li> <li>No time for art</li> <li>Not time/practice fine motor skills</li> <li>Older grade colleagues complain they can’t cut</li> </ul>	<p>I try to sneak in (time for art)</p> <p>What do you expect? None of you are making time for them to cut!</p>	Jayda DILEMMA
Older grade colleagues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased expectations</li> <li>Decreased skill level</li> <li>No time to develop or practice skills</li> <li>Talk of students not being “ready”</li> </ul>	<p>There’s always plenty in the rumor mill of, “this teacher doesn’t prepare as well as that teacher.”</p>	Jocelyn
Where we are failing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>So much to remember and do</li> <li>I’m sure it doesn’t always happen</li> </ul>	<p>That’s where we are failing because we are not addressing all those needs all the time</p>	Jocelyn

NCLB  
DCM

- Affected what needed to be taught
  - Affected what needed to be reported, measured, evaluated
- It's a bit rougher than I thought. Through the years of teaching it has become the main focus.
- Jocelyn

Documenting/assessing

**Documentation Doesn't = Effective Teaching**

DCM

- A lot of time is given up on documenting and assessment
  - Takes away from time teaching
  - Are we testing too many times?
- We need to be more effective and more documentation doesn't mean a more effective way
- Louise

Reduced outdoor time

DCM

- Reduced outdoor time
  - Low test scores a factor
- We are heading towards very little outdoor time because they feel threatened with their test scores
- Louise

Close the learning gap?

- Timed tests
  - More testing
  - Frustration from teachers
  - Can we close the gap?
- How do you meet all the needs with one teacher?
- Stella

Public education lack of funding

- Lack of funding
  - Not solving the problem
  - Reducing the money available
- How can something get better without helping it? They are just taking the money out of public education
- Jocelyn

**Causal Conditions:** Reduced outdoor time, more testing, lack of funding, frustration from teachers, time given up to documenting and evaluating, NCLB affected what needed to be taught and measured, no time for art, no time for fine motor skills practice, colleagues frustrated, very controlled kindergarten classrooms, increased expectations

**Phenomenon:** accountability = constraint

**Strategies:** Sneak fun in, reduce playtime, NCLB become main focus in schools, "Us and Them" mentality, not addressing all the needs all the time (faking it, just getting by).

**Context:** elementary classrooms, home, meetings with admin

**Question 2: What influence (if any) has accountability had (positive/negative) on the pedagogies, practice and decision-making process of ECE practitioners?**

Initial Code	Properties	Examples of participants' words	Participant
<b>ACCOUNTABILITY</b>			
Accountability for all (parents included)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Family is needed as a partner</li> <li>If govt give money = show what you are doing</li> </ul>	Let's be accountable!	Jayne
Involve parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Send home the expectations to parents</li> <li>Parents help address learning issues</li> </ul>	It goes with NCLB	Carolyn
We have been doing what we need to do	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Secure in own practices</li> <li>Believe ahead of Common Core</li> <li>No work book required</li> </ul>	I don't like busy work	Carolyn
Teachers do the testing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers need to test students because they know the child</li> <li>Takes a long time to do</li> </ul>	I'm glad we are not doing standardized testing in 1 <sup>st</sup> grade	Carolyn
Collegiate/teamwork <b>DCM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Following same guidelines</li> <li>Working on same objectives</li> <li>Doing same things in our way</li> </ul>	I don't feel we should be doing the exact same thing because we don't have the exact same kids	Carolyn
Lack of time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A lot more to teach now (compared with 20 years ago)</li> <li>Increased expectations on students</li> <li>Decrease in available time to do things you want</li> </ul>	That's the most <b>frustrating</b> thing for me; there isn't enough time.	Carolyn
Increase the Gap	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Background plays a part</li> <li>Culture plays a</li> </ul>	The longer kids are in education the larger the gap is going to be	Jocelyn

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>part</li> <li>Value placed on school plays a part</li> <li>Gap will increase despite progress being made</li> </ul>		
Never close the gap	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cutting budget</li> <li>Cutting aide time</li> <li>Students lack background knowledge</li> <li>Less help from home</li> <li>Teachers unable to meet all the needs of all students</li> </ul>	How do we catch these kids up? They're cutting the budget, cutting out the help, these kids come in behind and they never closed the gap.	Stella
Initial Code <b>ACCOUNTABILITY</b> and the impact on practitioner's pedagogies, practice and decision-making Time Constraint	Properties	Examples of words	Participant
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>40 hours per week</li> </ul>	...struggle to do our best in 40 hours per week – taking home papers to grade	Stella
Inconsistent Curriculum <b>DCM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Curriculum constantly changing – pulling from different formats based on what is coming from govt input</li> </ul>	How are you supposed to teach based on the curriculum they give you when it is "Hodge podge" because it's so inconsistent?	Jacky Jayda <b>DILEMMA</b>
Inconsistent Curriculum <b>DCM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>New ways of teaching disconnected to prior understandings gained at University</li> </ul>	Who makes these rules?	Jayda
Rote <b>DCM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rote practice versus traditional practices</li> </ul>	We try to do silly, goofy things to cover up the rote practice.	Jacky

Attitude to work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attitude determines work ethic</li> </ul>	Punch the clock	Stella
Attitude	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Always try our best</li> <li>I worry “I’m not doing enough.”</li> </ul>	<p>We would NEVER NOT work hard.</p> <p>I couldn’t be a teacher not want every child to the best.</p>	Mallory
Burn Out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work is taken home</li> <li>Teacher’s burn out</li> <li>Before NCLB teachers did their best for all students</li> <li>More accountable now (from the state) but always had accountability</li> </ul>	You can’t let it go because you always want to do your best	Jacky
Reflection on action DCM DCM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Always look at what needs to be better</li> <li>Mindset of an educator</li> <li>Reflect on what is not working</li> <li>How can I be more effective?</li> <li>Diversity among teachers is a good thing</li> <li>Learn from each other</li> </ul>	We wonder, “Do they really understand it? Can they apply it in the real world?”	Louise
Reflection in action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reflect on “what am I doing wrong?”</li> <li>I feel it is my fault (if a child gets a lower grade)</li> </ul>	<p>“I’m trying this and it’s still not working”</p> <p>I feel like I am failing that kid</p>	Jacky
Reflection on action/in action Practitioner qualities DCM DCM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Flexible</li> <li>Reflective</li> <li>Constantly changing</li> <li>Constantly rethink</li> <li>What can I try?</li> </ul>	<p>I am pretty flexible and reflective and constantly need to change and think what I need to do to reach the kids ...constantly trying to find a new way.</p>	Kate

Role model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reciprocal kindness</li> </ul>	To do something nice for a student to show him if you are nice it will be reciprocated	Jayne
Type of practitioner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Trait/characteristics of practitioner determines outcomes</li> </ul>	Are you a teacher who <b>wants to work?</b>	Jayne
Individual learning styles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Individual style of learning</li> <li>Every child needs a chance to learn</li> </ul>	You have to <b>know every child</b> as an individual	Carolyn
Increase in Organized Documentation <b>DCM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Less play = more documentation-generating activities</li> <li>More control</li> <li>Balance that with a child's need to play</li> </ul>	There is a drive as an adult to do more <b>organized documentation, more controlled activities</b> because I feel like more is happening that I can show for that	Louise <b>DILEMMA</b>
Increased output expectation <b>DCM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased expectation from admin on Teachers = Increased expectation on Students</li> </ul>	So basically, the teachers self-imposed more work on themselves by expecting more from the students than what the standards required	Jayda
Developmental V Academic <b>DCM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Finding a balance between what the teachers are required to do and what the students need to learn</li> </ul>	There's got to be a happy medium	Kate <b>DILEMMA</b>
<b>Consequences</b> <b>DCM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase need for classroom aid time</li> <li>Rushed teaching time</li> <li>Teaching time cut</li> </ul>	I have to <b>cut my teaching time shorter</b> so I can get all of the tests in before I can enter them in the report cards. There's a lot to do!	Hannah
<b>Consequences</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of prerequisites</li> <li>Decrease in vocab</li> <li>Decrease in background</li> </ul>	<b>Kids are not getting what they need</b> , the prerequisite skills, the prior knowledge, less vocabulary and background knowledge.	Hannah



	knowledge		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of readiness</li> </ul>	It's almost like a whole change...children are changing and not in a good way!	
<b>Consequences</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased direct instruction</li> </ul>	Students in Kindergarten are usually more tactile, kinesthetic or visual learners	Hannah
<b>Inconsistent practice for age DCM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in aural learning</li> <li>• Decrease in concrete experiences</li> <li>• Style of teaching versus style of learning</li> </ul>		<b>DILEMMA</b>
	CONFLICT		
<b>Consequences DCM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kindergarten no longer age appropriate</li> </ul>	Kindergarten is run more like a 1 <sup>st</sup> or 2 <sup>nd</sup> grade classroom	Jayda

**Causal Conditions:** Accountability, lack of time, extra workload for students and teachers, doing anything to help students learn and do well, teacher beliefs, teacher characteristics/traits, reflect on teaching/learning, develop new strategies, disconnect with beliefs and understandings gained at university, teachers feel they are the experts being dictated to by govt/admin

**Phenomenon:** "Do our Best"

**Strategies:** Reflection, role model, develop new strategies, try new things, share ideas, take work home, dwell on it, feel guilt, work harder, just do what they are told to do

**Context:** school, home, in one's mind, with colleagues, with administrators

## Question 2: What influence (if any) has accountability had (positive/negative) on the pedagogies, practice and decision-making process of ECE practitioners?

Initial Code	Properties	Practitioners words	Practitioner
<b>Stressor</b>			
Stressor on Practices <b>DCM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• District admin isn't giving clear messages</li> <li>• Teachers feel insecure</li> <li>• Causes stress and concern</li> <li>• Teachers overloading to keep up with everything</li> </ul>	When the district says things are optional you never know if they actually mean optional: teachers worry and need support	Kate
Pedagogy <b>DCM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Admin dictates how teachers teach</li> </ul>	"In some school's teachers aren't free to enact their own	Kate <b>DILEMMA</b>

Increased Paperwork	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased paperwork demands</li> <li>Take work home to complete</li> <li>Decrease in creativity</li> <li>Less meaning</li> </ul>	<p>pedagogy or they are too new to back it up”</p> <p>It’s <b>not as meaningful</b>. I spend more time on paperwork, with the reports and grading tests</p>	Hannah
No Job Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>No job security</b></li> <li>Students can underperform</li> <li>Not fair to teachers</li> <li>All students are different</li> </ul>	<p>I think what’s hard is knowing your job is on the line if children in your class aren’t doing as well on the tests</p>	Jayne <b>DILEMMA</b>
Behavior Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Classrooms now have higher level behavior issues</li> <li>Sp Needs Students included</li> </ul>	<p>It’s challenging because we have higher level behavior issues</p>	Kate
Mandated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mandated testing/common core inclusions bring extra stressors</li> </ul>	<p>Now you just feel that extra pressure because it is mandated by the state</p>	Jacky Mallory
Failing Children <b>DCM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stress of failing children</li> <li>Feeling responsible</li> <li>Failing the child</li> </ul>	<p>It stresses me if I have to <b>give a child a lower grade</b>. I feel like it’s my fault. I feel like I am failing that child</p>	Jacky Louise Mallory <b>DILEMMA</b>
Overloaded	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Curriculum writing is an extra</li> <li>Extra jobs required</li> <li>Teachers want to teach</li> </ul>	<p>Teachers were there for the kids but they were pulled to write curriculum. <b>They weren’t going to eat Bon Bons</b>, they wanted to work in their classroom.</p>	Stella <b>DILEMMA</b>
No Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No funding for support staff</li> <li>Impossible to accomplish everything</li> <li>Decreased planning time</li> <li>Increased expectations of staff and students</li> <li>No budget for materials</li> </ul>	<p>I think the behind NCLB is a good idea, but the funding wasn’t there, the <b>support isn’t there</b> and everything we are expected to do ... <b>It’s almost impossible to accomplish</b> without having help. We have to create (materials) on our own.</p>	Hannah
Pressure of standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased demands</li> <li>Common Core</li> </ul>	<p>It’s just the pressure of all the kids have to be at</p>	Mallory

Scrutiny Overloaded DCM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>increased work</li> <li>Pressure on all to succeed</li> <li>Sp Needs not going to achieve at same level</li> <li>Increased scrutiny from Admin and colleagues</li> <li>Blame when students don't achieve</li> <li>Teachers complaining about colleagues</li> <li>Kindergarten teachers feel pressure</li> </ul>	<p>a certain level and they all have so many needs and how do we do it?</p> <p>Everyone is <b>scrutinized</b>. There is a lot of <b>blame</b> going around! Teachers are working, they are teaching them but there is so much rushing through stuff and not spending time on basics. They are <b>just overloaded</b>.</p>	Jayda
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Push down expectations</li> <li>Increased expectations from older grade colleagues</li> <li>Pressure on Kindergarten to provide the foundation for learning</li> </ul>	<p>Children need to be at a certain place by the end of the year and this is being pushed down from 3<sup>rd</sup> grade</p>	Hannah
Increased stressors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased stressors</li> <li>More paperwork</li> <li>More teaching</li> <li>Increased expectations</li> </ul>	<p>Definitely more of that stress level because there is so much more that is placed on us.</p>	Hannah
Kindergarten assessments DCM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased assessments for Kindergarten</li> <li>Reduced social time for students</li> <li>Behavior becomes an issue</li> <li>Basic skills missing due to no practice time</li> </ul>	<p>Even in <b>Kindergarten they are being assessed</b> using DIBBLES and benchmarks. There are less students interacting on that social level and I think kids are missing out on that.</p>	Kate
Pressure trickled down	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pressure from School Districts</li> <li>Pressure from schools</li> <li>Pressure on teachers</li> </ul>	<p>There's pressure from school districts trickled down to administration now <b>trickled down</b> to teachers so that even in kindergarten they are being assessed.</p>	Kate <b>DILEMMA</b>
Inner city schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inner city populations have decreased ability to follow directions</li> <li>Increased behavior out of control</li> <li>Home may not be safe</li> </ul>	<p>It's hardest working with the population from the inner-city schools, there are more challenges in the classroom.</p>	Kate

	for them		
Reduced break time Reduced non-teaching time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teach to be kind to self and to others</li> <li>• Reduced time for breaks</li> <li>• Reduced non-contact time</li> </ul>	There are hard days when there is no time for a break except lunch and it's stressful. There is even less non-teaching time available.	Kate
Blood, Sweat, Tears <b>DCM</b> <b>DCM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cookie Cutter required</li> <li>• BLOOD, SWEAT, TEARS</li> <li>• Expectations high</li> <li>• No time to take risks and try something new</li> <li>• If it fails not documentation</li> </ul>	There is a lot of pressure; your reputation is on the line to get your kids to where they need to be. Blood, Sweat, Tears! That's what teachers feel... that pressure not to go off the beaten path but be more cookie cutter because "oh my goodness" if this doesn't go exactly as I expect it to I can't show that documentation that (admin) is expecting! More planning is required and more work to implement this new curriculum. The concrete materials are not provided.	Louise <b>DILEMMA</b>
New curriculum challenges <b>DCM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New curriculum = more planning required</li> <li>• Hard on teachers (veteran/new)</li> <li>• More work to create visual aids</li> <li>• Time taken to interpret how to implement it</li> </ul>		Kate
Can't walk out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extra work is taken home</li> <li>• No time to relax and regroup</li> <li>• Extra pressure on teachers to do it all</li> </ul>	I just can't walk out the door. It needs to be in my bag for home	Jacky <b>DILEMMA</b>
Tears	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers take work home</li> <li>• Home life is chaotic trying to complete school work</li> <li>• Family suffers</li> <li>• Guilt ensues</li> <li>• More work to integrated and align</li> </ul>	We'll be in tears because our own kids don't get the best of us because we get home and we are too tired.	Mallory
Race to the Top		I feel sorry for the school who, "race to	Kate

- new curriculum to common core
  - Teaches are given this task if new materials are purchased
- the top” and have all these wonderful things thrown at them because unless it comes ready to be aligned with the curriculum it’s more work! That’s the hardest part, after building up a repertoire coordinated with the curriculum you have to come up with it yourself.

**Causal Conditions:** Increased stressors on teaches from admin, new curriculums, less time for non-teaching endeavors, more contact hours, more paperwork, more testing, taking work home to complete, feeling like a failure, no job security, afraid to take risks in case it doesn’t work out and there is no documentation,

**Phenomenon:** Teachers are stressed out trying to juggle all the new demands of teaching as well as enact the old ones. They are looking for help but no one is listening.

**Strategies:** Take work home, try to help struggling students at other times, take less breaks, work harder, feel guilty, worry about blame from colleagues, feel insure about job, share feelings with others

**Context:** In school in the classroom, within the culture of the school/work place, at home, in mind

## Question 2: What influence (if any) has accountability had (positive/negative) on the pedagogies, practice and decision-making process of ECE practitioners?

Initial Code	Properties	Practitioners words	Practitioner
<b>Inconsistent</b> Standardized testing versus student needs <b>DCM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Standards are set by state</li> <li>Standards must be met</li> <li>Admin want to meet student needs</li> <li>Not always possible to marry the two</li> </ul>	Really unrealistic standard that’s in place with the standardized test but then admin is telling you to do what the kids need	Jayda
Variation in expectations <b>DCM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Different expectations for different school districts, schools, classes</li> <li>Teachers only meet once per month to plan grade level</li> </ul>	Kate: Schools are different; there is inconsistency between schools, states, charter schools, private	Jacky  Kate

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Useful to know what student needs to know by end of year</li> <li>• Students bring varying skills, knowledge and IEP's</li> </ul>	schools. Tax for each district and state influences this too.	
Inconsistent across the nation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education is always fluctuating</li> <li>• New ideas arise</li> <li>• The nation and each state has set standards</li> <li>• Difficult to prepare students</li> </ul>	We need some way to test everybody that's consistent but now everything is just preparing for a test. I don't know that I agree with that!	Mallory
Inconsistent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduced planning time together</li> <li>• Inconsistent content across classes</li> <li>• Different expectations/grade system</li> </ul>	My brother in Iowa receives half day planning time to share ideas with other teachers in the same grade so the content is consistent.	Stella
Not just a test score (Inconsistent)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More to consider than the final test score</li> <li>• Different racial backgrounds</li> <li>• Different heritage and culture</li> <li>• Different economic backgrounds</li> </ul>	This is so much more than just a test score. Testing isn't so bad but we don't look at the background of the child.	Jayne
Inconsistent UNBELIEVABLE AND CRAZY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NCLB rewards high performing schools</li> <li>• NCLB does not reward low performing schools</li> </ul>	NCLB at its core, at its heart is a good idea. The fact that schools who perform less well on standardized tests receive less money than school who perform well, that to me, is crazy? That's just the most ridiculous thing I've heard in my life. And we all knew it was ridiculous from the beginning and that's how it has continued to be!	Jocelyn
Unrealistic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unrealistic for Sp.</li> </ul>	"...according to the	Jacky

expectation for  
Special Needs

Needs students to be held to the same standard as regular Ed students

standards he needs to do it. It's just not realistic! I think realism has to come into play a little bit more!"

Unrealistic expectation for  
Special Needs

- Timed tests for Sp ED

Once thing I struggle with Sp Ed kids are never going to be able to meet the requirements

Kate

Unrealistic expectation for  
Special Needs

- Vicious cycle
- Not planning together
- No real ability groupings
- Different expectations across the board
- Some students not getting support from classroom aid
- Sp Needs Students expected to complete testing (PSSA)
- Teacher spends time planning/teaching Sp Needs
- Teacher focused on the lowest levels
- Some students 2 years behind class

The teacher is constantly exhausted dealing with Sp Needs and behavioral problems.

Stella

But even if you have an aid with a Special needs kid, you're still ultimately responsible. And the aid is not really certified. The teacher still has that child on their mind.

You can't tell me that some of my kids that were trying to focus aren't having trouble with (the aid) talking while I'm talking. It's very hard to get used to her talking while I'm teaching.

When you think of education there are so many problems it's overwhelming.

**Causal Conditions:** Govt trying to fix the problem of poor performing students and low test scores so focused on increasing these without more consideration given to the underlying causes (not poor teaching), test scores carry great weight and influence

**Phenomenon:** Test scores carry great weight and influence

**Strategies:** Teachers want time to work, plan and implement together for increased consistency across content areas, consideration given to more than just the test score of a child, standards need to be consistent and not continually evolving and devolving

**Context:** working with the school system, the state system, the national framework across time.

**Question 2: What influence (if any) has accountability had (positive/negative) on the pedagogies, practice and decision-making process of ECE practitioners?**

Initial Code	Properties	Practitioners words	Practitioner
Frustration/ Anger/ Irritation/ Overwhelmed Irritated/ Unreasonable	Students come from different: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Backgrounds</li> <li>• Different IQ/EQ starting points</li> <li>• Disciplinary experiences</li> <li>• Cultural backgrounds</li> <li>• Supportive environments</li> <li>• Educational values are different</li> </ul>	The thing that <b>irritates</b> me the most about all this education talk is the constant notion that <b>based on the success of my children I should then be paid</b> for that. It's completely unreasonable!	Jocelyn
Angry	Teachers are responsible for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning lessons</li> <li>• Teaching lessons</li> <li>• Cleaning classroom</li> <li>• Decorating classroom</li> <li>• Behavior management</li> <li>• Data keeping and recording</li> <li>• Reporting</li> <li>• Workshops to enhance skills</li> <li>• Professional development</li> <li>• Recess duty</li> <li>• Negotiating</li> <li>• Scheduling</li> <li>• All students needs are planned for and met</li> </ul>	When people say, <b>teachers are overpaid it makes me really angry.</b>	Stella
Angry A MENTALITY THAT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers have a bad reputation/given a</li> </ul>	Some people think teachers are <b>trying to do the least</b>	Jayda



PERVADES  
ABOUT  
TEACHERS)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>bad rap</li> <li>• Bad image that teachers don't know what's best for students</li> <li>• Teachers need to be controlled</li> <li>• Can't be left to their own devices</li> </ul>	<p>amount of work possible.</p> <p>There's this mentality that teachers have to be controlled because if you left them to their own devices everything would go to crap!</p> <p>Teachers are just like cattle that need to be directed!</p>	
Angry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No respect for the training</li> <li>• Those that can't - teach</li> </ul>	<p>Teachers are treated just like truck drivers – there is no respect for their knowledge</p>	Stella
Angry/ Frustrated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pressure on teachers to complete benchmarking</li> <li>• Rushing through the curriculum</li> <li>• Teachers are nervous wrecks</li> <li>• No-one is listening</li> <li>• No-one cares</li> <li>• A focus on getting it done rather than on the students' needs</li> </ul>	<p>We all feel the same way but no one is listening. We have so much to cover, rushing through the curriculum because they were taking the DCAF as a benchmark, although it's not mandated by the state. Everyone is a nervous wreck! SLOW DOWN!</p>	Jayda
Frustrating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers frustrated with admin</li> <li>• Not curriculum writers</li> <li>• Extra work</li> </ul>	<p>Over the summer the admin made the teachers get together to create a whole new curriculum, completely thrown together... 'Hodge podge'</p>	<p>Jayda</p> <p>I GET IN A LOT OF TROUBLE</p>
Frustrating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frustrating when curriculums are cobbled together</li> <li>• "Teachers hate it when the curriculum is made up because they don't know what</li> </ul>	<p>There is no perfect, right way to teach but when they (admin) throw these ridiculous curriculums at you, how am I supposed to teach them?</p>	Jayda

Frustrating	<p>they are doing”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All students expected to be proficient on standardized tests despite IEP</li> <li>• Less funding</li> <li>• State isn’t specific about what they want you to teach (e.g.: which synonyms?)</li> </ul>	<p>NCLB does impact us but what’s frustrating is they expect more and more with less and less funding! That is not logical!</p> <p>It frustrates the kids to test for days on end!</p>	<p>Mallory</p> <p><b>DILEMMA</b></p>
Frustrating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frustrating that during summer some learning is lost</li> <li>• Older grade teachers make snide remarks about what learning is missing</li> <li>• Teachers feel responsible</li> </ul>	<p>Sometimes it’s frustrating when the kids are not doing what you want and the older grade teachers say stuff and not really mean it (I’m thinking, did I do a terrible job?)</p>	<p>Jacky</p>
Frustrated-Inconsistent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All kids should be judged fairly and equally but teachers have differing expectations and assessments</li> <li>• Need to agree on expectations of knowledge</li> <li>• Admin dictate what must be addressed</li> <li>• Need time to work as a team</li> </ul>	<p>We have different interpretations of what a standard even means.</p> <p>We would like the time to share and talk about assessment but when we come together we have other jobs that we are given</p>	<p>Jacky</p>
Frustrated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accommodating Sp needs is frustrating</li> <li>• Takes time away from regular Ed</li> <li>• IEP students still taking tests</li> <li>• More support is required</li> <li>• More planning and teaching given to these students</li> </ul>		<p>Stella</p>
Frustrated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standardized tests bring pressure</li> <li>• Documentation</li> </ul>	<p>When I can just teach and I’m in the groove and the kids</p>	<p>Jayda</p>

- required for everything

are responding and we're having fun, forget all that stuff...but when the tests are coming and you're getting nervous it's just awful.

**1. Question 2: What influence (if any) has accountability had (positive/negative) on the pedagogies, practice and decision-making process of ECE practitioners?**

Initial Code	Properties	Practitioners words	Practitioner
<b>DROWNING</b> Increased paperwork	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Too much paperwork</li> <li>Increased record keeping</li> <li>Data coaches required to analyze data</li> <li>Drowning in paperwork</li> </ul>	<p>The amount of paperwork that is involved or record work is unbelievable to me! The district brought in <b>data coaches</b> to help analyze the data being created by all the testing. I felt like I was <b>drowning!</b></p>	Kate
No break	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers are "on" all day</li> <li>No respite from class issues</li> <li>No time to regroup</li> <li></li> </ul>	You don't really get a break. Lunch is your guaranteed break for 25 mins	Stella
Burn Out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers want to leave the profession</li> <li>High stress</li> <li>No support</li> <li>Increased expectations</li> <li>Little reward</li> </ul>	I am young but I'm just about done.	Stella
Burn Out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers want to do the best job</li> <li>Exhausting to care about what happens to students</li> </ul>	Caring about the kids is what burns you out. Putting in all the extra time - emotionally	Stella
Losing Our Best Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Poor working conditions</li> </ul>	Teachers are <b>getting pretty upset.</b>	Stella

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers writing curriculum</li> <li>Teachers feeling overwhelmed with extra work</li> <li>Extra responsibilities</li> <li>Districts don't have \$\$ to pay for extras</li> </ul>	Writing the curriculum in addition to all the other responsibilities. We are losing our best teachers!	
<b>EXHAUSTING</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Constant change</li> <li>Students are tired</li> <li>No down time</li> </ul>	It's exhausting because things are constantly changing	Mallory
Exhausting/Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hard on veterans</li> <li>Hard on new teachers</li> </ul>	A lot of changes – it's hard on veteran teachers as well as new ones.	Kate
Assessing is exhausting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased assessment</li> <li>Continual testing</li> <li>Tiring to find the time to include it all</li> </ul>	In teaching you know that there are hours beyond the school day. The amount of assessing is exhausting!	Stella
Exhausting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Behavior problems</li> <li>Inclusive issues with special needs</li> <li>Increased academics</li> <li>Increased testing</li> <li>No breaks</li> <li>Take work home</li> </ul>	Sometimes I have a headache by the end of the day. Now it's go, go, go!	Stella
Constantly exhausted	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Too many tasks</li> <li>Teacher has too many roles</li> <li>Too many students</li> <li>Not enough support</li> <li>Not meeting all students' needs</li> </ul>	The teacher is constantly exhausted. There's not enough time and now you have behavior issues, or you're stopping to say stop touching him, or you're moving their desks. But they are taking away from the rest of the class.	Stella

**Causal Conditions:** Poor working conditions, increased work tasks, responsibilities, more students with special needs/behavior issues, increased assessment, decreased prep time and time away from classroom, reduced down time, taking work home, constant change, not secure in what is expected or what will happen in work environment

**Phenomenon:** Teachers are exhausted, they are burning out earlier, they feel angry and frustrated with lack of support from admin, we are losing our best teachers

**Strategies:** teachers want to feel secure in their job, they want more help and less extra tasks piled on them, they want some understanding of what they do

**Context:** In the classroom, with the school culture and within the school district, Over time throughout the year and across career.

**Question 2: What influence (if any) has accountability had (positive/negative) on the pedagogies, practice and decision-making process of ECE practitioners?**

Initial Code	Properties	Practitioners Words	Practitioner
<b>ENHANCE</b> Increased Expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in expectation on kids via NCLB = increase in teacher expectation</li> </ul>	Expectation that ALL kids can and should grow and succeed	Kate
Accountability = Organized	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accountability = organization for teachers</li> <li>• Increase in knowledge of student understanding and skills</li> </ul>	Teachers need the documentation that accountability brings	Louise
Higher order thinking addressed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Addresses higher order thinking</li> <li>• Increase in teaching of skills</li> <li>• Increase in questioning from students</li> <li>• Increase in thinking about writing from students</li> </ul>	You have to ask the higher order thinking questions, you should be, so maybe it's not bad (NCLB)	Kate

**Causal Conditions:** Implementation of accountability (NCLB) drove expectations on students up

**Phenomenon:** Some positive aspects include increased teacher expectations, the belief that all children can learn, a focus on different learning styles and in some cases, extra support staff, addresses higher order thinking skills and an increase in documentation required for future planning

**Strategies:** Try to manage the increased work load without burning out, find new ways of working, remove certain “fluff” elements from curriculum due to lack of time,

**Context: At school:** In the classroom, at home and during meetings with admin

**Question 2: What influence (if any) has accountability had (positive/negative) on the pedagogies, practice and decision-making process of ECE practitioners?**

Initial Code	Properties	Examples of Practitioners words	Practitioner
Kindergarten practices in the past			
Past Practices and traditional philosophies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (in the past, there was) Softer transition to school</li> <li>• More creativity allowed</li> <li>• Playtime was allowed</li> <li>• Increased academic skills</li> </ul>	<p>It was a nice transition into school ... and there wasn't this push-push for academics!</p> <p>Now stifled with all the standards</p>	Hannah
Past Practices and traditional philosophies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decreased play in classroom</li> </ul>	There is certainly not as much play as occurred 10 or 15 years ago	Jocelyn
Past Practices and traditional philosophies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (in the past, there was) There was a kitchen area for dramatic play</li> <li>• Puppet area</li> <li>• Free play (choices)</li> </ul>	<p>Even the first-grade classroom (from 10 years ago) wasn't as structured and sit down. Very, very routine now</p>	Louise
Past Practices and traditional philosophies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (in the past, there was) Focus on social skills</li> <li>• Cooperative learning</li> </ul>	Even now 4-year-old preschool is like Kindergarten from the past (10-15 years ago)	Kate
Past Practices and traditional philosophies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developmental Kindergarten</li> <li>• Traditional practices</li> </ul>	<p>10 years ago, there was developmental kindergarten, which had a lot of toys in the room and students could play and interact. Now there are no toys, no dolls, no Legos, no blocks</p>	Jayda

**Causal Conditions:**

**Phenomenon:** Kindergarten becoming more like an older grade classroom with increased expectations on what students can do at the end of kindergarten, developmental kindergarten gone and is replaced with a more academic program, no time to play, no toys to play with, short time for recess, no rest for the brain, little movement for the body = children with behavior problems and teachers working overtime to implement all of the curriculum

**Strategies:** teachers working overtime to implement the curriculum, try to sneak some playing/fun during center time

**Context: (Temporal)** Over time, for duration of teaching career, becoming increasingly difficult

**Question 1: What do ECE practitioners consider to be appropriate ECE pedagogy and practice?**

Initial Code	Properties	Examples of Practitioners words	Practitioner
PLAY, Philosophy, Pedagogy Appropriate Philosophy DCM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Play has important role in kindergarten</li> <li>• Developmental/ traditional programs have a place</li> <li>• Manipulatives in math</li> <li>• Concrete experiences</li> <li>• Science experiments</li> <li>• Thematic teaching across the curriculum</li> <li>• Making connections to build on schema</li> <li>• Revisit a concept to reinforce</li> </ul>	<p>I absolutely believe that play is very important in Kindergarten. Now it is not an option, not if they want this accountability... if they want us to push the children, there's no way it works, especially in a half day program.</p> <p>In kindergarten they are not playing, they are working. It's not a fun time!</p> <p>They need imaginative play experiences. They need to pretend, try out different roles and use what they are learning.</p> <p>They need to learn social roles, not robotic math facts.</p>	Jayne <b>DILEMMA</b>
Appropriate Philosophy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visuals are really important</li> <li>• Math manipulatives</li> <li>• Acting out plays, doing plays</li> <li>• Offer lots of extra thinking activities</li> <li>• Create puppets</li> <li>• Science experiments</li> <li>• Reenact from SS</li> <li>• Variety of manipulatives</li> </ul>	We still have fun times when we have parties, etc.	Mallory
Appropriate Philosophy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Game inspired activities</li> </ul>	I try very hard to have the activity look like a game...it feels more like a	Louise

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduced worksheets</li> <li>• Keep students' active</li> <li>• Limit teacher directed lessons</li> <li>• Mini lessons</li> <li>• Centers important</li> <li>• Whole language/literature learning</li> </ul>	game them having them write it down on a worksheet.	
Appropriate Philosophy/practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Context learning</li> <li>• Problem solving</li> <li>• Math incorporates writing and drawing</li> <li>• Math broken down</li> <li>• Incorporate challenges (EG engineering)</li> <li>• Hands on experiences</li> <li>• Research projects</li> <li>• Writing prompts</li> <li>• Journaling</li> <li>• Lots of discussion</li> <li>• Teaching tools (Math manipulatives in a box for each child)</li> </ul>	<p>My main focus is think, think, think! Stop and think and now tell me why and then write it down.</p> <p>I love what we do because it is different but it is <b>linked to everything</b>.</p> <p><b>No math textbook!!</b></p> <p>We are so far ahead of the Common Core and we have been aligned to them for a long time and we're into problem solving.</p> <p>There are things they think are a fun game but it is fun learning.</p>	Carolyn
Appropriate Philosophy (skill develop)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Various experiences</li> <li>• Safe environment</li> <li>• Nurtured learning</li> <li>• Visuals learning</li> <li>• Modeling</li> <li>• Manipulatives</li> <li>• Touching and manipulating enhances learning</li> <li>• Arts and crafts enhance reading and fine motor skills</li> </ul>	<p>With ECE it's all about getting them to experience as much as they can and enjoy learning.</p> <p>Making things fun, enjoyable lends itself to them opening up and having more ideas of what they can do.</p>	<p>Hannah</p> <p><b>DILEMMA</b></p> <p>Fine motor skills (cutting, coloring, gluing) need to be worked on for future grades – no time = poor skills</p>
Appropriate Philosophy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enrichment</li> <li>• Guided reading</li> <li>• Extra thinking games</li> <li>• Math manipulatives</li> </ul>		Jacky



Appropriate  
Philosophy  
**DCM**

- Choose supportive learning scenarios versus direct instruction
- Learn by doing
- Learn from peers
- Differentiated instruction
- Establish a frame of reference

Direct instruction provides the opportunity to create artifacts for record keeping.

Kate

**DILEMMA**

Use all kinds of bags of tricks to reach all children

**ZPD**

**Extensive repertoire is being constrained**

Philosophy

- Similar views expressed by all participants
- Eclectic style
- Traditional philosophy
- Augmented with language of NCLB
- Many things were beliefs but not all could be enacted with NCLB
- Expression of dismay that change had prevented some of these things

- Safe environment
- Routine
- Structure
- Make learning fun
- Positive encouragers
- High expectations
- Everyone can learn
- Accommodate different learning styles
- Differentiated instruction
- Small group work
- Mini lessons
- Centers/stations
- Research projects
- Writing across the curriculum (integrated learning)

Carolyn

- Base curriculum on language arts
- Problem solving
- Child must feel safe
- Learn how to obtain information
- Independent learning
- Lots of resources
- Cooperative learning
- Play to student's strengths

Louise

Philosophy  
**DCM**

- Testing culture in full swing
- Teachers looking to find a balance between testing and

- Eclectic philosophy
- "I'm a pragmatist. I'm not really all one way, I believe in a little bit of everything."

Jayda

	meeting needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teaching ideologies are swinging into the middle where we are trying to meet the needs of kids realistically based on what they are expected to do and the standardized testing”</li> </ul>	
Pedagogy <b>DCM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Admin dictates how teachers teach</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“In some schools, teachers aren’t free to enact their own pedagogy or they are too new to back it up”</li> </ul>	Kate
Hidden Learning <b>DCM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Play is not easily documented</li> <li>Make observations</li> <li>Takes time and expertise and knowledge of child</li> <li>More concerned with how ‘we’ look to admin</li> <li>Need to prove learning is occurring</li> <li>Lose perspective</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We can get up on how do we look? As opposed to some of the hidden learning that we might not be able to document but is happening through play and the imagination.</li> </ul>	Louise <b>DILEMMA</b>
Structure for Educators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased structure for teachers</li> <li>More dramatic struggle to complete everything</li> <li>Increased stress to fit everything in</li> <li>Less time for enjoyment of learning</li> </ul>	There wasn’t this dramatic ‘run to the finish line’ when I first started (teaching) and ‘how are we going to finish? That has changed dramatically!	Jocelyn
Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create a culture of learning</li> </ul>	Creating that culture through behavior management, organization, expectations, environment of community	Jayda
Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Certain things need to be structured</li> <li>Teachers should provide examples</li> </ul>	You need the scaffolding	Jayda

Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Role model</li> <li>• Repetition</li> <li>• Curriculum focus not developmental focus</li> </ul>	They are 5 years old! Kindergarten is run like they are in 3 <sup>rd</sup> grade!	Jayda
Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creativity</li> </ul>	Teachers are really creative people with a lot of neat ideas and they want to do cool stuff!	Jocelyn
Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No experiences for background knowledge</li> <li>• No class trips</li> <li>• Parents less involved</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	How are you supposed to teach based on the curriculum they give you when it is “Hodge podge” because it’s so inconsistent?	Jayda
Curriculum = “Hodge podge”			DILEMMA
Inconsistent		Now it all has to be done yesterday! Everyone is in panic mode!	
Time Constraints			
Play Learning Centers)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Centers provide an opportunity to incorporate some elements of play into the curriculum</li> <li>• Provides something for students to look forward to</li> <li>• Offers small group work</li> <li>• Time for Mini lessons is done during Centers</li> <li>• Math manipulatives are no longer considered ‘toys’ they are ‘learning tools’</li> </ul>	There really isn’t a lot of time for that. I don’t want to say ‘play’ but getting familiar with (equipment)	Carolyn
Play (Learning Centers)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structured as games</li> <li>• Meeting Common Core Standards</li> <li>• Lots of educational value</li> <li>• Games to address learning</li> </ul>	Something that I was trying to make a little more fun.  I think some of those things would seem like fun, they wouldn’t see it as educational	Jocelyn
Play (Learning Centers)	Legitimate way to incorporate many aspects of philosophy without	I would only do it for a half hour. I felt that there were too many other things to do.	Jocelyn

	causing tension/conflict with admin		
Play (Learning Centers)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offers more freedom and more movement</li> <li>• Become more academic in nature</li> <li>• Centers still require justification to admin for content</li> </ul>	<p>I try to do more (blocks, etc.), but it worries me because I think if an administrator comes in they'll say, "Well, why are they doing that?"</p> <p>Students still need to have certain things that are developmentally appropriate for them</p>	Hannah DILEMMA
Play (Learning Centers) Double edge sword	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Used to incorporate fun, through an educational game</li> <li>• Used to develop fine motor skills</li> </ul>	<p>Centers allow the teacher to complete individual assessment like guided reading and leveling.</p> <p>They are playing and learning</p>	Jayne
Practices (Learning centers)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrate more hands-on learning for math</li> <li>• Small group work for math to use manipulatives</li> <li>• Math is taught like centers - interactive</li> </ul>	<p>We had a professional development meeting to integrate more opportunity for hands on learning</p>	Kate
Scripted Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Removed any chance for the teachable moment</li> </ul>	<p>The scripted programs make us like robots because it's faster, we get through more materials, but with less meaning</p>	Louise
Traditional/developmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developmental areas not addressed</li> <li>• Time used for test-focused area</li> <li>• Requires teaching too but not accounted for in Common Core (NCLB)</li> <li>• Less time for non-tested areas (Science/SS)</li> </ul>	<p>Using traditional play areas requires teaching too. I would like to incorporate it but it takes time away from test-focused areas.</p>	Kate DILEMMA
Balance Time allotted for non-curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time for structure/routine versus time for fun/ to relax</li> </ul>	<p>I think students need a breather.</p> <p>I always out took them out</p>	Jocelyn

## DCM

for extra recess...and why never allow that? Why not have them happy when we could do that for 10 minutes and then be more focused?

Balance  
Time allotted  
for non-  
curriculum

- No time to play
- 20 min recess
- Decreased attention
- Difficult to sit still
- Zoning out

No time to play time, which is very upsetting. And only one 20-minute recess. I am a big proponent of a second recess. Kids need something. We would accomplish just as much if the kids had it because they would be fresh. They can only sit for so long. They are not even listening anymore.

Stella

## **Appendix J**

### **Practitioner Dilemma Identification by Themes**

#### **Practitioner Dilemmas by Dilemma Themes**

##### **PEDAGOGICAL:**

1. Assembly line mentality – admin ideals contradict practitioner philosophy
2. Make things the same – practitioners expected to change teaching methods/curriculum to correlate with other practitioners in same grade level for appearance sake
3. Forced to fail – practitioners feel benchmarking forces them to focus on quantity of work not quality and some students may fail without more prep time
4. Teachable moments decline – practitioner must decide if there is time for these or push through to cover expected work
5. Afraid to get caught – hesitant to allow manipulatives/play versus academic work in case admin walk in
6. How are you measuring that? – philosophy not enacted if measuring tool not adequate
7. Sneak in - practitioner's philosophy and desire to include DAP clashes with admin need for worksheets versus development of fine motor skill development
8. Inconsistent curriculum – practitioners incorporate their own curriculum to augment what they perceive as inadequate curriculum
9. Developmental versus Academic – finding the balance between what the practitioners are required to teach and what the students need to learn (including DAP skills)
10. Increase in direct instruction and seat-work versus hands on, concrete exploratory learning
11. Pedagogy not a choice for practitioners – dictated by district (employer)
12. 'Trickled down' - assessment is not developmentally appropriate but it is trickled down from admin
13. Cookie cutter – the pressure to 'not to go off the beaten track' for lack of documentation
14. Appropriate philosophy versus required practices – no imaginative play or concrete experiences – practitioners struggle with this
15. Appropriate skill development – time for fine motor development versus worksheets
16. Artifact collection – direct instruction provides opportunities to collect artifacts versus skill development and practice
17. ZPD – extensive repertoire of teaching skills is being constrained
18. Out of necessity practitioners are pragmatic – adj; dealing with things sensibly and realistically in a way that is based on practical rather than theoretical consideration

##### **POLITICAL:**

1. Assembly line mentality – admin ideals contradict practitioner philosophy

2. Optional? – practitioners don't know if optional means optional so feel compelled to incorporate everything
3. Forced to fail – practitioners feel benchmarking forces them to focus on quantity of work not quality and some students may fail without more prep time
4. Afraid to get caught – hesitant to allow manipulatives/play versus academic work in case admin walk in
5. How are you measuring that? – philosophy not enacted if measuring tool not adequate
6. Choose not to share – feedback determines how much practitioner shares with admin
7. Very controlled – practitioner's philosophy clashes with admin need to have students sitting and controlled
8. Sneak in - practitioner's philosophy and desire to include DAP clashes with admin need for worksheets versus development of fine motor skill development
9. Organized documentation – more control, more documenting versus a child's need for play
10. Pedagogy not a choice for practitioners – dictated by district (employer)
11. No job security – job on the line if students don't perform well on the tests (including special needs students and students with behavioral issues)
12. Trickle down? - assessment is not developmentally appropriate but it is trickled down from admin
13. Variations in expectations - schools/school districts have inconsistent expectations. Tax variations between districts and states affect this
14. Increased expectations on students and teachers with decreased funding
15. **DOCUMENTATION DOESN'T EQUAL EFFECTIVE TEACHING** – takes time away from teaching which is when the learning occurs
16. **Using traditional play based instruction takes time away from test-focused areas**

### **CULTURAL:**

1. Assembly line mentality – admin ideals contradict practitioner philosophy
2. Optional? – Practitioners don't know if optional means optional so feel compelled to incorporate everything
3. Will I ever go home? – Practitioners feel torn between completing extra work at school and having a personal/family life
4. Burn out – practitioners forced to take work home = no down time = burn out
5. Afraid to get caught – hesitant to allow manipulatives/play versus academic work in case admin walk in
6. Very controlled – practitioner's philosophy clashes with admin need to have students sitting and controlled
7. Choose not to share – feedback determines how much practitioner shares with admin
8. Sneak in - practitioner's philosophy and desire to include DAP clashes with admin need for worksheets versus development of fine motor skill development
9. Organized documentation – more control, more documenting versus a child's need for play
10. Appropriate philosophy versus required practices – no imaginative play or concrete experiences – practitioners struggle with this

### **CONCEPTUAL:**

1. Assembly line mentality – admin ideals contradict practitioner philosophy
2. Developmental versus Academic – finding the balance between what the practitioners are required to teach and what the students need to learn (including DAP skills)
3. Appropriate philosophy versus required practices – no imaginative play or concrete experiences – practitioners struggle with this
4. Hidden learning – **play is not documented therefore not valued by those needing to measure learning**



**Appendix K**  
**Representative Questions Drawn from Dilemmas Using Windschitl's (2002) Framework**

**Representative Questions Drawn from Dilemmas**

- Conceptual dilemmas How can practitioners find time to utilize more developmentally appropriate pedagogy when administrators wholly subscribe to academic practices for necessary documentation?
  - Developmental Versus Academic Dilemma
  
- Pedagogical dilemmas How can practitioners balance direct instruction with concrete DAP experiences and constructivist approaches and still meet AYP?
  - The Cookie Cutter Dilemma
  - The Fear Dilemma
  
- Cultural dilemmas How much explicit teaching is appropriate if practitioners value student-centered learning but still have a requirement to complete all system prescribed learning objectives?
  - Time Constraint Dilemma
  
- Political dilemmas How do practitioners promote and defend the use of appropriate pedagogy within administrative directives for documentation and controlled seatwork?
  - The Controlled Classroom Dilemma

- Documentation/ Measurement Dilemma
- Inconsistent Expectations Dilemma
- Burn Out/Stress Dilemma

## **Appendix L**

### **Title 1**

#### **SEC. 1001. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

The purpose of this title is to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging State academic achievement standards and state academic assessments. This purpose can be accomplished by —

- (1) Ensuring that high-quality academic assessments, accountability systems, teacher preparation and training, curriculum, and instructional materials are aligned with challenging State academic standards so that students, teachers, parents, and administrators can measure progress against common expectations for student academic achievement;
- (2) Meeting the educational needs of low-achieving children in our Nation's highest-poverty schools, limited English proficient children, migratory children, children with disabilities, Indian children, neglected or delinquent children, and young children in need of reading assistance;
- (3) Closing the achievement gap between high- and low-performing children, especially the achievement gaps between minority and nonminority students, and between disadvantaged children and their more advantaged peers;
- (4) Holding schools, local educational agencies, and States accountable for improving the academic achievement of all students, and identifying and turning around low-performing schools that have failed to provide a high-quality education to their students, while providing alternatives to students in such schools to enable the students to receive a high-quality education;
- (5) Distributing and targeting resources sufficiently to make a difference to local educational agencies and schools where needs are greatest;
- (6) Improving and strengthening accountability, teaching, and learning by using State assessment systems designed to ensure that students are meeting challenging State academic achievement and content standards and increasing achievement overall, but especially for the disadvantaged;
- (7) Providing greater decision-making authority and flexibility to schools and teachers in exchange for greater responsibility for student performance;
- (8) Providing children an enriched and accelerated educational program, including the use of school wide programs or additional services that increase the amount and quality of instructional time;
- (9) Promoting school wide reform and ensuring the access of children to effective, scientifically based instructional strategies and challenging academic content;
- (10) Significantly elevating the quality of instruction by providing staff in participating schools with substantial opportunities for professional development;
- (11) Coordinating services under all parts of this title with each other, with other educational services, and, to the extent feasible, with other agencies providing services to youth, children, and families; and
- (12) Affording parents substantial and meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children.

## **Appendix M**

### **Pennsylvania Department of Education (2015) Every Student Succeeds Act**

#### **Background**

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was signed by President Obama on December 10, 2015 to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). This was developed and passed with strong, bipartisan agreement, and replaces *NCLB*, providing significant flexibility to federal education policy by moving authority back to the states and communities.

#### **Stakeholder Engagement and ESSA State Plan**

ESSA requires states to develop and submit a State Plan to the US Department of Education. Pennsylvania's State Plan will be grounded in the daily needs of educators, students, and communities, and will be designed via a stakeholder engagement process that includes participation from diverse groups of leaders and practitioners. Stakeholder sessions and work group meetings are also being designed to explore four key areas of the new federal law:

**1. Assessment:** State assessments serve as a measure of whether or not students are on course to meet Pennsylvania Academic Standards. While the current assessment system is time and resource intensive, enacted relatively early in the school year, and delivers outcomes to a timeline not optimal for informing instructional decision making, the state will explore options for reducing the amount of time given to testing, decreasing turnaround time, and ensuring assessments can be administered later in the school year, while implementing policies and practices that support fair and valid testing regimes.

**2. Accountability:** Accountability systems should ensure that every school, teacher, and parent has the ability to envision and reach the goals for a given school year. The goal of ESSA is to challenge states to consider comprehensive and holistic measures of school and student success within a statewide accountability system, inclusive of non-academic measures of school quality. Exploration of opportunities to develop valid measures of student growth and learning will be encouraged as well as indicators that control for mitigating out of school factors, which include poverty.

**3. Educator Certification:** ESSA eliminates the "highly qualified teacher" requirements of NCLB, and invites opportunities to identify strategies for recruiting and retaining diverse, talented teachers. The right to exercise autonomy and flexibility to place teachers in roles that allow for customization and personalization of programs in order to meet the diverse needs of students is recognized and encouraged. Certification changes now permit attention be given to staffing of special education teachers and content certification positions, and providing flexibility for teachers teaching dual enrollment courses.

**4. Educator Evaluation:** The requirements for equitable distribution of effective teachers and paraprofessionals remain intact, however, ESSA changes the federal initiatives that bind teacher evaluation to student assessment results. Exploration of the possibilities to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of Pennsylvania's current educator evaluation system will occur while addressing the complexities of teaching and learning yet still maintaining educator accountability for student success.

#### **ESSA Transition and Implementation**

ESSA's new framework largely goes into effect in the 2017-2018 school year, with 2016-2017 serving as a transition. Pennsylvania's existing state plan remains effective until August 1, 2016.

Pennsylvania Department of Education (2015). Retrieved June 14, 2016 from <http://www.education.pa.gov/Pages/Every-Student-Succeeds-Act.aspx#.V2D32463tQo>

## **Appendix N**

### **Variations to NCLB found in Every Student Succeed Act**

#### **How The Every Student Succeeds Act Reduces High Stakes Testing**

The new law will still require annual testing to occur in grades 3-8 plus once in high school, it decouples high stakes decisions from these assessments:

Eliminates Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) the test-based standard NCLB required to measure student proficiency

Provides funding for states to audit and streamline their assessment systems and eliminate duplicative assessments while improving the use of assessments

Permits school districts to apply to use another nationally recognized assessment for high school rather than the state standardized tests

Creates a pilot program for state designed assessments that permit local district assessment driven by teaching and learning and not accountability alone

Permits states to set a cap limiting the amount of time students spend taking tests

Maintains parents and guardians right to opt out of statewide academic assessments where policies allow them to do so

<http://neatoday.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Every-Student-Succeeds-Act-and-Testing.png>