# INNOVATIVE PRACTICES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

# CLASSROOMS:

# WHAT MAKES A TEACHER AN EARLY ADOPTER?

A Dissertation

by

ELLEN MARSHALL

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2004

Major Subject:  Educational Human Resource Development

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# ABSTRACT

Innovative Practices in Early Childhood Classrooms:

What Makes a Teacher an Early Adopter?  (May 2004)

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This basic qualitative research study focused on the internal constructions of ten early childhood education teachers who take new information acquired from workshops, coursework, or other educational venues and quickly incorporate it into their teaching. The participants were all women who work in a variety of classroom settings with two-through-six-year-olds in San Antonio, Texas. They were identified as teachers who are in the forefront in adopting new ideas in comparison to other early childhood teachers (Rogers, 2003).  A wide range of experience and education levels were represented. Using the interpretive paradigm as well as the ideological framework of constructivism, a grounded theory was established in response to the research question. Of special interest were factors that can be addressed in pre-service and in-service instructional opportunities for early childhood students and professionals.  There were three major findings.  First, the participants expressed core moral values in relation to their jobs as early childhood teachers:  they look upon their work as a moral endeavor; they have a spiritual connection to their work; and they care deeply about others. Second, they shared the character traits of a positive attitude, persistence, and flexibility.  Third, they

held two learning dispositions in common: they perceive and practice learning as a continual, on-going process; and they are highly reflective. Viewed together, these three findings form a continuous internal loop that impacts the external cycle of gaining new information and adopting it into classroom practice.

The findings in this study parallel previous teacher knowledge research done with K-12 grade teachers in the United States and in other countries. It supports models of change that consider one's frame of reference in terms of individual belief systems and how this impacts the change process. The implication is that focusing on technical knowledge is not enough. Early childhood teacher educators must consistently employ specific strategies with their students that help illuminate and strengthen the tacit traits identified in this study.

# DEDICATION

It is with great pride that I dedicate the completion of this dissertation to the following people. First, I dedicate it to my parents, Gladys Fawcett Marshall and John Marshall. They are no longer in this world, but I would not have gone this far were it not for the values they instilled in me during my own early childhood years. Second, I dedicate it to John Onderdonk, my husband. He helped and supported me throughout this seven-year journey. Finally, I dedicate it to Dr. Ken Reavis. He was my number one mentor and continually pushed me to excel in my profession. He too is gone, but will never be forgotten.

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This journey would not have been as it was without the following people who have been important milestones along the way.  First of all, I thank the ten women who together comprised the heart of this research.  They provided invaluable information that has already helped me, and hopefully others, to be more effective teacher educators.  I thank Cathy Castillo who was my partner throughout every class and trip to College Station.  It was helpful to have my friend and colleague with me all the way to the finish line.  I am also fortunate to work with innovative, supportive, and caring faculty and staff in the Child Development Department at San Antonio College.  They are truly dedicated to improving the lives of young children. I also thank my committee members: Dr. Carolyn Clark, Dr. Kim Dooley, and Dr. Don Seaman for supporting me throughout this journey.  I thank Dr. Paulette Beatty who prior to her retirement served on my committee.  And thank you to Dr. Kris Sloan who agreed to join my committee towards the end of the process.  Most of all, I am forever grateful to all the students with whom I have crossed paths during my 20-year tenure at San Antonio College.  Their diversity, honesty, and perseverance against obstacles that I can only imagine have taught me more than they will ever, ever know.

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# CHAPTER I

# INTRODUCTION

The current necessity, importance and benefits of quality early childhood experiences are undeniable. During the post World War II baby boom years, the call for childcare and education outside the home grew at an exponential rate. By the 1960's, society looked to education in general and to early childhood care in particular as a way to address a number of societal ills. Since the days of President Johnson's "Great Society" and the founding of Head Start, childcare has been seen as a way to create opportunity and alleviate inequity (Fuller & Strath, 2001). Quality early childhood programs, it was believed, could help otherwise marginalized people reach their potential. Caldwell (1991) confirmed that more intellectual development occurs in the first four years of life than at any other time and that young children learn significantly more than we originally thought if quality experiences are provided. She cautioned that experiences for young children cannot be left to chance because of the importance of their interactions within their environment. Finally, she discussed how quality environments are sorely needed in the early years to achieve advances in development.

Consequently, the number of early childhood programs increased significantly over the ensuing decades (Rust, 1993). Ever since that time there has been a growing

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This dissertation follows the style and format of *Early Childhood Research Quarterly.*

interest in the quality of services and in the professional practices of early childhood teachers (Cost, Quality & Child Outcomes Study Team, 1995; Early & Winton, 2001; McCain & Mustard, 1999; Moss & Penn, 1996; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1998; Sarocho & Spodek, 1993).

Powerful demographic changes in both workforce composition and family structure dictated the need for quality early childhood programs with quality personnel (Early & Winton, 2001). In his analysis of the 1990 census data for the United States, Hodgkinson (1991) showed that only 6% of households fit the traditional "Norman Rockwell" family structure: a working father, a stay-at-home mother, and two school-aged children. Indeed, at that time, 15 million children were being reared by single mothers, and about one-fourth of all preschool children lived in poverty. These statistics support the need for quality early childhood experiences. So critical is the need that one of the national education goals set by the first Bush administration was that by the year 2000 all children would enter school "ready to learn." A major objective outlined for this goal was that all disadvantaged children should have access to developmentally appropriate, high quality preschool programs. Unfortunately, the number of available quality programs in no way kept pace with this need and interest (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2000).

Early childhood research continues to produce numerous studies that replicate findings readily apparent in the late 1960's. The estimated economic benefits of quality preschool education are enormous compared to the costs of these programs (Barnett, 1998). Moreover, when viewed over time, subsidized high-quality preschool programs

return seven times the investment they originally cost taxpayers (Epstein, 1999). The long-term effectiveness of preschool programs for disadvantaged children has been demonstrated repeatedly in longitudinal studies such as the Carolina Abecedarian Project and the Perry Preschool Project (Currie, 2001).

Bowman, Donovan, and Burns (2000) studied several decades of research from social science, behavioral science, and biology that can aid practitioners in designing, implementing, evaluating and refining quality programs for young children.  They were part of a larger independent Committee on Early Childhood Pedagogy that between 1997 and 2000 reviewed and synthesized existing research related to preschoolers.  They were asked to distill the major findings that could affect policy in regard to early childhood programs.  They summarized that young children construct knowledge actively by linking new experiences to previous understandings; young children must have a full range of physical, cognitive, and social-emotional experiences to prepare them for future school learning; neither loving, nurturing relationships nor good teaching alone produces optimal results for a child's development—both must occur simultaneously; the quality of environmental stimulation effects physiological changes in the brain; and universally, young children are capable of more complex thinking than was formerly realized— learning experiences must challenge children but also be within their reach.  This final item demands adult sensitivity to a child's individual as well as developmental characteristics.

In 1998 the Ontario provincial government in Canada established the Early Years Study in order to gather well-documented recommendations regarding the best ways to

prepare all of their young children for school, careers, and social success (McCain & Mustard, 1999). The study synthesized existing research from neuroscience as it relates to early development. They came to five conclusions. First, stimulating and positive interactions with adults and other children are much more important for brain development than was previously believed. Second, the years from conception to age six have more influence on future learning, behavior, and health than any other period of life. Third, it is difficult to overcome a deficient early start. Fourth, to stimulate brain development, learning in the early years should involve developmentally appropriate interactions with caregivers and include play-based, problem-solving activities. And fifth, quality early childhood programs benefit *all* children.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) includes 30 member countries that share beliefs in democratic governments and market-based economies (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2001). In 1998 the OECD Education Committee began a review of early childhood education and care policies. The study was initiated because of increased recognition that quality early childhood experiences can strengthen the foundations for learning, educational, and social needs of children and families. Twelve countries participated in the study: the United States, Australia, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. The OECD report recognized that quality early childhood experiences are an investment in future adults. It also emphasized the importance of investment in staff development programs that improve the quality of teaching that young children receive (OECD, 2001).

The body of early childhood scientific inquiry and research provides a framework for the principles that should be taught in teacher training programs and presented in staff development sessions. It also reinforces the fact that we desperately need highly trained early childhood teachers to work with our youngest citizens. Participants in these training programs include pre-service teachers enrolled in college certificate and degree programs, childcare providers, Head Start teachers, public school teachers and other professionals who work on behalf of young children and their families. Along with the abundance of scientific inquiry in the field, the absolutism of earlier studies is being replaced by relativism (Alloway, 1997). The consensus of modern researchers is that there are a variety of ways to analyze research based information. People are scrutinizing previously held research truths. Researchers in the field of early childhood realize that they must continue to challenge ideas and skills practiced by early childhood teachers. Many of these result from inadequate training, poor economic resources, and resistance to change. It is now even more critical that early childhood teachers attend to innovations in the field and incorporate them into their classrooms as quickly as possible.

The realities of all education are complex. It generally takes a long time for research-based innovations to be adopted into practice (Bryant, 1995; Pearson & Gall, 1999). In 1953 Paul Mort and researchers at Columbia University Teachers College estimated the time lag between the development of educational innovations and their adoption into practice at 25 years (Rogers, 2003). Economic, technological, and social change in our country means that schools are under great pressure to adapt to new

realities (Darling-Hammond, 1996). Prospective educators must not only demonstrate skill competencies, but they must also accept and use innovative teaching strategies to help engage children in a love of learning (Carter, 2002).

The number of children in early childhood programs continues to increase. Currently, it is estimated that 65% of women with children under the age of five work and consequently require out-of-home care and education for their children (Gallagher, Clayton, & Heinemeier, 2001). In 1995, approximately one in three, or about 6.4 million children under age five, was in preschool programs (Fuller & Strath, 2001). Presently, 39 states and the District of Columbia provide state-financed programs for at least some of their three to five year olds. In 2001, Head Start enrolled over 900,000 three to five-year olds. Not only is the number of children requiring care and education increasing, but also the number of young children for whom English is a second language is rising (Early & Winton, 2001). This places additional burdens on knowledge and alternate practices for early childhood teachers to ensure quality for all children.

A 1995 comprehensive cross-disciplinary report on childcare provision in the United States revealed the disturbing fact that most childcare centers in the U.S. range from poor to mediocre in quality (Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes Study Team, 1995). Only one in seven childcare centers had a curriculum that promoted healthy development in young children. More alarming is the finding that fully one in eight centers provided care that actually jeopardized health and safety of children. The care provided in seven out of ten centers is considered so mediocre as to compromise how ready to learn these children will be as they enter the public schools. One of the major

recommendations of the Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes Study Team's report was to increase the investment in the professional development and salaries for the teachers. In a review of numerous research studies, Ellis (1998) found that specialized training for teachers in child development theory and practice positively correlated with the quality of early childhood classroom practices.   Research has clearly indicated a positive correlation between the educational level of caregivers and the quality of childcare (Katz, 2001).

Many studies show that early education demands different approaches and skills than later education (Blenkin & Kelly, 1997; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Goffin, 1989; Moss & Penn, 1996).  Early childhood education requires both different kinds of planning and evaluative criteria than later education.  It is not simply the provision of early childhood education that produces benefits; the education and care must be of high quality (Blenkin & Kelly, 1997).  Berk (1985) suggested that the effectiveness of practical training for early childhood caregivers and teachers is dependent on the extent of the teachers' knowledge, their internalization of child-centered beliefs, and the scope of their intellectual sophistication.

Katz and Raths (1985) identified dispositions that are desirable for early childhood teachers. These dispositions are observable through teacher actions. Dispositions they identified include the ability to suspend judgment of child behavior, the ability to seek help when confronted with problems in the classroom, and the ability to look for patterns in child behaviors.  Another key disposition identified was that of innovator.  Innovators experiment with alternative forms of pedagogy and have the

ability to evaluate and modify changes made in their own teaching.  The research study presented here looked at those elements that characterize the disposition of early childhood teachers who are innovators.

## Statement of problem

Obviously, the primary beneficiary of the improved education and training of direct practitioners is the child.  Increasingly, more and more children no longer grow up in stable, nurturing environments.  In the past decade, studies have shown that quality education and care during the early years not only build a strong foundation for school and improve success, but also help prevent drug abuse, teen pregnancy, and teenage crime and violence (Barnett, 1996; Jacobson, 2001; Schweinhart, 1994).  Therefore, it is crucial that new information affecting early childhood practices be integrated into teaching activities as rapidly as possible. However, it is not known how or why a teacher adopts new practices in to the early childhood classroom.

Quality early childhood programs depend on the interplay of staff/child ratio, staff education, and the prior experiences of administrators (Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes Study Team, 1995). Hargreaves and Fullan (1992) argued that teachers are essential as change agents in schools.  Fullan (2001) said that, "Educational change depends on what teachers do and think—it's as simple and as complex as that" (p. 115).  Times of immense educational reform often create friction between administrative policies and the professional knowledge of teachers.  It is therefore particularly significant that we look more closely at the individual conceptual frameworks of those teachers who, despite these tensions, do make changes in their

classrooms. It is critical that teachers be asked what curricular change in the classroom means to them (Butt, Raymond, McCue, & Yamagishi 1992; Hall & Hord, 2001). According to Goldenberg and Gallimore (1991), very little is known about how new information makes its way into classrooms at the various educational levels. The increasingly larger number of students who are performing poorly or dropping out of school are evidence that positive change in education is sorely needed (Fullan, 2001).

The importance of educational requirements for all early childhood caregivers is gradually gaining recognition. This is evidenced by the current Head Start reauthorization proposal requesting that 75% of their teachers have at least an Associate's degree by 2005 and that all Head Start teachers meet that requirement by 2008 (National Head Start Association, 2003). The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) which went into effect in January, 2002, requires that teacher assistants and teachers in Title I schools be highly qualified (No Child Left Behind, 2002). In the public schools, many early childhood classrooms have teacher assistants. The NCLB requires that all teacher assistants in Title I schools have two years of college or an Associate's degree by 2005. Prior to the enactment of this legislation, the only requirement was a high school diploma or GED.

Professional development is an integral piece of quality early childhood education (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; The North Carolina Institute for Early Childhood Professional Development, 2003; North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 2003). Professional development opportunities are the source for new information. Current pre-service and in-service professional development opportunities

for early childhood teachers focus on what is known about young children. The formats for professional development are the same as they are for other grade-level teachers: college-credit courses, local and national conferences, professional organizational memberships, and mandatory and non-mandatory workshops. The information in the field of early childhood is ever-changing. This requires teachers to constantly re-evaluate the techniques they use in the classroom (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). Practitioners must keep up with this changing pace of research based knowledge, as in any profession. The professional development requirements for early childhood teachers working in child care centers are minimal in comparison to those for public school teachers. The techniques used by public school early childhood teachers are often based on out-dated research. It is essential that the quality of time that early childhood teachers spend in professional development settings be maximized. Professional development of early childhood teachers must improve in order to increase the likelihood that they will adopt and adapt new information to fit their particular classroom settings.

## The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to attempt to understand *why* some early childhood education teachers take new information acquired from workshops, coursework, or other educational venues and quickly incorporate it into their teaching.

## Significance of the Study

The need for quality early childhood experiences is clear. The economic benefits have been proven. The principles and practices for improvement are known. Yet the rate

of change in classroom practices is glacially slow.  Additionally, research studies in this

field are not typically used to affect public policy (Spodek & Saracho, 1998).  In looking

toward the future of early childhood research, Spodek and Saracho (1998) emphasized

the importance of studying the teacher as a necessary avenue to understanding the

improvement of early childhood education. Considerable research has been carried out

with teachers and teaching at the K-Grade 12 levels.  Early childhood teachers cannot be

understood in the same context as these teachers. Research specific to this population is

absolutely necessary in order to improve early childhood programs. Understanding how

early childhood teachers who are early adopters view themselves in relation to their

responses to new information is invaluable.  Such insight can shed light on ways to

appreciate and approach other early childhood teachers and students in teacher training

programs who may not fit the profile of early adopters of innovative practices.  The

attitudes and practices of early adopters of innovative information may indeed be

teachable to those who are not typically prone to update their practices.  This can

eventually lead to improved pre-service and staff development practices, identification

of early adopters, modifications in early childhood administrative practices, and

ultimately suggest avenues for further research.  The crucial beneficiaries of this

research are young children.  These earliest educational experiences establish the

foundation for future dispositions toward learning.

**Definition of Terms**

For the purpose of this study the following terms are used:

*Early adopter* is a person who is in the forefront in adopting new ideas in comparison to other early childhood teachers (Rogers, 2003). They are responsive to change in their classroom environment, with curriculum activities, or in interactions with others, basing the change on reasonably new information.

*Early childhood classroom* is defined as any classroom in a public school, private school, or childcare center serving children ages birth through age eight (Bredecamp & Copple, 1997). The broad age group of birth though eight years corresponds to the definitions adhered to by major early childhood professional organizations. These are specifically the National Association for the Education of Young Children and the Association for Childhood Education International. However, in this study I focused on teachers who work with children in the age two through six year old age groups. These are teachers who work with pre-kindergarten and kindergarten aged children. Teachers of birth to two year olds generally possess a different set of skills and interactive processes than do teachers of children aged two through six years (Bredecamp & Copple, 1997).

*Early childhood teacher* is defined in this study as a practitioner with a minimum of 30 college credit hours. If they did not yet have a degree, they must been actively working toward the completion of one. Further, they were currently employed in a position that requires them to work directly with young children in an early childhood classroom setting for a minimum of 20 hours per week.

*Innovative practices* are defined as information, ideas, or concepts that are relatively new to the individual early childhood teacher (Rogers, 2003).

## Assumptions

Clearly, my approach to this study was influenced by my experiences as an early childhood educator. I define myself as an early adopter in terms of applying innovative practices to the adult training I conduct. I strongly believe that these personal experiences with early childhood and innovative teaching assisted me in understanding the experiences articulated by the participants in this study. I also assumed that the teachers in the study were capable of articulating their experiences as early adopters in early childhood classrooms and that they responded objectively and accurately.

## CHAPTER II

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In order to diffuse innovative information into the field as quickly as possible, we need direct practitioners who are early adopters (Rogers, 2003). Fullan (1997) cautioned change agents not to expect all, or even most, people in a particular target group to change. He said that systemic change is so complex that we cannot expect to bring about major reform in any large social system. However, this does not mean that small steps cannot be taken or that the number of people who implement change cannot be increased. Fortunately, early adopters are generally well respected personally and professionally (Rogers, 2003). Early childhood teachers who are early adopters are not only quick to spread the word about new research-based practices, but also serve as role models for others within their social systems. This, then, can overcome the reluctance of more unwilling peers in adopting new ideas (Rogers, 2003).

Change is both inevitable and difficult for many teachers. Managing and affecting change is an important aspect of school improvement (Harris, Bennett, & Preedy, 1997). The process is complex and theorists have disagreed as to whether it is personal qualities or organizational elements that influence the process most (Kerstling, 1995). Planners of innovation and change have frequently ignored critical factors associated with the implementation process (Fullan, 1997). Daunting, time-consuming implementation processes are often glossed over or simply ignored.

Two major areas of the research literature are reviewed here. The c*hange* literature focuses on models for diffusing innovations into practice, and the process of

change as it specifically relates to education. Literature related to change within systems

as well as change within individuals is reviewed. The progression of the change

literature goes from the general to the more specific as follows:  first, change theory;

second, organizational models of change; third, teacher need for change; fourth,

educational change models; fifth, intentional conceptual change; and finally, early

childhood teachers and change.  The *teacher* literature is significant in terms of how it

affects the change process. Reviewed here are current pre-service and professional

development practices in early childhood and K-12 teacher training, as well as teacher

effectiveness traits for these same populations.  The K-12 literature is included because

there is a wealth of research information for that population of teachers and a dearth of

inquiry related to early childhood teachers.  The progression of this portion of the

literature search is as follows:  first, the qualities of effective teachers are reviewed;

second, teacher beliefs, behaviors, and images of teaching are addressed;  third, the

current state of teacher training programs is reviewed;  and finally, the critical role of

reflection and personal knowledge in teacher training is considered.

**Innovation and Change**

Types of Innovations and Change

Innovations come in different sizes (Hall & Hord, 2001).  There can be

innovations that are products, such as assessment techniques, curriculum ideas, and

computers in the classroom.  There are also innovations that are processes, such as

collaborative learning, constructivist teaching, and character education.

Cuban (1992) discussed two types of planned educational change. "First-order" changes are those that improve current practices. First-order change is designed to make what already exists more efficient without changing the organizational structure. Implementation of cooperative learning groups in classrooms is an example of this type of change. "Second-order" changes are somewhat more complicated. These are changes that are meant to modify how schools function. An example of this type of change is constructivist learning. In constructivist learning the teacher is asked to see the children as individuals who make meaning of new information by connecting it to prior experiences both in and outside of school. This is opposed to the more traditional view of learning where students are considered empty vessels that are filled with correct information. Cuban (1992) noted that when either of these types of change takes place, the majority of classroom teachers remain fairly stable in continuing to do what they have always done rather than institute changes.

<div align="center">Models of Change</div>

In reviewing research on innovations during the late 1960's and 70's, House (1979) concluded that three perspectives had dominated thoughts about innovation. These are the technological, the cultural, and the political. Blenkin, Edwards, and Kelly (1997) defined and discussed these three perspectives while adding three more:

- The *technological perspective* considers all direct practitioners as technicians who can rationally follow a specified set of procedures to implement and manage change. It derives from a positivist philosophy. Drawbacks of this perspective include the thinking that innovation developers are superior to the

implementers; the idea that interpretation of an innovation will be the same as envisioned in its development; the fact that characteristics of schools as systems are often ignored; and the simplistic idea that curriculum is something tangible and independent of the human interactions involved in implementation and practice. The authors pointed out that the technological perspective in implementing change has had limited success in relation to educational settings.

- The *cultural perspective* sees change as affected by the symbolic variables evident within a socio-cultural framework. Symbols, traditions, and ceremonies related to the social system where change is introduced are an integral part of this perspective (Bolman & Deal, 1997). Members of the shared culture (in the case of education, the school or classroom) are affected by the cultural values and practices in relation to change. One drawback to this perspective is that not everyone in a school necessarily shares the same expectations and values (Blenkin, Edwards, & Kelly, 1997). Even though teachers may share a common occupational culture, they do not necessarily share other characteristics and symbolic frames of reference. Also, not all cultural variables are equal in significance. Therefore, the culture of a change introduced into a system may be counter to an already existing cultural environment in the school. Attempts to alter structures within education without attending to the operative cultural variables are doomed (Molinaro & Drake, 1998). Blenkin, Edwards and Kelly (1997) reviewed literature that cites the example of

privatized practices rather than teacher collaboration as a strong cultural value

existing in many schools that could potentially affect change.

- The *political perspective* implies that individuals and sub-groups constantly vie,

  bargain, and negotiate for their own special interests.  The process of change

  becomes one of distribution of resources and may affect control of territory.

  The challenges that politics can cause for implementing change are numerous.

  According to Bolman and Deal (1997) one must identify the political powers,

  determine the formal and informal lines of communication, predict what people

  may do in sensitive situations and consider both internal and external

  mechanisms for taking action to implement change. It may be helpful to look at

  the perceptions of different parties and map out the true political landscape.

- Blenkin, Edwards, and Kelly (1997) delineated the *biographical perspective* of

  change as one that considers the individual lives and careers of the people who

  are responsible for implementing the change.  Bolman and Deal (1997) referred

  to this as the human resource frame of reference.  Peoples' attitudes, level of

  commitment, skills, and needs are considered and valued in addressing the

  change process in this perspective. The sense of self is vital to the teacher

  (Blenkin, Edwards, & Kelly, 1997).  Resistance to change can thus be seen as

  loss of psychological meaning if something connected to the innovation or

  change is in opposition to the individuals' belief system.  Individual teachers

  need to have some control over the direction and pace of change.  The authors

  summarized research that indicates that the teacher's life and work must all be

considered in understanding and promoting change.  The context in which the teacher exists must be considered and is much broader than just the classroom and school.

- The *structural perspective* assumes that schooling is a process that is part of a greater economic, social, and political structure where there are certain rules and policies that everyone generally follows.  Teachers are required to operate within the parameters of the dominant ideological structure.  These structures affect major educational constructs such as curriculum and assessment. Resistance to change may result from the authoritarian approach generally used in this perspective.

- The *sociohistorical perspective* is the final theoretical construct discussed by Blenkin, Edwards, and Kelly (1997).  They cite the work of Ivor Goodson (1992) who suggested that studies of teacher actions are common, but that we need to look at how teachers' lives relate to what they do in the classroom.  He stressed that more voice needs to be given to this often marginalized population of professionals.  This perspective suggests that we look at the teachers' life cycles and think about how teachers' lives are indicative of the historical period and societal values in which they live.  This perspective can provide insight into obstacles to change.  For example, national standards for curricula may result in the demise of a number of many credible action research innovations. This perspective can help to explain resistance to such national standards.

Oakes, Welner, Yonezawn, and Allen (1998) discussed the community's impact on the educational change process. They stressed that the context of the community in which the school is located often affects the "zone" or parameters of discussion that will be allowed in relation to specific changes and reforms. The school is limited and affected by outside political and ideological forces. This has been referred to as the "zone of tolerance." For example, if a school sees the importance of implementing AIDS awareness instruction, the community in which that school is situated may be so parochial that consideration of curriculum modification will be met with opposition. Oakes et al. broadened this idea of a zone of tolerance in saying that local community forces interact with regional, national and global levels of ideology to form a set of boundaries that can inhibit or encourage change. They called this the "mediation zone." This zone is further delineated by mediations among people and between people and these outside forces. For example, well-planned publicity may affect outside perceptions to a point of changing the zone boundaries. Each individual's own frame of reference also affects the perceived perimeters of a mediation zone. The researchers further emphasized that critical inquiry should be part of the change process when dealing with politically and ideologically sensitive issues. The social constructions of issues related to equity are forces within and outside of schools that must be looked at and talked about if changes are to occur that otherwise may be hampered by the existing mediation zone. Current research, new professional practices in education, and individual personal experiences all need to be part of discussions related to change.

Organizational Theory of Change and Education

Schools are organizations, and therefore it is reasonable that organizational theories of change are applied to the field of education (Rogers, 2003).  Michael Fullan has investigated numerous organizational change theories and models and looks at how they apply to the educational field.  Fullan has been involved in extensive school-related change projects around the world (Fullan, 1993, 1999, & 2003).  He cited two particularly helpful theories as they relate to change (Fullan, 1999).  One is the "complexity theory," also referred to in the literature as chaos theory.  The complexity theory emphasizes the idea that it is extremely difficult to find the link between cause and effect. Change is a very nonlinear process with many contradictions and paradoxes along its path.  Creative solutions for learning and adapting can flourish in environments that are able to recognize these complexities and uncertainties.  The second theory that Fullan cited (1999) is the "evolutionary theory." This theory looks at how humans change and adapt over time in relation to interaction and cooperative behavior.  Interactive, collaborative cultures have an advantage when it comes to adapting to change.  Social cohesion facilitates adaptation to change. Fullan (1999) also discussed the concept of moral purpose and how it is needed to unite us in using these theories in order to help us improve public education.  Included in the ideals of moral purpose and improving the lives of all citizens is the development of social and intellectual capital within the school context.  Social capital means developing traits such as compassion, honesty, fairness, trust, and civility.  Intellectual capital means fostering problem-solving skills in a world that is more and more technological.

Schools must also use politics for the positive purpose of getting things done so that they can be more effective in developing intellectual and social capital.  These notions can be helpful in creating a pathway within an organization that encourages innovation.

Fullan (1999) outlined eight lessons that should constantly be addressed in combination within complex organizations, such as schools, if change and innovation are to occur.  These include first, that the idea that moral purpose is complex and problematic. Second, theories of change and theories of education need each other. Third, conflict and diversity are our friends. Fourth, we need to understand the meaning of operating on the edge of chaos.  Fifth, emotional intelligence (necessary for change) is anxiety provoking and anxiety containing. Sixth, collaborative cultures are anxiety provoking and anxiety containing. Next, we need to attack incoherence and realize that connectedness and knowledge creation are critical.  Finally, there is no single solution. It is necessary to craft your own theories and actions by being a critical consumer.

Fullan (1999) cited research supporting the idea that creativity and anxiety go together hand in hand.  That is, when people try creative activities or attempt to find creative solutions to challenges, anxiety is produced.  Organizational environments that are emotionally supportive of their workers and members provide environments more conducive to dealing with anxiety and therefore promote creativity.  Highly pressure-producing environments inhibit creativity.  Fullan (1999) pointed out that schools often fall into the inhibiting type of environments that reduce creativity.  Such conditions are not conducive to innovative changes. Staessens (1993) looked at the culture of nine elementary schools targeted to implement systemic innovations.  She found that the

culture of the school (defined here as the socially constructed climate of the school) has great impact on the success of innovation implementation. Schools with more family oriented cultures and schools with professional cultures that operate with the attitude that things can always be improved are more successful in implementing innovations.

Fullan (1999) summarized his ideas and research about change in schools as requiring three major elements. He argued that schools and systems, all the way from the classroom to the State House, must consider these three critical forces. The first is the power of the intellect in knowledge creation through the use of new ideas and information. The second is the political force. Schools must establish positive alliances with diverse entities both in and out of the school. Groups must work through their differences and work together. The final force is the spiritual dimension. Education must be seen as having a moral purpose in improving the lives of others. All three of these elements must work together in order for change to take place. Fullan (1999) used the metaphor of fusion to help illustrate his point. When the fusion of elements occurs, it produces five times the energy in a system. The fusion of these three forces can provide the energy necessary to initiate and maintain change. Fullan (2001) viewed teaching both as highly intellectual and highly caring. He also said that the teaching profession requires a great deal of emotional intelligence.

<div align="center">Teacher Need for Change</div>

Briscoe (1991) noted that direct practitioners want to make changes in their classrooms as evidenced by the large number of teachers who voluntarily attend workshops and summer enrichment programs. Unfortunately, documentation of

sustained changes made as a result of attendance at such activities has not emerged in the research.  Briscoe cautioned that education is not a profession that ordinarily encourages innovation at the level of the classroom practitioner.

In a five-year study, Huberman (1993) and his colleagues studied the lives of over 160 Swiss secondary teachers. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used in this research.  The teachers they interviewed had anywhere from five to 39 years of experience in the classroom. Their goals included investigating the answers to questions such as: Are there stages in the teaching process?  How does a teacher perceive themself during different periods of their career?  Do teachers perceive themselves as becoming more confident over time?  Does contentment with one's career change over time? What part of a teacher's private life is carried over into the classroom?   Regarding their pedagogical practices, 40% of the teachers interviewed were afraid of too much routine and of going stale.  They wanted to renew themselves through innovative practices in the classroom.  They expressed a special interest in experimenting with new methods at the classroom level as opposed to more collective, mandated systemic reforms. Women who were interviewed (43%) were more likely to hold this view than men who were interviewed (32%).  Twenty-five per cent of the teachers interviewed still felt that they were as enthusiastic about learning and trying new ideas as they were when they began their teaching careers.  One question asked of respondents related specifically to innovations.  They were asked to choose one of the following answers as it related to different points in their teaching careers:

(a)     "…the results obtained by good pedagogical innovations are well worth the effort and the complications that arise from their implementation;  or

(b)     …pedagogical innovations are inherently good, but they demand too much effort and too many complications.  They really are not worth the trouble" (p. 181).

The results indicated a change from answer (a) to answer (b) as time passed in their careers.  This means that they went from an optimistic view of innovation to a more fatalistic view the longer they were teachers.  The change is significant between the eight and 12 years of experience.  The majority of the teachers attribute external factors outside their control as major factors in this shift in their thinking.  Again, women are less liable to migrate toward the fatalistic end of the continuum than men.  It may be noteworthy that deeper analysis indicated differences between middle and high school teachers

<div align="center">Education Change Models</div>

Hall and Hord (2001) identified a number of change principles that have surfaced through long-term research. They cited 12 underlying principles to educational change with the initial six that follow.  The first is that change is a process, not an event. The second is that there are significant differences in what is entailed in development and implementation of an innovation. The third is that an organization does not change until the individuals within it change. The fourth (and previously stated on p.15 of this manuscript) is that innovations come in different sizes.  The fifth is interventions are the actions and events that are keys to the success of the change process.  The sixth,

although both top-down and bottom-up change can work, a horizontal perspective is best (pp. 4-12). The remaining six principles relate to characteristics of the school climate and leadership.

These twelve principles are the basis for Hall and Hord's (2001) Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM) of change. It emphasizes the importance of taking teacher concerns into consideration as plans for implementing innovations are made. In their writings Hall and Hord also raised an important question regarding educational change that at the present time has little or no research support. That question is, "does change come about simply as a result of increased experience with the innovation, or is it related to *affective* aspects of the person?" (Hall & Hord, 2001, p. 94).

Olson and Eaton (1987) discussed three conceptions of change in education. The first two are similar to those discussed under the earlier *Models of Change* section of this paper. The systems approach is based on the technical aspects of change. Teachers who implement innovations are considered secondary to the system designed to diffuse the innovation. The ecological approach investigates the social and technical aspects under which teachers work. The environmental factors unique to the classroom and the reality of dealing with large numbers of children are considered. The teacher is still seen as secondary in determining how best to implement the innovation in light of these factors. They also identified a third way to conceptualize educational change that they call the reflexive conception. In this model, teachers are primary in the implementation process. They are asked to reflect upon facets of an innovation that they can incorporate into their classroom, problem solve as to the best way to accommodate conflicting demands, and

resolve any resulting conflicts that may arise. It is recognized in this model that teachers' existing thinking is influenced by the innovative materials or methods they are asked to implement. They are encouraged to step back from their own practices and reflect upon what they normally do in conjunction with the voluntary implementation of an innovation. This type of process is necessary to promote debate in the school context where innovation is either mandated or implemented voluntarily. An innovation may include both the elements that fit into the existing classroom routine as well as novel elements. Drawing from work by the social psychologist Harré, Olson and Eaton (1987) divided teaching into two categories. The first is called instrumental teaching, and is directed at producing learning such as promoting problem solving, teaching spelling, improving writing skills, and so on. The second is expressive teaching, and is aimed at more abstract elements such as creating respect for the teacher, creating a positive learning environment and developing a positive disposition toward learning. The researchers contended that teachers assign meaning to change under the influence of both instrumental and expressive elements. Teachers operate under more than the traditionally measured category of instrumental behaviors. Awareness and reflection of both categories of constructs may help teachers evaluate and resolve the dilemmas that arise as a result of innovation.

Johnston (1990) developed a model of curricular change based on multiple interviews with six secondary teachers. She identified individual teacher images and looked at how these images affected their curricular changes. Her model depicts curriculum decision making as based primarily on personal practical knowledge. One's

personal practical knowledge affects the teacher's images of teaching, images of school, images of the role of the teacher in school, and images of a new subject that may be introduced. Personal practical knowledge is based on the past and present personal experiences of the teacher. The teacher's personal practical knowledge in turn affects one's willingness to perceive a need for curricular change and to take action. This model views curriculum change as highly personal and greatly affected by individual values and attitudes. The way that people view themselves as teachers is instrumental in their actions (or non-actions) toward change. Johnston indicated that the participants in this study exhibited profiles similar to other studies of innovative teachers. They were socially aware, willing to take risks, highly interpersonal, and had status among their peers.

<div align="center">Teacher Voice and Change</div>

Between 1973 and 1978 the Rand Corporation funded a national study to the U.S. Department of Education to look at four federally funded programs charged with implementing innovative practices in public schools (McLaughlin, 1990). The purpose of the Rand change agent study was to look at and understand federally developed change policies as they were implemented in 293 local projects. The study found that a large number of innovations were initially adopted, yet only a few were adopted successfully. Even fewer of the innovations endured over time. McLaughlin cited research supporting the neglect of cultural variables in place that affect teacher adoption of innovations. He indicated that teachers had very little voice in the adoption of the innovations in those 293 projects. Collegial interaction and teacher voice are integral to

the success of planned educational change. Teachers need to have a leadership role in change processes if innovations are going be successful (Meier, 1992).

Clandinin (1985) also contended that much curriculum innovation has failed because of neglect by innovation developers to adequately include teachers in the process. Teachers are expected to implement someone else's intentions without being included in the decision process. Clandinin (1985) also mentioned that the lack of respect for teaching as a profession has often contributed to this non-inclusion in decision processes. This may subsequently affect the time teachers are allowed for professional development and the processes involved in making educational change (Cook & Fine, 1997). The mainstream population often has limited views of education and considers teaching as entailing only the time spent with students. Therefore, the time for professional development and working through curricular change is often neglected. Cook and Fine contended that professional development cannot be considered something that happens on particular days of the year. Professional development is an ongoing part of the teaching process. The National Education Association recommends that 50 percent of teacher's time be allocated to professional development activities (Cook & Fine, 1997).

Eraut (1985) argued that higher education researchers need to take a more active role in including direct practitioners in the transmission of researched based knowledge. He further contended that we know very little about how and why professionals apply new information or to what extent on-the-job learning or off-the-job learning affects professional development. In discussing current views of effects on professional

knowledge and its use, Eraut gave the analogy of a fifteenth century, Eurocentric map of the world where people and lands outside of the Renaissance world view boundaries are hardly acknowledged. He said this is analogous to how educational researchers have ignored the practical knowledge of teachers; they fail to look beyond certain boundaries. He pointed out the importance of looking at knowledge that teachers develop as result of their experience as teachers. Post and Lubeck (2000) indicated that university-school partnerships aimed at working together for change are now fairly common in grades K-12 but must less common in early childhood programs. This type of collaboration allows researchers and teachers to learn from each other. Eraut also mentioned the importance of an encouraging work environment in affecting innovation and adoption of new knowledge. He categorized classroom teaching as a "hot" profession. This means that quick decisions are often made on the spot. It is action-based, often without adequate time for reflection. Intuitive thinking often overtakes rational reflection. The consideration of new ideas may be less feasible in such situations than in less action-based professions.

Florence (1998) referred to the work of bell hooks who postulated that many college level teacher training programs fail to encourage the type of interactions and thinking that stimulate the desire to change. Many professors continue to follow the traditional hierarchy of teacher as the voice of power and student as a receiver of information. Such interactions fail to model the ideal of learning communities where teachers and students have a common pursuit of knowledge and improvement. Florence referenced the term "engaged pedagogy" which has been used by hooks to describe

greater interactions of college teachers and their students. These thoughts parallel the earlier ideas espoused by Paulo Friere (1994). Teachers should not be authoritarians who deposit knowledge into the minds of students. The relationship must be more democratic and include meaningful dialogue and respect.

Calderhead (1987) discussed the importance of considering the contexts that have shaped teachers' practices. These contexts impact the response to the process of change. He surmised that once an innovative idea is introduced to teachers, they interpret and reinterpret it over time in conjunction with their own variety of knowledge bases, interests, and belief systems. Calderhead indicated that we must investigate the types of knowledge that teachers draw from in order to know best how to approach innovations in the classroom. He cited some of the same questions that often surfaced in Hall and Hord's research (2001). What are the benefits? What are the costs to me personally? What type of support will I receive? Volk and Stahlman (1994) looked at change from a developmental perspective and indicated that any training for teachers who are asked to implement innovations needs to first address the individual concerns of how the change will affect the person being asked to incorporate it. Opportunities for genuine discussion of feelings are an integral part of any change process. Those concerns must be addressed while at the same time providing information about the change itself. Only after these two steps are addressed is the teacher adequately prepared to proceed to managerial or child concerns related to the change. Guskey and Sparks (1991) discussed three major factors that affect whether or not teachers will use innovations presented to them in staff development opportunities. One is how clearly the

innovative practice is presented in the staff development session.  Another is how the innovation aligns with the teachers' current philosophy and practices.  A final factor is the cost in terms of the teachers' time and effort.

Briscoe (1991) also said that teachers should be included as part of research teams because their existing frameworks need to be an integral part of inquiry rather than ignored, as has traditionally been the case.  Goldenberg and Gallimore (1991) reinforced this idea by stating that scientific research knowledge often has no direct bearing on teacher practices because it generally disregards the local influences that impact teacher thinking and behavior.   Briscoe's research focused on a case study where the researcher and a secondary science teacher investigate where the teacher is in relation to where he wants to go.  Through one-to-one interviews, the researcher uncovers the metaphors that the teacher uses to define his roles as he conducts his classes. These metaphors are then compared to the metaphors of where the teacher says he wants to be.  The researcher helps the teacher see the inconsistencies, thereby providing him the means to change towards his desired images of teaching.  Briscoe also found that when teachers try new instructional methods their interpretations are affected by their own existing frameworks of knowledge regarding teaching and learning. If these frameworks are quite different from what an "expert" has in mind, the technique (for example, cooperative learning) may fail when actually put into practice by the teacher. Teachers may need assistance examining their own beliefs, thoughts, judgments, and practices through reflection in order for change to truly occur.  They need to consider their own mental images because they are used to construct their roles in the classroom.

A commitment to change and to the use of new techniques is not enough. This relates to Fullan's (1999) discussion of tacit knowledge versus explicit knowledge. Explicit knowledge is analogous to the tip of the iceberg. It consists of words and numbers and generally can be communicated as hard data. Tacit knowledge is composed of the skills and beliefs that exist below the surface. This may include an individual's morals, ideals, and emotions. The secret of success in schools in implementing change may be the ability to convert tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge on an ongoing basis.

## Intentional Conceptual Change

Many of the theories and models of change reviewed focus on variables outside the learner; that is, what teachers and staff developers can do to manipulate the learning environment to facilitate the learners' restructuring of existing knowledge. There is currently cognitive psychology research and theory that specifically looks at the learner's active and intentional role in the process of learning and change (Sinatra & Pintrich, 2003). The core of this concept is that the learner's intentions regarding the new knowledge introduced greatly affect whether or not change in thinking and behavior does indeed occur. In reviewing research related to conceptual change processes, the authors identified some common elements across models: there has to be a restructuring of one's current knowledge in order to accommodate new information; and the learner must weigh the similarities and differences between their existing knowledge and the new information. They noted that even when these processes occur it is not guaranteed that change will take place. In order for conceptual change to be intentional, the learner must have a specific and conscious goal orientation towards truly learning and

understanding new material that may be in conflict with their existing framework of knowledge. Sinatra and Pintrich used the term "high engagement" to describe the processes that the learner must experience with the new and often dissonant information. They also noted that it is possible for conceptual change to occur without this high engagement on the part of the learner. The unresolved issue with this is the difference in the quality or intensity of change that occurs when knowledge engagement is intentional versus unintentional. Sinatra and Pintrich reiterated that the goal of schooling is to foster change in thinking and therefore the idea of intentional conceptual change is critical and needs to be considered in pedagogical practices.

There are different yet similar definitions of conceptual change. Vosniadou (1994) looked at conceptual change in terms of learning physical science. She identified three different types of conceptual change. When one adds new information to an existing framework, this type of conceptual change is called "enrichment." When one makes changes in the structural framework of a particular belief or theory, this is *revision* type change. The most difficult type of change is the third and occurs at the level of revising one's entire theoretical framework. Kuhn (1970) coined the term "paradigm shift" while Vosniadou called this a "change of framework theory." Limón Luque (2003) cited Carey's classic definitions of "weak" and "radical" changes. Weak changes are analogous to Vosniadou's enrichment and revision levels of changes. These are they type of changes that help move someone from a novice to an expert for a particular area of information. Radical changes are major and involve a change in knowledge framework or a shift to a new paradigm.

Ferrari and Elik (2003) used the analogy of the process of psychotherapy to describe the processes involved in intentional change. One must be willing to look deeply at patterns of relationships and re-evaluate them both intellectually and emotionally in order for changes to occur. They described the influences of both micro and macro cultural values in relation to these intentional processes. They used the term "metaconsciousness" to describe the ability to truly look at one's values and beliefs in relationship to new information. One must be able to self-regulate in terms of their inner-most feelings and ideas. Hennessey (2003) indicated that both cognitive and metacognitive processes must be engaged in the learner if change in knowledge is to occur. Intentional learners are able to regulate metacognitively how their beliefs, motives, goals and emotions influence current learning. This is something done by the learner rather than by the teacher. Hennessey viewed constructivism, metacognition, and the social and educational environment all as integral elements to the panoramic view of intentional conceptual change. Limón Luque (2003) identified three prerequisites to intentional conceptual change. First, learners must be aware of the need to change along with knowing what to change. Learners must also want to change rather than the change being mandated by outside forces. Finally, learners must be able to self-regulate their change and the processes involved. Limón Luque also cited research indicating that it is difficult for intentional conceptual change to occur on any level without a certain amount of domain-specific knowledge. The amount of knowledge and just how that amount may change across domains is still a matter of inquiry. She identified three implications for learning (and therefore change). First, learners need to have a certain amount of domain

specific knowledge.  Second, they must be told about intentional conceptual change and what that involves. Third, the elements of self-regulation need to be reinforced in a variety of social contexts.

Andre and Windschitl (2003) summarized research findings indicating that personal interest toward a domain of information along with one's epistemological beliefs greatly influence intentional conceptual change. There is a positive correlation between interest level and change.  Also, more sophisticated beliefs about the nature and acquisition of knowledge positively correlate with change.  The more sophisticated epistemology is constructivist in nature as opposed to the more objectivist view of knowledge. Studies have shown that learners who view knowledge as complex and dependent on context are more likely to engage in conceptual change than are learners who view knowledge as simple and unequivocally true.

<div align="center">Early Childhood Teachers and Change</div>

Early childhood teachers often have greater flexibility than K-12 teachers in selecting their classroom curricula and therefore can have a broader decision-making role (Goffin, 1989). As mentioned early in this chapter, information about teachers and change has focused primarily on public school personnel for grades Kindergarten through 12.  Preschool education in the public schools is a relatively recent phenomenon. I was able to locate only two studies that specifically looked at early childhood teachers in relation to the change process (Kerstling, 1995; Wood & Bennett, 2000). Wood and Bennett looked at nine early childhood teachers in terms of their theoretical positions of play as compared to their actual practices.  Teachers' classes were videotaped. Through

joint discussion among researchers and teachers in regard to these videotapes, all of the teachers made changes in their theory, or their practices, or both. A three-stage model of change emerged that involved first, a detailed reflection of their practices in comparison to their theories; second, the ability to problematize their practices; and third, a restructuring of their theories, practices, or both.  Kerstling examined the change process in teachers that results from major curricular innovations in implementing the Reggio Emilia approach to learning in a school in St. Louis, Missouri.  In this case, the curricular changes were made in a college-supported school as a result of a foundation grant.  The process of change included expert presentations from specialists directly connected with the Reggio Emilia schools located in Italy.  The purpose of this research was to explore the impact of the changes on participating pre-K and Kindergarten teachers posed as a result of adopting this model.  Kerstling found that the context of working together facilitated the change process for these teachers. They were given opportunities to share and discuss frustrations, problems, and successes. The practice of detailed reflection was found to work positively in tandem with the teaching experiences during the change process.  Kerstling noted specific characteristics of the change process that played a role in her study: acknowledgement of challenges, reflection, cooperation in a group environment of teachers, willingness for risk-taking, and consensual decision making.  She concluded that the teachers in her study were extremely dedicated to young children and were willing to take risks involved in implementing such an innovative curriculum.

The change process is indeed complex.  Systemically and individually there are numerous external and internal factors that must be considered. The next section looks specifically at the characteristics and development of effective teachers.

**Teacher Development and Teacher Effectiveness**

In order for people to be empowered as early adopters of change and innovations, they must view themselves as having an effect on the practices and behaviors of others. They cannot view themselves as someone who is constantly controlled by outside forces (Shute, 1993).  People who hope to affect improvement of others need to focus on their own betterment (Webb, 1993).  No one can expect to improve others unless they themselves are improving.  It is important to understand that education is a life-long process and that teachers must be willing, and ready, to change some of the pieces in the ever expanding jigsaw puzzle which frames the education profession (Dottin, 1996). As the total puzzle picture changes, so must the pieces within it. The nation needs early childhood educators who are ready and equipped not only to make but also diffuse change. The shared, underlying goal for everyone serious about the field of early childhood is to improve the lives of children and to facilitate gains in developmentally appropriate ways (Hall & Hord, 2001).

Qualities of Effective Teachers

A comprehensive project conducted in Great Britain called, "Principles into Practice:  Improving the Quality of Children's Early Learning" (Blenkin & Kelly, 1997) found that it is the ability and competence of the adults who interact with young children that is the single most significant determinant in the quality of care and education.  This

study included three phases.  The first phase involved a national survey of currently

existing early childhood programs in England and Wales.  The second phase focused on

an investigation of what practitioners see as the benchmarks and deterrents to quality

care and education.  The final phase was the development of strategies to enhance

professional development to improve the skills of practitioners. Results of interviews

with 534 program directors indicated that their perception of the most important quality

for the effectiveness of early childhood teachers was the knowledge of child

development.  Out of 15 factors, "openness to change" ranked as fifth most important.

The narrative interviews of practitioners yielded a strong focus on the quality of teachers

as revealed in training and specialization related to young children.  This is evidenced in

an emphasis on the uniqueness of each child, as well as a focus on teaching as an art of

both caring and creativity.  The key personal qualities that emerged in the people and

relationships stories were caring, sharing, and receptivity.  The data revealed metaphors

that shaped interviewees' views and practices in early childhood education.  The general

metaphorical categories included *positive power* (a joyous approach to caring for and

educating young children in a warm, stimulating environment); *space* (a space where

children can grow and flourish, where they can be safe, play and be creative, and where

a variety of areas of learning are emphasized); and *structure* (foundations for future

learning, building knowledge and building on strengths).  Additionally, they also

expressed concern for the social and moral aspects of early childhood curriculum.

Cartwright (1999) noted after studying kindergartens in New Zealand that good

early childhood teachers must demonstrate inner security, self-awareness, and integrity.

She also cited the traits of warmth and respect for children, the ability to trust children, and unconditional caring for children. Additionally, Cartwright emphasized the importance of appropriate teacher modeling for children.

Bredekamp, Knuth, Kunesh, and Shulman (1992) looked at the position statements and guidelines developed by the National Education for the Education of Young Children and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education in relation to children ages three through eight-years. Their purpose in doing so was to discuss ways that schools need to change in order to prepare for all children to learn. They found that these organizations emphasized the following content areas as most important for teacher training: child development knowledge, individual characteristics of children, knowledge of the various disciplines (i.e., literacy, math, science, social skills, motor skills), cultural values, family dynamics and parenting, and the knowledge children need to function in our society.

Anziano (1993) found that professional development in literacy improved early childhood teacher performance for a group of Navajo Head Start teachers. This literacy training required teachers to reflect and write about what they do in the classroom. Participant's self-confidence increased due to more education and training.

A recent publication from the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development on *Qualities of Effective Teachers* (Stronge, 2002) suggested that the relevant quality characteristics form a mosaic. The pieces include teacher preparation, classroom management skills, the way a teacher plans, delivers, and monitors student progress, and personal qualities. Stronge noted that affective characteristics of teachers

often outweigh pedagogical factors in interviews and surveys with students. He also

noted that achievement is often affected by teachers' psychological influence on their

students. Stronge specifically cited the role of caring; that is, listening, gentleness,

understanding, recognition of student individuality, encouragement, enthusiasm, and an

overall love of children. In his review of research, Stronge additionally noted that

effective teachers are concerned both about the learning of their students as well as being

concerned about their own on-going personal learning and development. Attitudinally,

effective teachers consistently display more positive outlooks toward students and

colleagues. The importance of teacher reflection and introspection

is also highlighted as a significant contribution to effectiveness.

Wilson, Shulman, and Richert (1987) conducted research that resulted in a model

of teacher effectiveness that is governed by subject matter knowledge in tandem with

pedagogical content knowledge. The latter is comprised of elements including

knowledge of the learner, knowledge of the curriculum, knowledge of the context, and

knowledge of pedagogy.

<u>Teacher Beliefs, Behaviors, and Self-Images</u>

Teacher beliefs and behaviors clearly affect the quality of early childhood

programs, but teaching young children involves more than simply a love for children

(Cartwright, 1999). It requires an extensive early childhood knowledge base and a high

level of commitment to the profession (Saracho & Spodek, 1993). Early and Winton

(2001) pointed out that the importance of quality education for individuals working with

young children (ages birth to four-years) is widely accepted in the field. They also

indicated that very little is known about the content, context, and needs of those

programs that provide teacher education.  Fuller and Strath (2001) stated that early

childhood is decades behind the public schools in examining the effectiveness of teacher

attributes and classroom practices as they relate to child outcomes. The important

decisions made by early childhood teachers are not merely based on technical

information; they are also based on morals and values (Saracho & Spodek, 1993;

Creighton, 1999). The pedagogical beliefs of early childhood teachers are instrumental

in determining their behaviors in the classroom (Vartuli, 1999).  In a study specific to

early childhood educators and teachers, Goodfellow and Sumison (2000) discussed the

idea that teaching, learning, and learning to teach need to be viewed from a relational

perspective.  The core of the effective early childhood teacher is an ethic of caring. This

means that learning these ideals is best done through relationships with others.

Relational dimensions identified as important between early childhood classroom

teachers and student teachers training under their supervision are: shared understandings;

concern and commitment to communicate with one another; respectfulness toward each

other; empathy in understanding what the other is thinking or feeling; and the ability to

tune in to the contextual climates of different situations that arise in the educational

setting.

The disposition of the child toward learning and knowledge is established during

the early childhood years. This makes it vital to look at the beliefs that affect teacher

behaviors.  Vartuli (1999) cited Spodek's research where he found that it was difficult to

define the beliefs of early childhood teachers.  He established that their decisions in the

classroom are often based on personal and practical knowledge rather than on technical and theoretical knowledge. Saracho and Spodek (1993) highlighted research conducted by Clandinin and Connelly which demonstrated that beliefs shared by early childhood teachers are often based on their common technical knowledge. Beliefs that were *not* shared seemed to represent the individual's life experiences combined with their professional experiences. Combining these personal and technical elements into a core of professional knowledge for teacher training may help to reconcile the disparity between the techniques learned by early childhood practitioners in college classrooms and workshops, and what actually occurs in their classroom.

Johnston (1992) followed two early childhood teachers through their pre-service practicum experiences. She found that these teachers' images of teaching could be identified through dialogue with the researcher. She defined "image" as a personal view that permeates much of what is expressed by a teacher indirectly in their speech. These images are represented by themes that emerge in their dialogues about teaching. For example, in a 1990 article she cited similar research where she identified one teacher's image as "meeting the needs of individual students." This image then recurred as an organizing construct for the teacher's curricular decisions. Such images, in turn, affect decision-making and choices made by individual teacher trainees and teachers. These images are important to the teacher's perception of a need for change. Inbar (1996) looked at the images of 254 educators with different roles. Ninety-five of these educators were classroom teachers, 22 were principals and assistant principals, 56 were student teachers from universities and colleges, and 81 were department chairs,

superintendents, advisors, and university teachers in education. He found the metaphors generated in relation to participant perceptions of students, teachers, principals and schools to be critical to their analysis of education. Such analysis of metaphorical language allows us "…to read between the lines and opens a window into the deep structure of schooling" (p. 90). Inbar also indicated that the exposing individual metaphors and images of one's teaching practices can help move those individuals toward change in practices.

<div align="center">Teacher Training Programs</div>

Without a doubt, professional preparation of early childhood teachers needs to improve (Bruneau & Ambrose, 1997; Hyson, 2001; Phillips, 1998). Some argue that the ways in which education programs have prepared early childhood teachers have not changed in decades (Phillips & Hatch, 2000). Phillips and Hatch also advocate that early childhood teacher preparation programs need to model what they want their students to do when working with young children in the classroom. For example, instructors for the senior year internship program brainstormed with their students about what they wanted to learn and what skills they wanted to develop during their internship. This is very similar to the child-centered approach to learning that is often taught in many college-level early childhood classes. Children are asked what they already know about a particular topic and what they would like to learn.

The 1993 Advisory Committee for Head Start Quality and Expansion suggested increased and improved staff development and training as primary needs to achieve quality across all of their programs (Caruso, Horm-Wingerd, & Golas, 1998). The

amount of education, along with level of wages, appears to be predictive of child outcomes in early childhood settings (Fuller and Strath, 2001).

Educational requirements for early childhood caregivers and educators are gradually increasing (Bowman, et al., 2000; Cost, Quality, and Outcomes Study Team, 1995; Early & Winton, 2001).  Even though requirements have risen, there is still considerable room for improvement for professional development of early childhood teachers (Epstein, 1999). Moreover, educational requirements throughout the profession are inconsistent. Early childhood teachers in public schools and non-profit programs generally have more extensive and formalized education than teachers in Head Start programs.

Studies of early childhood caregivers and teachers have shown that the level of education does affect variables consistently tied to quality practices.  The more education the teachers have, the less likely they are to be over-authoritative and punitive and the more likely they are to have positive interactions with children (Arnett, 1989). Bryant (1995) indicated that the higher the level of training and education a Head Start caregiver has, the more likely they are to promote social competence for children and the more positive their attitude is toward parent involvement.  In a study of 190 Head Start pre-kindergarten classrooms, McCarty, Abott-Shim, and Lambert (2001) found that teachers in high and average quality classes have more education and/or training than those in lower quality classrooms. They also established that the teachers in lower quality classes have more difficulty differentiating between appropriate and inappropriate early childhood practices.   Kaplan and Conn (1984) found that as little as

20 hours of training has a marked effect in improving the classroom environment and increasing quality interactions with children.   Cassidy, Buell, Pugh-Hoese, and Russell (1995) found that 12 to 20 credit hours of community college coursework significantly increases the child-centered skills of early childhood classroom teachers as opposed to those who do not receive college training.  In 1998, the Head Start Reauthorization Act mandated that by 2003 at least 50% of Head Start staff must have an Associate's, Bachelors or advanced degree related to early childhood education (Ball, 2001).  The 2000 executive summary by the Committee on Early Childhood Pedagogy (Bowman et al., 2000) highlighted as one of its recommendations that children in any type of child care and education program should have a teacher who has a minimum of a Bachelor's degree related to early childhood education. Training appears to affect both attitudes and behaviors of early childhood teachers. Regardless of the amount of specialized training, early childhood teachers need be educated to realize that teaching is complex, intellectual, and challenging, and that they must act as observers and researchers in their practices (O'Brien, 1996).  This requires reflection and continual transformation or change.

Some countries, such and Denmark and Spain, recognize the importance of these early years.  They have implemented training standards for all teachers who work with young children (Moss & Penn, 1996).  These countries have combined all of their early childhood services within one administrative framework.  The training requirement is a minimum of a Bachelor's degree related specifically to the early childhood years.  In

Denmark, teachers specializing in early childhood (ages birth through six-years) can also teach in the primary grades, but not vice versa.

Teacher education needs to help pre-service and in-service early childhood teachers realize that they can be agents of change (Phillips, 1998). Phillips cited the example of preparing early childhood teachers to effectively address diversity. Teacher training programs cannot merely touch the surface of the importance of diversity and investigate appropriate curriculum activities. They should involve strategies to deeply explore the system of White privilege. Phillips said that in order to prepare early childhood teachers to be change agents they must be encouraged to investigate their connection to institutions such as White privilege. They need to go below the surface of multicultural issues. She pointed out that changes in behavior require changes in conceptual understanding and attitudes. "…Students should be encouraged to reflect upon their own attitudes and experiences…they must be given the opportunity to understand activism…" (Phillips, p. 60). Sarason (1993) said that teacher education should contain two vital elements in preparing individuals for classroom work. One is to prepare them for the everyday realities of schools. The other is to encourage attitudes and abilities to conceptualize change. Teachers need to be prepared to cope with and seek changes that support what they know and believe. Pre-service training must help future teachers realize that they can be agents of change as opposed to being powerless and victimized. Sarason argued that if teachers do not continue to learn, grow, and change, then they can never expect to be able to create and sustain these qualities in the students with whom they work.

Saracho and Spodek (1993) illuminated the idea that the traditional ideology of programs that prepare early childhood teachers generally mirror developmental theories of early childhood education. The predominant one is rooted in the technical ideology of knowledge that supports and models cognitive control and empirical, analytic approaches to learning. The other two major models of knowledge, one focusing on practical concerns and the other on emancipatory concerns, are generally ignored in both teacher training and early childhood education. The authors suggested that early childhood teachers need exposure to multiple ideologies in order to be able to meet the demands of their complex jobs. The work of early childhood teachers includes both technical aspects as well as moral aspects. Soto and Swadner (2002) urged teacher educators and researchers to move beyond traditional views of early childhood education and include knowledge from multicultural, feminist, and critical constructivist ways of knowing.

Connelly and Clandinin (1994) made four assumptions about elements of effective teacher education. First, teacher education is a life-long process. Second, teacher education needs to include strategies for looking at life histories; these individual life histories affect what has happened in the past, present, and future for the teacher and this in turn affects student learning. Next, teaching is any educative relationship among people; one does not need to have the title of "teacher" to be instructional. Finally, teacher education operates on a continuum including pre-service, introduction to the profession, and continuing in-service.

Feldman (1997) identified four perspectives that have guided educational research of effective teaching and teacher education. These include, the teacher knowledge perspective that looks at what teachers need to know in order to be able to teach effectively; the teacher reasoning perspective that looks at how teachers reflect and make decisions; the socio-cultural social constructivist perspective that goes beyond just the cognitive variables involved; and the teaching as a way-of-being perspective which looks more holistically at processes that help teachers to improve and understand their practices. Feldman supported the fourth view because it appears to build upon, and add to, the other three perspectives. He viewed teaching as comprised of three types of teacher wisdom: wisdom of practice, deliberative wisdom, and wisdom-in-practice.

Calderhead and Robson (1991) placed part of the blame for resistance to new techniques and ideas on teacher educators. They claimed that teacher educators do not perceive nor investigate the prior knowledge, experiences, and values that teachers and teacher trainees bring with them to college classrooms or professional development activities. Constructivist learning suggests that all of these variables affect what the individual takes from training opportunities. Important questions include, "How are these variables integrated with new knowledge?" and "What activities will best integrate new knowledge with existing images of teaching?" Cole and Knowles (2000) discussed the importance of reflexive inquiry. Reflexive inquiry promotes a continuous cycle of teacher improvement through learning, teaching, and learning. This is similar to what Paulo Freire called praxis (1994). Freire's definition of praxis included a cycle of action, reflection, and revised action. In both cases, teachers are urged to consider their

curricular practices in the context of historical, political, and social influences. Reflexive inquiry also means examining how personal experiences and characteristics affect professional practices. Reflexive inquiry is intended to be a critical perspective for self-analysis and growth.

Fantuzzo, Childs, Hampton, Ginsburg-Block, Coolahan, and Debnam, (1997) documented the effectiveness of collaborative, on-site training versus traditional and in-class training. This includes discussion between trainees and other adults who serve as appropriate examples in the classroom. They found that such collaborative training increases positive interactions between parent volunteers, teachers, and children in Head Start programs. The major elements that prove successful are partnership, critique, co-construction of information, and mastery of skills.

<u>The Role of Reflection and Personal Knowledge in Teacher Training</u>

The study of teacher knowledge as something beyond specific teaching behaviors is only a few decades old (Cole & Knowles, 2000). A major focus of effective teaching has become teacher thinking as it relates to the traditionally observed teacher behaviors. The idea of the importance of reflection has previously been cited above and surfaces repeatedly in current educational research. The practical knowledge that guides the practices of effective teachers is much more than just the accumulation of facts and teaching techniques (Carter, 1993; Clandinin & Connelly, 1996; Clarke, 1995; Goodfellow & Sumison, 2000; Johnston, 1992). Teaching is an active process with continuous interaction between thought and action (Calderhead, 1987). Recent research continues to promote the use of *reflective practices* in teacher education to encourage

"thinking teachers" (Blenkin & Kelly, 1997; Calderhead, 1987; Schon, 1983; Tertell,

Klein, & Jewett, 1998).  Calderhead illuminated the point that most reflective teaching

practices do not account for the preexisting predispositions that teacher trainees bring

with them.  He cited a study presented by Korthagen that found that a teacher education

class designed to encourage reflective teaching is effective only with those students who

are already engaging in critical thinking and analysis regarding their practices. Huang

(2001) emphasized that pre-service teachers need to be guided into deeper reflection

processes.  He analyzed the journal-based reflections of forty-five secondary teacher

candidates and found that most of the writings simply reported what had taken place in

videotaped micro-teaching lessons.   Teacher trainers need to guide students in

purposeful, analytical reflective thinking regarding their practices. Characteristics of

reflective thinkers include a strong student-orientation, a long-term view of the

educational process, a grounded knowledge of oneself, the children, and the subject

matter, openness to continual learning, and an internal metaphor of the teacher as a

facilitator.  Kemp (1997) found that educators who have strong visions of change in

education also engage in deep, personal reflection.  This reflection enables these

educators to create new visions for relating to their students.

    Action research is a recent phenomenon designed to encourage personal

reflection and inquiry in order to improve practice (Blenkin & Kelly, 1997; Borgia &

Schuler, 1996). In action research, practitioners investigate their role in the effectiveness

of activities and strategies for learning. Action research provides a way for teachers to

make changes from within rather than relying on the traditional top-down mandated

approach to change. Reflective strategies must be encouraged to facilitate the change process for teachers (Britzman, 1986; Huang, 2001; Wood & Bennett, 2000).

Clandinin (2000) stressed the importance of focusing on "teacher knowledge" rather than on "knowledge for teaching" as we conduct and modify teacher training programs. This means that we must recognize and value the life experiences, dispositions, and practical knowledge that the teacher trainee brings with them to the classroom. We must recognize the importance of the personal stories of teachers and teacher trainees. Clandinin (2000) contended that these are the critical elements that determine how teachers construct their classrooms. These are the dimensions that determine how the knowledge and skills provided in training will be used in the practical context of teaching. Student teachers must be guided to understand how their own school experience biographies affect them as they return to classroom life in new position of teacher as opposed to that of student (Britzman, 1986). Britzman (1986) further proposed that if these biographical experiences are left unexamined, then the traditional authoritative power structures continue to remain the pattern. Such a structure is in direct contrast to current, more student-centered constructivist approaches in education. More recently, Britzman (2000) said that the first and primary obligation of teachers is to "know thyself." This means not only thinking about what one may like to know about oneself but also thinking about what may be difficult to know about one self. This means looking at and questioning one's own life narratives.

Both personal experiences (past and present) and professional experiences (past and present) comprise what Clandinin and Connelly (1996) referred to as "personal

practical knowledge."   Recognition and acknowledgement of prior life experiences, dispositions, and practical knowledge can enable teacher educators to be more individually responsive to teacher trainees.  In the field of early childhood, such an approach models precisely what we want the classroom teacher to do with young children:  be alert and responsive to the individual child's needs and interests rather than merely expecting every child to have a similar bank of knowledge and skills (Meade, 2000).

Clandinin and Connelly (1995) also used the term "professional knowledge landscape."  This is delineated as follows:

> …a notion of professional landscape as composed of a wide variety of components and influenced by a wide variety of people, places, and things. Because we see the professional knowledge landscape as composed of relationships among people, places, and things, we see it as both an intellectual and a moral landscape (pp. 4-5).

The "professional knowledge landscape" is a metaphor for the total environment in which a teacher works (Connelly, Clandinin, & He, 1997).  This is a complex environment comprised of intellectual, personal, and physical factors.

In an earlier article Clandinin (1985) described "personal practical knowledge" as part of this professional knowledge landscape. She described this knowledge as:

> …A body of convictions, conscious or unconscious, which have arisen from experience, intimate, social, and traditional, and which are expressed in a person's actions…all those acts that make up the practice of teaching including

its planning and evaluation…knowledge which is imbued with all the

experiences that make up a person's being (p. 362).

In a 1987 article, Clandinin Connelly and defined personal practical knowledge as:

…A term designed to capture the idea of experience in a way that allows us to

talk about teachers as knowledgeable and knowing persons.  Personal practical

knowledge is in the teacher's past experience, in the teacher's present mind and

body, and in the future plans and actions.  Personal practical knowledge is found

in the teacher's practice.  It is, for any one teacher, a particular way of

reconstructing the past and the intentions of the future to deal with the exigencies

of a present situation (p. 666).

The totality of elements that comprise the personal practical knowledge and the

professional landscape of teachers need to be recognized in order to identify and

develop effective teachers who are open to change.

Huberman's (1993) exhaustive review of teachers lives, surmised that most of

the teachers interviewed never had taken the time (prior to their inclusion in their

research) to reflect upon the development of their professional lives.  The author

suggested that it may be advantageous to schools as well as to the effectiveness of

teachers to provide professional development activities that are specifically designed to

encourage such reflection.  He suggested that conscious awareness of the teacher

evolutionary process could be helpful in retaining teachers while moving them forward

in their development. In an article related to teacher training and early childhood, Goffin

(1989) said too much research focuses on teacher behaviors within the classroom and not

enough is devoted to reflections that are part of pre-teaching and post-teaching (out of

classroom parts of the teaching process). Teacher educators need to require more

opportunities for in-service and pre-service teachers to become active thinkers and

reflectors. Only in this way, Goffin argued, can they help make teachers more

consciously aware of the variables that affect and influence their teaching. In a study

involving 129 early childhood teachers who had university-based student teachers in

their classrooms, Goodfellow and Sumsion (2000) surmised that teachers are

unaccustomed to articulating the type of effect they are having on others in the

classroom.

Clandinin and Connelly (1987) reviewed numerous studies dealing with teachers'

personal practical knowledge. They noted that even though authors differed in their

language and stated intentions, the patterns of the inquiry were similar and supported

the importance of further investigating, recognizing, and utilizing personal practical

knowledge. Clandinin (1985) discussed four types of research studies that concentrate

on what teachers know. These included studies looking at what teachers know about

theory; studies focusing on what teachers know about specific teaching practices;

studies investigating teacher epistemologies; and studies interested in teacher personal

practical knowledge.

Connelly and Clandinin (1994) postulated that a focus on teacher support and

development should be the top priority in school improvement. Conversely,

governments and policy boards traditionally fund the development of testing standards

and curriculum improvement. Becoming an effective teacher must involve instruction

and reflection in how to *be* a teacher rather than just learning to *do* teacher tasks (Goodfellow & Sumsion, 2000).

## Major Themes in the Literature Review

This literature review can be distilled into seven major themes. First, change is a process. The process of change, both individually and systemically, is complex. There are numerous models and theories that purport a variety of factors influencing the change process. Cultural variables both at the micro and macro levels influence the change process. Organizational politics influence change. Individual dispositions and life history experiences influence change. The ability for introspection and reflection influence the change process. Both personal qualities and organizational factors seem to play a significant role in the change process.

Second, changes come in different sizes. Change may be fairly simple, such as adaptations to knowledge and practices. Change may be complex, such as a major alteration in ones belief system. Change also may fall somewhere between these two extremes.

Third, some teachers are more amenable to change than others. While there is very little research specific to early childhood teachers and the propensity to change, there is a wealth of information specific to the change process in schools and teachers throughout the K-12 grade levels.

Fourth, teacher education programs need to improve. They need to model what they teach. They also need to include reflective practices. Teacher trainers must recognize the different life experiences and constructions of knowledge and

epistemologies that people bring with them to the learning environment. Pre-service and in-service teachers need to be encouraged to delve into their own life histories and investigate the influences on their own pedagogical beliefs and practices. They also need to look deeply at how their individual dispositions and goals for change may hamper or enhance their learning.

Fifth, teachers have not traditionally been involved as key players in the change process. They need more voice in the types of educational changes that are made and how they are made. Educational researchers need to consider and include teachers as co-researchers in improving educational practices. Educational systems have not traditionally provided teachers the encouragement or the means for implementing innovation in their classrooms. Teachers need to be taught how to engage in action research, a process that involves a constant cycle of action, reflection, and action.

Sixth, teaching is a complex job. It involves so much more than domain specific knowledge. To truly be an effective teacher, one must be up-to-date on domain specific knowledge, knowledge related to effective teaching techniques, self-knowledge, the moral implications of teaching, and political influences on the teaching process.

Finally, affective qualities are just as important as technical qualities for effective teachers. The ability to change is a quality of effective teachers. The interior world and histories of teachers affect their ability to change.

The current study looked specifically at individual, first-order change. I have attempted to answer the following questions based on this literature search. What are the shared traits of early childhood teachers who make changes in their classroom

teaching in accordance with new information?  What constructions of knowledge help

these teachers be responsive to change?  What elements of these teacher's interior

worlds can shed light on improving the skills of early childhood personnel? How can

the results of this study be applied in my own teacher training?  What can educational

systems gain from this information?

# CHAPTER III

# METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore the characteristics of early childhood teachers who introduce innovative practices into their classrooms in a timely manner; that is, they are early adopters. I was specifically interested in those factors that may be teachable in the course of pre-service and in-service instructional opportunities for early childhood professionals. The research design utilized is that of a basic qualitative study. According to Holloway and Jefferson (2000), "why" questions are best answered through qualitative research. The question of "change" in relation to most teacher behaviors is so broad as to not be quantifiable. Social science research requires investigation into the *meaning* of the responses. I strived to understand the human tendency for change in relation to a specific group of early childhood practitioners. Explaining meaning and opening the door to such human realities is best achieved through qualitative research (Smeyers & Verhesschen, 2001). The value of qualitative research in relation to early childhood education is now readily apparent (Soto & Swadener, 2002). Qualitative research encourages researchers to recognize and value multiple ways of knowing. Listening and talking with teachers in focused ways yields significant information (Cole & Knowles, 2000).

The voices of teachers often have been ignored in educational research (Britzman, 1989; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990; Thomas, 1993). Qualitative research provides the means to validate their perspectives (Britzman, 1989). It gives voice to a group, consisting primarily of women, who historically have been oppressed (Dillard,

Abdur-Rashid, & Tyson, 2000).  My goal was to bring these teachers' voices to the

forefront.  By looking beneath the surface classroom behaviors of these individuals, I

wanted to discover if some common and relevant qualities, perspectives, images or

thought processes emerged.  I sought insight into *why* particular early childhood teachers

are early adopters. Qualitative research accounts for multiple realities among people in

relation to what, on the exterior, may appear to be similar occurrences.  These varying

realities affect the belief systems of teachers.  The construct filters used by teachers to

attribute meaning to information are composed of their beliefs and experiences (Smith,

1997).  Teacher actions in the classroom are largely determined by their construct filters.

My interest in the topic is the result of twenty years of experience as an early

childhood teacher educator.  The lens through which I view students has altered over the

years. I am now able to name the thoughts and feelings that affect my practices as a

teacher educator.  They are reflections of the constructivist paradigm. As I examined the

results, I realized that many of the traits that emerged in this study have surfaced in my

own persona over years of teaching.

Traditionally, surveys, classroom observations, and responses to hypothetical

situations have been used to investigate the realities of early childhood teachers

(Genishi, Ryan, Ochsner, & Yarnall, 2001). I used face-to-face interviews to collect

data. My goal was to gain an in-depth understanding of teacher beliefs that affect their

actions of innovation.  Consequently, I chose semi-structured, open-ended interviewing

techniques.  As I reviewed the literature and collected data, I anticipated that a grounded

theory would emerge.  I applied the interpretive paradigm along with the ideological

framework of constructivism. Ultimately, my aim was to derive an applicable theory. The results should suggest techniques that can facilitate early adoption for teachers who are ordinarily more hesitant in implementing change in their classrooms.

## Grounded Theory: The Constructivist Net

"The net that contains the researcher's epistemological, ontological, and methodological premises may be termed a paradigm or an interpretive framework…" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 21). As an educator and a researcher I base my practices on the constructivist paradigm. Within the constructivist paradigm it is recognized that everyone uses their own experiences to establish meaning of information. Individual perceptions and experiences affect the meaning that one attributes to their world. These perceptions simultaneously impact new information that is integrated into that world. A truly shared, objective reality does not exist among people. The more people interact and dialogue, the more they construct shared meanings. Constructivism implies a hermeneutic research methodology. Realities are in a constant state of flux and elaboration (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

In the present research, I looked carefully at the shared meaning for these teachers in relation to their implementation of innovative practices into the early childhood classroom. I used systematic qualitative inquiry to seek in-depth understanding of the question, "What makes early childhood teachers early adopters of innovative classroom practices?" The inquiry approach used is phenomenological because the focus is "What is the structure and essence of experience of this phenomenon for these people?" (Patton, 1990).

As previously stated, I was interested in distilling a grounded theory from the data. My goal was to determine qualities or characteristics shared by these teachers so that I can address them directly in adult education and trainings. Ultimately I combined the findings with key elements of my literature search to establish a heuristic model that assists in accomplishing that goal. Charmaz (2000) discussed *constructivist grounded theory* as a flexible, heuristic strategy that is efficacious in understanding informants' meanings. She argued that the strategies in this process do not have to be firm or unyielding and that grounded theory enhances rather than restricts data interpretation. Establishing grounded theory entails looking for parallels in processes. Rather than testing the validity of an existing theory, my goal was to discover the theoretical constructs that emerged from the analysis of the data. That is, through analyzing and interpreting the data, can the information gained from the research be used in more than one setting (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998)? In this case, can the studied phenomenon of change be explained in a way that is useful to early childhood college teachers? Furthermore, what theoretical constructs can be made from analyzing the ensuing data? In essence, grounded theory provides a useful ordering of the data that explains the phenomenon, which in this case is change in classroom practices. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000), with grounded theory the categories into which the data are sorted cannot be preconceived. They are arranged and rearranged as the collection of data progresses. Through inductive analysis, theory grounded in the particular set of data emerges.

## Pilot Study

In the summer of 1998 I completed a pilot study as part of a qualitative research course. I interviewed two early childhood community college faculty members who were early adopters of new information. I asked participants to reflect on memorable workshops they attended during the previous year. This included considerations of content, reflection of factors that influenced their choice of workshops, and perceptions of the formats for these workshops. They were asked to consider the factors that motivated them to take new information gained from these workshops and incorporate it into their classroom teaching. The participants also were asked to think about the favorite innovations they gained from workshops. Finally, they were questioned about the perceived effects that implementing this new information had on their students.

The data indicated that both participants evidenced strong identities as teachers and as learners. This dual identity contributed to their roles as early adopters. These two early adopters were teachers whose lives were shaped by a deep concern for others; a desire to impact the lives of others; and a spiritual view of their role as teacher. At the beginning of the pilot study, I neither anticipated the depth nor the affective nature of the data that eventually emerged. I represented these results as a pyramid structure. The three elements listed above formed the base of the pyramid. These three shaping elements supported the dual role of teacher and learner. These, then, supported the apex of the pyramid that represents their role as an early adopter. I was curious to see if similar affective characteristics would emerge in the current research. Figure 1 is the visual representation used to present this pilot study.

```
                    Early
                   Adopter

          View of              View of
          self as              self as
          teacher              learner

                     A spiritual    A deep
        A deep       view of the role  desire to
        concern      of teacher     impact others
        For others
```
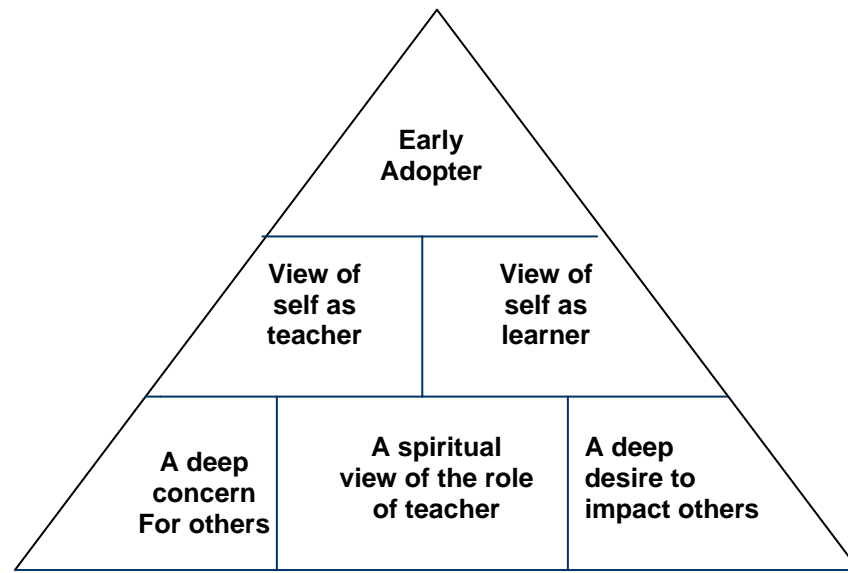
Fig. 1. Conceptual model of the characteristics that effected the early adoption of innovative teaching techniques by two Child Development community college faculty members.

## Sample Selection

I selected a purposeful sample of ten early childhood teachers for the present study. Research shows that the confidence level of teachers improves as they gain years of teaching experience and education (Cassidy, Buell, Pugh-Hoese & Russell, 1995; Huberman, 1993; Katz 1972; White 1993).  Therefore, I chose to interview only teachers who had a minimum of five years of teaching experience and at least 30 college credit hours.  I surmised that this would improve the communication process by placing the interviewer and interviewee on more equal levels.  I wanted to lessen the power differential in terms of my interactions with the participants. Denzin and Lincoln (2000)

cautioned that interviews are not neutral. They can readily be influenced by the power, gender, ethnicity, and class of the interviewer, as well as the interviewee.

The early childhood teacher positions in San Antonio require a continuum of levels of education. This is comparable to nationwide patterns. The continuum begins with little or no specialized education beyond a high school diploma or its equivalent for teachers in private childcare centers. It progresses to a minimum of a Bachelor's degree for public school early childhood teachers. There are various points above and below those levels as well. My work as a teacher trainer requires that I have contact with people from all educational levels. There is an additional caveat that applies to San Antonio's teachers employed non-public school settings. For many of those teachers, English is often a second language and cultural base, while Spanish is the first. I consciously chose to interview a diverse population in terms of ethnicity and education levels. Because the goal of this research was to enrich procedures for teacher training, I purposefully sought out participants who demonstrated an interest in formal education above the high school level. This was the rationale behind requiring the college credit coursework. I chose to interview only one teacher per center or school so that a variety of work settings would be represented. The students in my classes came from a large variety of work settings. I was searching for variables that may affect the phenomenon of change that exist independently of specific levels of education.

I consulted with early childhood colleagues in the local community to identify participants who were early adopters of innovative practices. I specifically sought recommendations from people who Rogers (2003) called "gatekeepers." Gatekeepers

are people who actually decide to pass on innovative practices to others. My community college faculty colleagues are certainly gatekeepers. They make decisions about which new information will be diffused to students. All of my fellow faculty members also conduct workshops in the local community. This faculty is a proactive, innovative group. I elicited them, as well as local childcare program directors, to assist in identifying teachers who are early adopters. Directors can also be considered gatekeepers because they often make the decision of passing new information on to their teachers. My first step was to approach faculty in my own Child Development Department at San Antonio College for recommendations. A large percentage of our child development community college students works concurrently 30 hours or more per week as early childhood teachers. Typically, each of our faculty supervises students in their workplace each semester as part of their course loads. As a result, faculty members have the opportunity to observe students in their natural domain, the early childhood classroom. Throughout the years, faculty members often return to specific centers to observe new students. Consequently, they come in contact with former students who are still teaching. There are nine full-time faculty members in our department. In an E-mail to all of them, I requested nominations for participants. Eight of the people recommended were employed in childcare centers. I called the director for each of the eight different centers and asked them for recommendations of teachers they employed who they considered to be early adopters of innovative practices. In every case the names given matched those originally suggested by individual faculty members. The two public school teachers interviewed were my selection. Other faculty members

corroborated my choices.  I observed one of the teachers firsthand on three different occasions in her early childhood classroom.  The other public school teacher was an adjunct faculty member in our department. I interacted with her frequently in my role as her course mentor.  As a result of our conversations about her kindergarten class, I realized that she was an early adopter.  We discussed numerous innovative curricular ideas that she had instituted in her classroom.  These ideas were often the result of research she was exposed to as part of her adjunct faculty coursework preparation.

I was acquainted with six of the ten participants prior to the interviews.  Three of them were then, or formerly had been, adjunct faculty in the Child Development department where I work.  One was a teacher in a college lab school.  Two others were former students who had taken at least one of my classes.

Nine teachers were interviewed once, and one was interviewed twice. She was interviewed a second time at her request. Semi-structured interviews were carried out from May, 2002 through June, 2003.  The participants each chose the location for the interviews.  Some interviews were held at my institution, San Antonio College, and others were held at the participant's worksite.  Each lasted an average of 1 ½ hours, with the range being from 55 minutes to two hours. The initial portion of each interview included questions related to the participant's current position, education, and reasons for choosing a career in early childhood. The second part focused on their experiences with both professional and personal change.  Please see Appendix A for a copy of the interview guide.

Table 1 presents the setting and context demographic information for the participants. The information regarding education level, years of experience, work setting and age group of the children with whom they work was current at the time of each individual interview. Two African-American women, four Mexican-American women, and four Anglo-American women were interviewed. Their experience in the field ranged from a low of five and one half years to a high of twenty-three years. Eight of the ten were, or had been, community college students. Three participants were working on their Associate in Applied Science degree; three had earned their Associate in Applied Science degree; one was working on her Bachelor of Arts degree; and three held Master's degrees. They worked with children aged two through six years. A range of work settings was represented: public schools, a Head Start Center, church-based schools, a Jewish Community school, a military base child care center, and a community college child care center. Participants ranged in age from mid-twenties to late fifties. They are all female.

### Data Collection

In-depth interviews are one way of gathering data in order to formulate a grounded theory. Informants were asked to participate in one audio-taped semi-structured interview. Semi-structured interviews, like the type I used, result in a "negotiated text" (Fontana & Frey, 2000). This premise recognizes that researchers are part of the context from which the data is drawn. Fontana and Frey clearly articulated

Table 1
Participant Background Information

| Participant | Ethnicity | Years in ECH | Education | Current work setting | Age Group |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | African-American | 20 | Associate's Degree(AAS) - CHD | Community College Lab School | 2-3-year olds |
| 2 | Mexican-American | 20 | AAS-CHD BA – Elementary Ed. MA-ESL | Public School | Kindergarten |
| 3 | Anglo-American | 5 ½ | AAS-CHD; pursuing BA-Early Childhood | Church-sponsored Child Care Center | Pre-K (4-5-year-olds) |
| 4 | Mexican-American | 19 | Working on AAS - CHD | Church-sponsored Child Care Center | Pre-K |
| 5 | African-American | 16 | AAS- CHD | Military Installation Child Development Center | Pre-K |
| 6 | Anglo-American | 18 | BA – CHD MA-Early Childhood | Church-sponsored Child Care Center | Kindergarten |
| 7 | Mexican-American | 9 | AAS – CHD | Jewish Community Center Early Childhood School | 2-year-olds |
| 8 | Mexican-American | 13 | One course from AAS – CHD | Head Start Child Care Center | Pre-K |
| 9 | Anglo-American | 23 | Pursuing AAS degree | Church-sponsored Child Care Center | Pre-K |
| 10 | Anglo-American | 22 | BA Elementary Ed MA Early CHD 30+ post masters credits | Military Installation Public School | Kindergarten |

that, "It is time to consider the interview as a practical production, the meaning of which is accomplished at the intersection of the interaction of the interviewer and respondent" (Fontana & Frey, p. 664). My belief was that the higher the confidence level of the teachers, the less likely they would be to say what they thought I may want to hear. I wanted to glimpse their unique values and thought processes. I wanted to delve into the participants' personas and uncover those relevant elements that affect their tendencies to be innovators in the classroom.

The participants were contacted by phone and asked to choose the date and location for their interview. Not one person declined to participate. Six teachers chose to be interviewed at their place of employment, and four came to my office. During this initial phone conversation I told them that I would ask questions about their early childhood professional and educational background. I also informed them that I would ask questions related to their tendency to make changes in their classroom. Nine of the ten requested that I use their actual first name. During my initial contact with each participant, they were told that they were recommended by at least two people as someone who is amenable to change in the early childhood classroom. In every case the participant expressed the honor they felt in being asked to participate. I conducted member checking by sharing the findings chapter with each participant and incorporated their feedback into the final draft. Additionally, there is theoretical triangulation in terms of how the final data analysis articulated with the current literature put forth in Chapter II.

**Data Analysis**

Data collection and analysis occurred in tandem.  I used an inductive approach to analysis and the categories and patterns were not predetermined.  They emerged as the interview data was collected (Patton, 1990). I employed the constant-comparative method of data analysis to identify key themes and recurring ideas.  After transcribing the first two interviews, they were re-read and segmented into major themes, issues, or activities. I used what Charmaz (2000) called "focused coding," which is often used to organize large amounts of data into recurring themes.  In turn, these were divided into smaller categories and sub-categories that emerged as the research progressed (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).  I separated the themes, issues, and activities into umbrella code categories based on Bogdan and Biklen's concept of data "families."   These categories underwent revision as the interviews progressed. All coded divisions in the classification system were made on the basis of Patton's reference (1990) to what Guba calls internal and external homogeneity.  This means that I organized information in a particular category based on how well it connected in a meaningful way.  It also means that the differences between coded categories were distinct.  Appendix B contains a complete listing of the coded families, themes, categories, and sub-categories.   Finally, I searched for themes and connections across coded categories in order to determine the complete picture for my final results.  I then studied each of the various coding categories.  As part of these reflections, I carefully extracted specific quotations to support each coded category. Only after looking at all the individual pieces was I able to see the entire picture that illustrated the results.

In thinking about a visual metaphor for this process, I returned to the pyramid visual representation from my pilot study.  It occurred to me that the process of data analysis is analogous to building a pyramid in ancient Egypt.  It takes a skilled workforce to build a pyramid.  It takes enormous amounts of time and materials to build a pyramid.  One must allow for some wastage of materials during construction. It takes practice to chisel all the stones.  The work on the base of the pyramid (collecting the data) is difficult because it is hard physically, and conceptually it is difficult to know where to begin the analysis process.  As the building progresses, it becomes easier to know where the structure is going although it is often difficult to determine how to go about placing the stones. The process changes as the building progresses.  It's easier to see what needs to be done, but it is still difficult to accomplish.  It takes a practiced eye to locate stones that fit together seamlessly. The final stone is the most painstaking to place and probably demands the most effort. The final stone represents the grounded theory that emerges as a result of the building blocks of the analysis.

Here, then, is an example of how I established my findings.  One major conclusion of this research focused on significant character traits.  One of the coding families I established was *situation codes*; that is, what is really important to these participants? This was based on Bogden and Biklen's (1998) recommendations for initial coding families.  After coding the initial two interviews, the trait of a *positive disposition* emerged in three different sub-categories for this particular family of data.  A positive disposition was evidenced in attitudes toward work, continual learning, and even in one's personal life.  As interview stage progressed, a positive disposition overtly

emerged in another family of data entitled, *Participant's Views of Others, Themselves, and Change.* In subsequent interviews, the trait of a positive attitude continued to surface for all ten participants.

## Limitations

Extensive experience in the field of early childhood education provided a lens through which I viewed and interpreted the information in these interviews. It may therefore be difficult for me to see things that deviate from these experiences.

An additional limitation is that all of the participants were women who work and reside in San Antonio, Texas. I have attempted to furnish the information necessary for understanding their contexts. Greenwood and Levin (2000) stated that for qualitative research, "…generalization becomes an active process of reflection in which involved actors must make up their minds about whether or not the previous knowledge makes sense in the new context" (p. 98). It remains the reader's decision as to how the information applies to their particular setting or context (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

# CHAPTER IV

# FINDINGS

This chapter is a review and analysis of the information derived from the interviews with the ten participants selected for this research.  I examined the interviews specifically in relation to the research question: *What makes a teacher an early adopter of innovative practices in the early childhood classroom?* What exactly affects the phenomenon of change for this group of professionals? What is the essence of this phenomenon for these particular teachers (Patton, 1990)?  As with any phenomenon, it is necessary to recognize that there are more than one or two distinct factors that affect early adoption of new information. We must look at the convergence of multiple factors (Houle, 1961).

These are women who strive to stay current in their profession by readily making changes in their teaching practice as they gather new information.  There is very little external incentive to do so in early childhood teaching.  The work is under-valued in our society and the wages are abysmally low. In fact, early childhood education is often considered more of an occupation than a profession (Fromberg, 1997). According to the Concise Oxford Dictionary (Sykes, 1984) one definition of an "occupation" relates to a job for money, which takes up someone's time, or a pursuit of an occupation in terms of work or business.  In comparison, a "profession" is referred to as a vocation or calling that generally requires advanced learning.  Fromberg pointed out that the status of most early childhood teachers is relatively low.  This holds true for many jobs in the public service domain.  Too often early childhood teachers are considered technicians as

opposed to professionals.   Regardless of living within this reality, these ten women strive to excel in the performance of their jobs.  They continually engage in advanced learning.  Following is an examination of the three major findings that emerged from this study.  These teachers are able to adopt new information into their teaching in spite of some of the more negative societal influences.

The first finding focuses on the value these teachers attribute to the profession of early childhood education.  They view their work as a moral endeavor.  Looking carefully at these perceptions helps early childhood teacher educators understand the underlying impetus for their actions in regard to young children. These teachers view their engagement with young children as truly honorable.  They consistently strive to do their best in the profession and to do what is right for children.  With the increasing public interest in early learning, many of the traditional practices used with young children in group care drastically need to be supplanted with newer, research-based techniques.  In fact, some of the teaching practices that continue to be used in group care can be emotionally harmful to children.  The participants in this study were teachers who make changes because they strive to do their very best and they believe young children deserve the very best.  They have a deep concern for many people with whom they come in contact in their jobs.  These teachers are concerned about the welfare of young children.  They genuinely care about parents, peers, and early childhood college students.  They act on these concerns rather than merely verbalizing their significance.  Another less apparent, yet supportive element of this core moral value is that many of these teachers have a spiritual feeling towards their work. They see their work as

fulfilling and some even view it in the context of their own spirituality. This is expressed either in overtly religious terms, or more subtlety as a feeling of personal harmony towards the profession. Their profession provides a sense of meaning for them.

The second major finding encompasses specific character traits shared and valued by the participants. I am referring to their interactions with people, challenges, and new information. These are not necessarily inherent traits, but rather are qualities that these women have chosen to cultivate. These teachers have a positive attitude that shows both professionally and personally. This does not mean that they are naturally cheery people. Rather, they choose to look at situations and challenges with a positive attitude. In addition, they are people who exhibit the trait of persistence. They are persistent in trying to make new ideas work for them. They are persistent in working with challenging people. They choose not to give up easily. A final characteristic they share is flexibility. They understand the need to be flexible in order to be effective early childhood teachers. They recognize that working with children is not bound by sameness. It changes from moment to moment and child to child and they are open to this reality.

The third finding illuminates the participants' learning dispositions. Regardless of life circumstances, these women engage in two learning essentials: continual learning and self-reflection. These two dispositions are integral to their professional lives. They are very introspective in terms of what they do in behalf of children. They define themselves as teachers who can adapt new information to their own, unique settings.

They see themselves as life-long learners in regard to their profession. They willingly seek new information. They value knowledge and its application.

These three findings are represented here separately, but they ultimately intertwine. This is analogous to the approach often taken in presenting information in our college level child growth and development classes. We talk about distinct areas of development for the child: physical development, cognitive development, language development and social-emotional development. They are discussed separately, and therefore it is often difficult for students to understand the reality that all of these areas of development truly intertwine. Like the individual pieces of a rope, they work together to form the whole child. One needs each and every one of the strands to complete the optimal composition of the rope. If one strand is missing or is not adequately strong, then the entire piece of rope is compromised. The findings of this research represent three of the strands shared by these early childhood education teachers.

These findings are both indigenous and sensitizing (Patton, 1990). They are foremost indigenous in that they are the result of key words, phrases, and ideologies specifically expressed by the participants. They are also sensitizing because I, the researcher, formulated some of the concepts based on my interpretation of the underlying content of interview information. These sensitizing concepts resulted from the literature base reviewed in Chapter II combined with experiences I brought to the study.

**Introduction of the Participants**

This part of the journey begins with some personal information about each of the participants. Because this is a female-dominated field, I was curious to know if these teachers who excel in their profession enthusiastically and consciously chose early childhood as a career. Childcare and teaching are traditionally considered women's work. These are women who keep up with new developments in the field. We need more people like these in the discipline to enhance the perception of early childhood as a truly valuable and viable profession. As Fromberg (1997) stated, the phenomenon of getting paid for taking care of groups of other people's children is relatively new in our culture. Too often people perceive that the woman's' nurturing characteristics are the critical criteria for early childhood teachers. While nurturing is certainly one valuable quality, the need for formal educational training is often overlooked and undervalued.

These women were not exposed to any rigorous career planning opportunities during their elementary, middle, and high school careers. Early childhood education was not a vocational consideration that was a conscious part of their lives as they matured into adults. Their selection of the field was not even due to purposeful exposure to a variety of career options during early schooling. Like many women, these teachers probably knew on some level that this was a field that was readily available to them. Only one of the participants ever considered a more nontraditional career field.

<u>"I Feel Strongly That It Was a Calling in my Life"</u> (Jamie)

Jamie is an African-American woman who has an Associate's degree. She is originally from New York State and has worked in the field for 20 years. She worked

for many years in military base child development centers, and currently works in a community college sponsored lab school. She viewed her work with children as a "calling" originating early in her life. She mentioned previous babysitting experiences as a secondary influence on her career choice. A talkative person with clear convictions, she articulated a very strong belief in God, and truly believes that God chose her for this profession. Jamie has an Associate's degree and works as a lead teacher in a community college-based lab classroom.

<div align="center">

"You know, I babysat" (Terri)

</div>

Terri is a soft-spoken, Anglo-American woman who has a Master's degree in early childhood education. At the time of the interviews, she worked in a nationally accredited, church-sponsored childcare center. She has since taken a job as a full-time faculty member with a community college. Araceli is a teacher with a local Head Start center. She is a Mexican-American woman who was born and raised in San Antonio. Araceli exudes self-confidence. She has worked in the field for 13 years, and is pursuing her Associate's degree with hopes of eventually getting a Bachelor's degree. Terri and Araceli, along with Jamie, talked about their earlier experiences with baby-sitting as influential in their eventual career choice. Baby-sitting, again, is traditionally something performed by young adolescent girls. After high school, Araceli needed a job and did not go directly to college. She knew that early childhood teaching was something she could do without any college training.

As a teen, Edie occasionally took care of her own siblings. She also did work with a summer recreation program. This initiated her interest to work in some capacity

with children. She said that she finally settled on the teaching profession because she especially liked the idea of having summers and holiday vacations free. Edie teaches kindergarten at the public school on one of the local Air Force bases. She is a lively, petite Anglo-American blond who also teaches part-time at a local university and community college.

### "I Found It By Mistake" (Claudia)

Four participants, Ann, Claudia, and Patti, ended up in the field by accident. Ann is a Mexican-American woman from San Antonio. Her husband died unexpectedly while she was a young mother of three. She needed to work in order to support her growing children. A friend in the early childhood field suggested that she would make an excellent teacher. Ann, in turn, began substituting in the childcare center where she still works 19 years later. Just this past year, she went from the role of classroom teacher to Assistant Director. Claudia, a Mexican-American woman, originally considered elementary education as her target profession. While wandering around looking for another building on the campus of a local community college, she walked into the Child Development Department. Her interest was sparked after seeing the young, pre-kindergarten children in their classrooms and on the playground. She also cited a first grade teacher whose *negative* impact on her may have influenced her career choice. She expressed the traumatic impact of this early school experience. The teacher was so negative toward her that she cried everyday and pleaded not to go to school. As an adult she decided she did not want other children to endure a similar experience. Claudia has an Associate's degree and works in a Jewish Community Center preschool program.

While a stay-at-home mother, Patti was a volunteer in her own child's Sunday school class. An Anglo-American woman originally from a ranch area in rural Texas, she was always involved in her children's activities just as her parents had been with her when she was a child. She was eventually offered a position to work for pay in the church sponsored school. Sandy, a young Anglo-American woman with only five and one-half years of classroom experience, attributed her interest in the field as the result of a supportive high school coach. She formed a desire to impact others like her coach had positively impacted her. This led her to become interested in secondary education. The personal and genuine interest the coach took in her and her teammates is something that has stayed with her. She initially enrolled in a university after high school. Her goal of meshing sports and secondary education was not realized to her satisfaction. Sandy eventually left the university setting and began taking courses at the local community college. She enrolled in an early childhood course and was impacted by the instructor's enthusiasm and passion. She credited this instructor with her entry into the early childhood profession.

Mary grew up in East Texas and is a genuinely friendly, African-American woman who has her Associate's degree in Early Childhood Education. She has worked for many years in a civil service job at a child development center on a local military base. She originally became interested in pursuing nursing, another female-dominated field. This was a result of a high school experience with children who have special needs. She began her education toward this goal and eventually married a service man whose duty took them overseas. She researched educational opportunities while

stationed in Germany.  Nursing was not an option, so she began her career in one that was. This was early childhood education.  Although she did not continue with nursing, she remained in a care giving profession.

<p style="text-align:center;">"I Was Best At Teaching" (Lynda)</p>

Lynda is a Hispanic woman from a ranching area in South Texas.  She began her college career in veterinary school.  She found it extremely competitive and felt she had to work very hard to maintain "B" grades.  Being somewhat a perfectionist, "B" grades were not acceptable to her.  Once she started taking courses to become a teacher, she found that it was relatively easy for her to get all "A's."   She said, "My parents were not supportive of me wanting to become a teacher because they knew it was a lot of work and they felt like I could…make more money in another field."   Her brother went on to become a physician, and it appeared to Lynda that her parents thought she could do something "more" than teaching.

## Finding One: Core Values

Each and every teacher defined her professional life within a moral context. They are consistently concerned with doing their best.  They strive to do what is right. They are concerned about doing what is most beneficial for young children.  These ideals surfaced as they articulated their individual profiles as early childhood teachers. They emerged while discussing people who influenced them over the course of their own lives.

Four teachers mentioned the strong influence of a significant adult such as a parent, grandparent, or a coach, in respect to striving to do their best. "…Because my

mother spoke education and [said] that we needed to be…the best you could be. And that's all you could give" (Jamie). "I was an overachiever always, always. I think it comes from my dad; my dad is very hard working…" (Lynda). "It was a strong work ethic in my family; both my mom and dad were really hard workers" (Ann). "You know [with sports] they [the coaches] kind of give you the attitude that you have to do your best to succeed…" (Sandy). Others expressed doing their best as their own, unique value. "…and if things don't always go right, I know that I tried my best" (Claudia). "It's just something that's in me…it's important to me…I'm very disappointed in myself if I don't' try my best" (Araceli). "…I want to be the teacher that I always wanted to have" (Edie).

Terri demonstrated her desire to do her best by contacting me the day after our initial interview. I told all of the participants to feel free to call me if they thought of something else they wanted me to know. She requested to meet again to clarify some of her comments. Her goal was to make sure that I received and clearly understood all the interview information. During this second interview, Terri speculated where the desire to do her best may have come from. "I think it probably comes from my childhood because the way to get noticed was to be good…to be the best…and I think that's where I got my attention."

Related to doing their best, doing the right thing was also discussed. When talking about interactions with her fellow teachers, Lynda said:

Now I've learned that I'm going do what's right and if they [the other teachers] don't do it, then that's their responsibility. Even though we're all responsible for

each other, I need to take care of my students and myself and this is what I am going to do.

Lynda talked about how she wants all teachers in her school to strive to do what's right. She found herself getting upset in the past when some of her peers were not living up to her own personal standards. Lynda indicated she now realizes that while it may not be possible for her to impact all the other early childhood teachers in her school, she, will continue to do what is right for the children. Mary echoed her own support for this when she talked about her interactions with peers and young children: "I'm for the right thing."

The participants truly recognized value in what they do and strongly articulated that young children deserve the best classroom environment possible. Terri expressed her disappointment in seeing that many childcare centers do not operate according to the principles she learned in college. She said, "…I got out there [in the workforce] and it wasn't like what I learned in school and I was very disappointed." She proceeded to talk about her desire to do her best "…for the good of the children." Lynda wanted to give all young children the quality experiences that she hoped for and always expected for her own son when he was a child. "…I teach to the best of my ability as I would want that teacher to teach my own son….the teacher that is going to really push their students and just make a difference for them." In reference to doing what is right, Ann enthusiastically said:

I love knowing what I'm doing with the children is the right thing to do. I think it's plain simple, knowing what I bring back from school [college classes] is

something that will help the children in their development or in their learning. Claudia echoed her support for this by saying, "…remember that you're here for the children and what's best for the children."

These teachers believe that it is important to stand up for themselves and for children. This supports their core value of morality. Jamie related stories that demonstrated her willingness to stand up for herself in the workplace. From early in her career she has stood up for herself. She referenced her relationship with a trainer who tried to give her some specific suggestions for improving her teaching. Jamie didn't agree with all the suggestions, and wanted to approach the trainer with her concerns:

> …I was the new kid on the block. And [the trainer] was really good in training in the other areas. So I needed to go through [teaching my classroom] and she had to give a report to how I interacted and what I could do. So I was in the midst of the storm. So therefore, I had to get my nerve up to tell her that [one of her suggestions] is not working. Everything else is working, but this is not working.

Lynda related an incident where she readily spoke up to two administrators in her school. She was experiencing a personal health condition that required her to leave the classroom more often than generally allowed by the school's policy. She was not the least bit timid about arguing her case with the principal. Lynda was also willing to go against her family's wishes and become a teacher. Ann discussed how she is willing to challenge authority figures when she is confident she has supportive information. Jamie

talked about standing up for her son when he encountered problems at the college he once attended.

Every single participant made direct statements revealing their caring views of young children. They deeply value children. "…I'm constantly trying to reach every child I have in the classroom…you know, [so] that each child can relate to something. So my class is very multicultural" (Mary). They expressed their instrumental roles in impacting the lifelong values learned by children. In response to being asked why she wanted to work with young children, Edie replied: "…I knew that those beginnings meant everything. You know, you could just tell if they had that good start at the very beginning that…then they were headed off to the stars. I mean you just knew it." These teachers sincerely understand the importance of early childhood experiences. They truly enjoy working with young children. Claudia expressed this as, "That's what I enjoy; working one-on-one directly with children." They value the child's individuality. Jamie, Lynda, and Mary all talked about the importance of speaking up for children in order to give them voice. Reflecting on her own childhood, Mary expressed dismay of her parent's thoughts that children should be seen and not heard:

> That stuck with me…to the point that, as I grew up I thought, 'Children should be heard.' So I don't care how busy I am. The kids pull on me, 'Ms. Mary, Ms. Mary.' I make it my business to show some attention at that time, because that child needs to be heard. And that's a major thing with me. There was so much I had to say as a child.

These teachers indicated that young children deserve to have a voice in the classroom.  They realize that children have rights and are concerned that these rights are respected. They translate this into action by consciously honoring children's individual and group interests when planning both the environment and curriculum.  Mary talked about choosing curriculum ideas based on the children's experiences.  At one point she was getting some opposition from her peers regarding something new she was trying to do.   She said, "But I'm standing firmly on the prior knowledge of children." Mary also referred to her own mother as being very strict and not really allowing her voice to be heard as a child. Respect for young children is something she expressed may have been missing from her own early background.   Terri also indicated that she strives to be the type of teacher who listens for the children's interests as she plans. She reflected how her own mother tended to make decisions for her when she was a child.  Terri said she was given little voice or choice.

In conjunction with the ideal of genuine care for young children, every participant made statements that showed their genuine care and concern for others as well.  This care and concern was reflected in their dialogue and actions not only related to children, but also towards parents, college students, other teachers, and their own families.  While reflecting on her career of 22 years in the field Edie said, "I wanted to be a helper. I wanted to help kids.  And I also wanted to help teachers and I wanted to help parents."   Edie talked about how she was affected when her own mother deserted the family.  Edie was a senior in high school at the time.  She in turn said, "…I would cut off my right arm before I would leave my own children."  Patti and Mary originally

went into nursing in order to help others. Patti and Lynda both discussed positive childhood experiences of caring for a variety of farm and ranch animals. Jamie talked about her current volunteer work for a ministry program. She goes into the local prison twice a month to work with female inmates. She also contemplates one day opening up her own home to foster children. Terri equated helping others to helping herself; that is, she sees it as a benefit for her own self-development. "But, in helping others I help myself" (Terri). Lynda talked about her earlier experiences of helping her cousins with schoolwork. Ann discussed her high regard for teaching others and how it has brought her many rewards in life. Sandy spoke of her involvement in a teacher-mentoring project. She regularly mentors teachers in other childcare centers in San Antonio. Edie, Lynda, and Terri have all been adjunct faculty in area community colleges and universities. They talked about the immense satisfaction they derive from influencing current and future early childhood teachers. Patti expressed her dreams of eventually starting a project that will enable child care centers to share materials and resources. Lynda phrased her care for others metaphorically:

> I see myself as a life-long gardener. And I see my students, no matter if
> they're college or if they're…my kindergarten students, I see them as my
> seedlings. And it's my job to nurture them, and talk to them, and to take
> care of them, and to put them in the right direction. And each seedling is
> going to need different amounts of nurturing, different amounts of sun,
> different amounts of care. And that's how I see myself.

Often people view their teaching as a spiritual effort (Fisher, 2000). A majority of the participants in this study defined themselves within a religious or spiritual context. Jamie, Mary, and Patti referred to their connection to organized religion. Jamie felt that the early childhood profession was a genuine calling for her. "I know that God's given me the gift to work with children…" (Jamie). Mary stated:

> …I don't know if this had any bearing on anything, but I am a faith bound
>
> person. I…don't impose it on anyone. It's my own type of belief. And I
>
> don't necessarily take it in the classroom but I think it makes me a better
>
> person.

Patti started her early childhood career as a volunteer in her daughter's Sunday school class. She has worked in a church school setting for 23 years. Her faith has helped her through difficult days. "…there are days, you know, I really pray to get me through because I have had some difficult situations."

Terri, Ann, and Claudia referred to their spirituality in a more general way. Terri talked about how she was raised Catholic, but now participates in a non-denominational spiritual program. "…I just have a real close relationship with God. He kind of gets me through the day….there are certain children, that I'm like, 'Help me love them and help me do what's best for them'." Ann talked about making successful changes in her life and how that has affected her spiritually:

> And I think that if you don't change throughout your life, you don't
>
> grow….You don't grow spiritually, emotionally….Spiritually, I just think
>
> that you have more to appreciate when you make a change and the change

is successful. You feel great and so you're just glad to be alive….just grateful to God that you've made a change.

Claudia worked in a Jewish community school although she herself is not Jewish. She talked about attending a national conference session focused on the brain and spirituality. She indicated the information from the conference helped her with her own spiritual thinking. "It made me feel a lot better….I'm not embarrassed to tell people that I believe in God." Prior to that time, she was concerned that someone might view her as a "fanatic" if she discussed her feelings toward God in the school setting.

While four teachers did not overtly articulate their spirituality, they demonstrated a sense of spirituality in the significant meaning they attributed to their role as early childhood teacher. They expressed intense commitment to their work. This was discussed previously in terms of their views of early childhood as a moral profession and the deep concern they share for others. Morality is often discussed in the broad context of spirituality (Bainbridge, 2000). Spirituality involves a search for meaning in one's life. In this context, they view their work as a spiritual act. Such deep meaning was demonstrated when Edie expressed her role as an early childhood teacher:

> My role is to bring the children, as well as the parents, as well as my school, the best that I have. Everything I know, I'll put forth my hundred and ten percent. My role is to teach, to teach them what I know, to change, to make it better for all of them and I see my role as a teacher of potential futures…I don't know. I don't know. I just see my role as being the teacher that they always hoped they would have, the one I always wanted to be standing in front of me.

Lynda illustrated a sense of spirituality as she talked about the importance of having a true passion for one's work and life. She credited her father and especially her grandfather for instilling such a passion in her:

My grandfather was…hard working, hard working.  And he's still alive today. He's ninety-eight.  And because he has his passion for his ranch and he lived through his ranch and that was what he wanted to do.  And he drank and smoke [laughs], you know.  But he's still alive because he just had this passion for life, you know.  And I'm like that…and very thorough.  My son is not like that…my son is totally; my son is like a free spirit.

In conclusion, these teachers all share a core moral value toward early childhood teaching.  They strive to do what is best.  They try to do what is right for children.  They have a genuine concern for children as well as for the other adults with whom they work. They have a spiritual connection to their profession.

## Finding Two: Shared Character Traits

The second finding designates character traits shared by these teachers in terms of their interactions with people, challenges, and new information.  Three mutual traits surfaced in the interviews.  Comments supporting these traits were made in the context of both their personal and professional lives.

### Positive Attitude

Every one of the participants made remarks that exemplified how they strive to maintain a positive attitude in both their personal and professional lives.  When given the choice to take a pessimistic view versus a positive view of a situation, they choose to be

optimists. These teachers were handpicked for this study for their willingness and ability to adopt new ideas for use in their early childhood classrooms. Consequently, it is no surprise that the dialogue for all ten teachers indicated a positive view of new ideas. They expressed their willingness to try new ideas. They indicated that using new information makes their work easier. They emphasized the value of research and recognized that the field is constantly changing.

When asked why she stays positive about changes in the field, Claudia referred to the adage of "making lemonade out of lemons." They talked about some of the factors that help them maintain such a positive disposition. Three teachers mentioned a relative who influenced their positive attitudes. Jamie referred to her mother; Lynda spoke of her grandfather; and Patti discussed her father. Jamie referred to a positive disposition as a choice. In reference to going to mandatory training that is required in her current and past teaching positions she said:

> So either I go in with positive or negative [attitude]. I decided to go in with the positive. Because that way I could gain more. Going in with a positive manner [is better than] going with a negative and not receive what I needed to receive.

Ann discussed some of the challenges that accompany change, with the ultimate result as positive:

> Making changes in my classroom is sometimes like pulling teeth and that is because I am not the only one that is affected when I make a change. Parents are involved, the assistant teacher is involved. I know that I will have to do things differently. So sometimes I have to think about how, the logistics of things, how

am I going to make this change?  But I think once I've made the change, nine

times out of ten, it's been a good thing.

These teachers looked at new ideas as positive opportunities for improvement.

When asked to think of a metaphor in response to the stem statement, "Keeping up with

professional development is like…" Ann responded:

…is like getting a prize for doing something right.  I think that when I go to,

when I take a class, it's painful at first because I'm making a commitment to take

this class.  I have to find the time to take this class and I have to arrange my life

so that I can, even with a training seminar or weekend conference, or an evening

seminar, or something.  But I always come away feeling like a winner.  I feel

like, 'Boy, I can't wait to come back and share this….I can't wait to tell parents

about what I learned today or you know, I can't wait to show the children this.'

In response to the stem statement, "Making changes in my classroom is like…"

Patti expressed her positive attitude:

Goodness, it's almost like, again, I don't know why these things are

coming to my mind but I'm thinking of baking…because I, you know it's

fun.  It's enjoyable.  So, I'm thinking like making cookies…I'm thinking

chocolate chip cookies.

Araceli recounted a specific training opportunity called, "Who Moved My

Cheese?"  She said that this particular workshop helped her to focus on the positive side

of change.  She now makes a conscious effort to be positive when changes are required

in her job. Patti mentioned that if she gets just one new idea from an otherwise terrible

workshop, she feels like she has gained something. "I go in with that attitude.  If I come out with one new idea, it was worth my time."   Sandy discussed the unpredictability of working with children and talked about how she certainly experiences challenging days.  Even so, she ultimately declared, "You know, but in the end, by the end of the day, it's usually always a pretty good day." Ann further demonstrated her positive disposition when she equated working with children as, "getting to eat dessert before a meal.  It's just like it's the best, the most fun thing that a person can do."

Edie spoke about her abiding trust for the public school personnel with whom she works.  She indicated that this trust helps her remain positive even when she is presented with daunting new curriculum mandates from her supervisors.  While discussing a training grant with which the kindergarten classes in her school were involved, she reflected about the positive approach of the trainer and how that affected her own attitude.  She subsequently maintained a positive attitude about the grant because, "I trust my school entirely.  They have made me a different teacher….because every time, they empower you."  Some of the other participants also targeted encouraging support from their supervisors as contributing to their positive attitudes.

In relation to her personal life, Lynda talked about remaining positive through the difficult task of raising her son after she and her husband divorced.  Jamie saw herself as a positive person, even as a child.  She talked about failing the fourth grade in school.  Reflecting on the situation she said:

But I don't consider myself a failure because I consider myself privileged

because I got the honor to go over things that I missed.  So I looked at it as

a positive factor. And I don't tell everybody I flunked the fourth grade,

but…I remember people asking me, 'Oh, did you make it to fifth grade?'

And of course, I had to tell them, 'No, I didn't make it. But I'm going to

get better and move up.'

These teachers viewed themselves within a positive framework when it comes to

influencing others. They saw themselves as positive role models for other adults in the

field of early childhood.   They talked about their ability to help others, lead others, and

their desire to share information.  Sandy referred to her current participation in a locally

funded teacher-mentoring project.  She mentors teachers in other childcare centers that

are striving to become nationally accredited.  Ann talked about how she affects teachers

in her center:

I think I've been a good role model for the other teachers.  They see what we're

doing [in the classroom] and it looks like a lot of fun and it looks like the

children are really involved, and so the enthusiasm is contagious. And so they try

similar activities too.

Lynda described herself as someone who can help other people.  She related

stories of helping her peers in college, tutoring her cousins, and assisting fellow teachers

with their classrooms.  She discussed how she takes a lead in writing proposals to obtain

new materials and training for the early childhood teachers in her school.  Edie depicted

herself as someone who affects the students she teaches in her role as an adjunct faculty

member with the local community college.  Terri talked about her goal of going to a

different level in terms of her influence on early childhood teachers.  She stated that she

eventually wanted to teach in higher education. (Since her interview, this goal has been realized.) Patti had a goal of helping teachers in other centers to meet national accreditation standards. Mary animatedly talked about her excitement in sharing new information with other teachers in her own center:

> The first thing I do when I go to workshop, I take lots of notes. So I take all these notes. I come back and I'm excited because I like to share with everyone [laughs]. So I show everyone these notes. Oh gosh, you know this is what we can do; this is what we can do for literacy.

## Persistence

A second character trait that emerged among the ten participants is persistence. They do not give up quickly or easily. Professionally, this includes persistence in trying to make new ideas work, dealing with difficult people, sharing new information with others, and continuing their education even when faced with obstacles. When asked about trying new ideas in her classroom, Patti said:

> So, I usually try, you know. I'll try something again two or three times to see if maybe sometimes I interpreted it wrong and that I need to, you know, I need to re-look at, well maybe you're executing this in the wrong way, you know…because this is supposed to work.

Terri talked about trying to adapt new ideas in her classroom. "It didn't work, but let me try it this way."

Jamie discussed her view of working with difficult people. She sees it as a challenge that she can generally work through if she persists. She told the story of

working with a person with whom no one else in the child care center wanted to work. Jamie's peers at the time considered her to be a peacemaker. "So the story goes on that I endured, I stayed in the room, and the room did make changes. But I had to eat and swallow a lot. And be quiet. And not retreat. And I made it."

Lynda discussed the large amount of work that needs to be done in order to move the early childhood field forward. "I just feel there is so much that needs to be changed." As a result, she finds herself continually trying to share the information she has with fellow teachers. She persists in her efforts even when they may not be well received.

Araceli discussed growing up in San Antonio and how she had to struggle as a student in school as compared to her siblings. She also said that when Head Start stopped giving her funding for her college education, she made the decision to persist even though it was going to be financially very difficult. She did not want to stop going to college and plans to keep going even after she receives her Associate's degree. She talked about having specific educational goals and indicated her persistence to achieve them.

Lynda demonstrated persistence in her personal life as a single mother. "I would manage my [graduate] classes and babysitting and everything. And I graduated with honors. And it was difficult, but I managed." Terri talked about struggling with her weight throughout her life. She's been persistent since high school in watching her diet and exercising. Ann has persevered in living in the home where she grew up. She purchased it from her parents when she was first married and since that time it has

flooded twice during severe storms. Even though many of her friends and relatives advised her to leave, she has renovated twice and remained. She is proud of herself for staying because she enjoys the comfort of living among familiar people and surroundings. Jamie told a story of persisting in helping her son when he encountered a tough situation in college. She went all the way to the president of the college to get the facts she felt were needed. She ended the story by saying, "And not to belittle anyone at his college, I went in, I found out information, and it wasn't concerning just him. It was [also] for the people coming behind him." She attributed her persistence to a desire to affect others in a positive way. She realized that the fruits of her efforts may not be readily apparent:

> And you need to stand up for what you believe as an individual. Not just for yourself, but for the people that are coming behind you…it's not all about me. It's about the children. It's about my neighbor. In other words, when you do things and you make changes, sometimes it's going feel like you lost. Because the change didn't come with you, but the change came after you. So you know there's progress in the change….You may be standing alone by yourself. But, however, the change was made. So that you know down the road that it was a positive thing you did.

Some of the participants recognized that their persistence in using new information really pays off in making their classrooms run more smoothly. Edie reiterated how working in early childhood is very different from working with elementary aged children. She indicated that implementing appropriate strategies for

working with young children is difficult, yet it is ultimately beneficial for everyone. In reference to her own kindergarten classroom she said:

> You know the thing about the children is that if you know what you're doing, and you're doing it well, your life is much simpler….So I learned that the more I know, the more I can do, and the more I can change the way I do things. I don't give them 20 worksheets anymore to sit and do because they are usually not going do them or they are going do a poor job of them and what are they getting from it? If I want them to learn about the alphabet, I put them in the sandbox and I put alphabet molds in there and they can spell just as well there as they can on paper…it makes my job easier.

Sandy talked with excitement about experiencing her best semester ever in her classroom. A student teacher helped her implement a new, fairly complicated curriculum approach. In reference to its consequent success she said:

> So it was just a lot more fun in the classroom. Which then in turn made it less stressful, you know, as far as at home, because…I didn't have to stay at home to do all this paperwork and so it kind of, I guess it built on that…just the fun and less stress.

These teachers all demonstrated a character trait of persistence. This was apparent is both their professional and their personal experiences.

<div align="center">Flexibility</div>

These teachers defined flexibility as an important trait for their roles as early childhood teachers. They talked about the need for early childhood teachers to remain

flexible if they are going to be successful in their classrooms. Sandy discussed the unpredictability of working with young children. "I mean, I guess it goes back with the whole flexibility thing. It's just very unpredictable working with kids." Claudia echoed this when she said, "The biggest advice is to be flexible; flexible, flexible, flexible." Even when things in the classroom are not going well, she advised going with the flow and remaining calm.

Mary talked about flexibility in terms of her multiple roles as a teacher. Mary cautioned others about becoming early childhood teachers if they aren't willing to assume this flexibility that must accompany these multiple roles:

If you don't want to be a counselor, if you don't want to be another

mother, if you don't want to have other certain professions [roles] that

entail you to do that, when you're teaching with, working with children,

if you just want to go in there and be a child care worker, then don't do it.

Jamie revealed flexibility as a necessary trait in order for her to remain in the profession:

…I have to be totally honest, there were areas where I was comfortable and

didn't want to move on, but if I was going stay in the field of early childhood

education, I had to realize you had to be very flexible. And that one [piece of]

research might find 'A,' and then when someone came along they found out it

could be better or we needed to make a turnaround and increase what we had

[change what we did]. So I had to take the attitude of, whatever comes, go with

the flow.

Jamie further demonstrated her flexibility when she related a story where her center director provided new information in a staff meeting related to preschool block areas. This compelled her to search for some additional information. She in turn made some modifications to her block center almost immediately:

> So I wasted no time. I went in, pulled in more blocks and this morning came in looking for research so I could put in how many [blocks] that's supposed to go for that particular age group and how much more I need to put in or take out. So in dealing with changes, I realize that changes are going to constantly be made to make it better for the children, as well [as] myself.

Ann reinforced this idea when she said, "Whatever happens, you just have to adapt."

These teachers demonstrated flexibility in their ability to use and adapt new information to fit their own unique situations. They persist in working with new information even when it may conflict with their current beliefs and knowledge. They modify new information to fit their specific classroom situations. Jamie thought about new information in relation to how she can expand the things she already does in her classroom. Terri discussed situations where something she tried did not work. I paraphrased what she said by stating, "So it sounds like you try to adapt it [the idea] sometimes if it doesn't work." Terri responded with, "Usually what happens is I'll go to a workshop and they'll be talking about, 'Oh go on and try that.' It didn't work, but let me try it this way." Araceli compared keeping up with professional development to piecing a puzzle together. She said that you have to problem-solve in order to see how new information can fit with what you already know or do. "I think personally you have

to just piece it together yourself.  Because if somebody else does it for you then, I mean,

how are you going to learn from it?"   Patti talked about getting new ideas even from

very old resource books.  Though the information may be old, she finds ways to adapt

ideas to make them work in her current context.  An example she referred to was her

ability to look at craft ideas and turn them into more developmentally appropriate art

activities for young children. Patti also discussed how she adapts early childhood

information and uses it with her own husband.

Lynda viewed herself as an "eclectic educator."  She expressed a belief that

reading as much as possible helps her in the classroom.  She exemplified her flexibility

in adapting curriculum ideas:

> I feel that there is no [one] bible for a good teacher….I feel that…you cannot just
>
> base your classroom teaching one curriculum….I always have this 'to do' list,
>
> always, of things that I need to integrate [into the classroom] because that's
>
> what's working….it's your responsibility to not be stale, to constantly be
>
> growing .

The life trait of flexibility appears to help these teachers in adopting and adapting

new information.  They are not literal in their translation of innovations into practice.

They understand that their specific contexts influence the use of new information.

### Finding Three: Learning Dispositions

These teachers believe in continual learning in respect to both their professional

and their personal lives.  They willingly seek new information.  They value new

knowledge and its application. They value new ideas and understand their own personal

role in implementing new information. They are also people who are deeply introspective and highly reflective. Reflectivity is a necessary element for true learning for these teachers.

<div align="center">Continual Learning</div>

Jamie, Mary, and Edie all have benefited from excellent training opportunities resulting from their affiliation with military schools and childcare facilities. Mary happily viewed her professional development as "…a continuing ride, on and on. It's never ending. So it's going be a forever learning experience." Terri advised that teachers go to as many workshops as they can in order to gain new information. Lynda equated her professional development to that of a physician's:

> It's your responsibility to not be stale, to constantly be growing. I always tell my brother who's a doctor, he's always talking about medicine and this and that. And I told him education is the same way. You cannot go, you cannot stay, you cannot use old trends all of the time….you always have to be innovative….Now, I still use a lot of my ideas that I used twelve years ago, but I've polished them up. I've added new research.

Ann expressed her love of going to school to learn the latest early childhood information. Araceli hoped to continue her education after she earns her Associate's degree. She referenced her enjoyment of gaining new ideas she can in turn adapt for use in her own classroom. Patti talked about the value of keeping all of her textbooks. She enjoys looking through all kinds of resources, no matter how dated they are. She does this with hopes of finding just one idea she can adapt and use. She even enrolled in early

childhood classes although it was not required. Edie advised that teachers should never stop reading. She browses through early childhood textbooks in college bookstores. Claudia equated professional development to driving a car. "It's time consuming, but you're going to get somewhere in the end."

Five of the participants talked about their quests to seek new information in their personal lives. Terri sought information to aid her with marital problems. She also researched financial information to help with family budgeting. Lynda read everything she could find prior to making a decision to have a hysterectomy. Claudia took an interest in homeopathic medicine and proceeded to explore the topic further. Edie sought information about nutrition and exercise after a close friend suggested that she attend more to her health. Jamie realized she had made a mistake when she relented to sales pressure and purchased an unwanted time share. She subsequently researched legal information that helped her cancel the contract without penalty. After the untimely death of her husband, Ann actively sought advice to help determine her future financial options.

These teachers all stressed the importance of attending professional workshops. They also read specialized publications and take classes related to early childhood. Five of the teachers talked about observing others in order to learn new information. Some of the teachers talked about the importance of researching both professional and personal issues that are significant to them.

Mary, Jamie, and Edie all referenced the excellent trainings available to them through the military settings where they currently or formerly have been employed.

Many of the teachers talked about attending local, state, and national conferences for professional development. Often they have to plan and conduct fundraising events within their schools to raise the money for this type of professional development. Most of these teachers recognized that professional memberships are important for their continued development. They spend their own personal money to join organizations such as the National Association for the Education for Young Children.

Jamie discussed the strategy of observing others as a way to learn. In respect to learning something that could help her with her first job of babysitting, she talked about observing at the playground across the street from the home where she worked. "So I used my resources and we went to the park. And [we] participated in activities where people had the knowledge of early childhood education. So I piggy-backed off of what they had." Terri observed classrooms in other childcare centers to help give her new ideas.

Six of the teachers were taking college credit courses at the time they were interviewed. These included courses at the Certificate, Associate's, Bachelor's, and Doctoral levels.

<u>Reflectivity</u>

All of these teachers demonstrated a strong ability for introspection and reflection. They examine their own mental processes. They did not articulate this quality of reflectivity explicitly; rather, it was determined based on their numerous comments which revealed their self-knowledge.

Patti, Ann, Claudia and Araceli discussed their own individual confidence building processes. They viewed themselves as becoming more self-confident over time. This has been facilitated through gaining knowledge and supervisory support. Jamie noted that working with difficult co-workers has helped her to learn more about herself. "And in dealing with them, sometimes I end up seeing some of me too…" She told the story of a co-worker who made inappropriate remarks about her to other classroom teachers in the center where she worked:

So what I did in that situation, I knew that my name was being tarnished but I couldn't say anything, because I would have had to turn around and tarnish them [by doing so] so I held my peace. And I let them go on and on and on. And then eventually, the truth will be revealed.

Mary told a story that illustrated her ability to reflectively self-analyze. She related an instance where she planned a group activity where the children used rhythm sticks. They had used rhythm sticks in the past, but these were *new* rhythm sticks and the music she played had a much faster rhythm than the music she previously used. It was traditional African music:

The kids started going a little fast with it and just going actually really berserk and started hitting the furniture and each other. But the problem was I didn't thoroughly explain to the group what the sticks are for [laughs]. Not for hitting. And so I thought, well I just automatically thought they were going to do rhythm….But these were new sticks, they were a little longer [than those previously used]. And to kids, you really have to be precise in what they do each

time. And I thought, 'Well, they've had rhythm sticks before…' So they started

banging, hitting the furniture, each other, and throwing them. And I thought,

'Now what did I do here? What happened?'

Terri used reflective self-talk in order to avoid the stress that comes with being a

perfectionist. She spent excessive time re-typing handouts in order to make them

perfect. She now uses self-talk to aid her awareness that such revisions may not be

important enough to warrant the extra time. She realized that oftentimes the recipients

look at them only once. Lynda was introspective about her future even as a child. In

relation to her early idea of becoming a veterinarian she said:

> I saw myself having my own office and driving this truck and going to these
>
> farms and checking the horses and everyone calling me…I'd be wearing boots
>
> and this hat. I just had this vision that was going to be me.

Claudia demonstrated her ability to self-analyze when she said, "And I've learned that if

I don't resist, if I go with the flow, then everything will be okay. If I resist and I'm

negative, then that's when nothing will be solved." Ann reflectively identified herself as

an assertive person and as someone on whom others can count. Araceli knew that she is

a person who has to push herself in her college classes. She indicated that for her,

learning does not come easily:

> At first [in school] I was like, you know, I'm not smart. I'm not smart. I'm
>
> okay. I'm not dumb, but I'm not smart…I'm mediocre. And then it got to the
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> point, 'Hey, I've been making all these A's. I'm smart too.' I mean, and in math
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> I made a B. So, I know I'm smart. I can do it I just need to work harder.

These teachers are reflective in how they observe, interpret, and articulate the actions of others. This, in turn, affects the ways they approach other adults. These teachers made many statements that indicated their ability to reflect, understand, and interact well with their peers, parents, and supervisors. They are people who engage in introspection and recognize the effects their own actions have on others. Jamie recognized the importance of establishing positive relationships with her co-workers. She felt this was a necessity prior to trying to change their classroom practices. She said that it is imperative to find some shared elements in the relationship in order to make people more amenable to change. "Because it's about feeling people [out] and building the relationship to [see] what you can and cannot do. And once I found that loophole in the relationship, I stepped in it. Opportunity knocked so I took it." Claudia reflected about the significance of the partnership she has with her co-teacher in the classroom. She recognized that they have totally different personalities and discussed the importance of their relationship:

> This is a partnership. We have to work at it….It's like a marriage. Some days we're going have good days; some days we're going have not so good days. But we just have to keep working. You know, together.

Sandy saw a connection between interpersonal relationships and her desire to try new ideas in the classroom. She discussed the impact of her college teacher's enthusiasm and interest toward her as an individual. She also cited her director's support as a positive influence. "…I mean I guess I'm just susceptible. If they're getting excited about it [new information] then I'm getting excited about it." When asked why she

thinks it's difficult for some of her peers to make changes in their classrooms, Araceli said, "Maybe it's their confidence or maybe it's…they don't have support. I have support."

Ann recognized that she has the confidence to challenge people of authority in relation to child development. She admitted that interpersonally this can be a scary thing to do, and indicated that past college instructors have empowered her. She talked about the importance of having back-up information for support prior to challenging others.

Edie recognized that her peers were able to reverse their thinking in terms of a new math curriculum introduced in her school. She attributed the success of the new curriculum to the introductory approaches used by the school supervisors and trainers. Rather than merely mandating that the curriculum be used, they supported and empowered the teachers. Edie recognized and was able to articulate this process.

Early childhood teachers have contacts with numerous adults on a regular basis. The nature of the interactions in these relationships often requires tact. Eight of the teachers interviewed worked with a co-teacher or teacher assistant. They also often have contact with the parents of the children enrolled in their classrooms. In many instances, the parents visit the classes daily to bring their children and pick them up. Jamie's strategies for working with the younger parents of children enrolled in her current classroom included reflective consideration of the parents. She related an instance where she realized that some of the parents were lacking basic parenting skills and needed to be approached with great care:

Because there were parenting skills that I knew they were missing…simple things. You know a diaper rash…Steps to [take] with a diaper rash…and the parent not knowing. So I knew that I had to regroup my words to make sure that I would not offend the parent, but be a team player with letting the parent lead, but me giving information. And being careful in how I did [it], my attitude…working together for that whole child. So I knew I had to make sure that I was positive and let the parent lead [while] at the same time giving information concerning that particular child.

Claudia emphasized her attempts to approach her teaching assistant in a respectful manner:

I always make sure to respect the other teacher [her assistant] and tell them, 'Look, we're going to do this…Can we work together?' And I explain to them what we're going to do. Or, I always try to keep communication lines open. It doesn't always work. But I try to include the teacher [assistant]…[as] my partner in whatever we do (Claudia).

Lynda said that she has learned to approach her peers with care. She reflected about her lack of success in the past when she tried to assign co-workers specific tasks in writing proposals for new early childhood materials. After careful consideration, she has now decided to use the strategy of logical consequences. Those teachers who contribute to the proposal get materials. Those who don't contribute do not. Mary discussed a breathing strategy she now uses to help her handle difficult situations when interacting with co-workers. She wants to make sure she is calm and composed in order to be

effective in problem situations. Terri reflected how she appreciates a democratic process when decisions among co-workers are needed. Ann thought about her communication strategies before approaching other teachers to implement changes. Araceli discussed how she thinks about her strategies prior to approaching conflict with others:

> Okay, personally…I've changed myself, like on how I express myself towards…other co-workers and how to deal with conflict and things like that. I try to keep it professional and I think that's a lot of work. Because …it's too easy to get upset. It's so easy to just blurt out anything but it's harder to think and know how to say it without getting on the defensive side.

Patti talked about considering the importance of communication style when approaching others about making changes:

> …I did work at a place where there was conflict because the lady was not willing to change and this other teacher, they were at each other's throats constantly, almost because one wouldn't do [something] and the other wanted to do [it]. And I was hearing all of this and seeing [it]. It was the way she went about it. She didn't present it to the other teacher as if the other teacher had any knowledge of, or reason behind [what she did]…It was 'I want to do it this way and I want to change it.' I think it made the other one feel unworthy….She came across kind of rough.

Edie has learned from her current supervisors and the positive manner they model when approaching the teachers in her school. Rather than forcing change, they empower the teachers to make the changes themselves.

These teachers think prior to initiating change.  Precipitously, they try to connect new information with what they already know or do.  They are willing to entertain information that may be dissonant to what they already practice.  Mary discussed the visual strategy of webbing as a mechanism to tie new information to her current knowledge.  This helps her clearly see the type of changes she wants to implement. Terri told the story of modifying what she was already doing in terms of the journals kept by her kindergarten children.  As she learned more information about journaling, she refined her actions and instructions to the children.  Terri and Sandy indicated that it may take more than just one exposure to a new idea to be motivated to the stage of implementation.  Lynda used her knowledge of young children to analyze the commercial curricula provided to her in the public school.  Even though these curricula are often provided in accordance with mandates from the Texas Education Association, she does not immediately accept them at face value:

> I like to dissect my curriculums.  I like to know what I need to be doing [and] what else is supplemental that I can use.  So I start dissecting the curriculum…the science [for example.  That's fairly new.  They [administration] just gave us these books but it didn't have [accompanying] picture cards….So I started just adding more to modify it….Because I felt the curriculum was very choppy.  I always wonder, 'Who writes these things?'

Araceli understood that it is difficult to use new ideas without modifying them to fit her own situation.  She thought about how she can make new ideas work for her:

You just have to brainstorm an idea, you know? Or use it and see if it works.  If it

doesn't work, either you can modify it or not use it.  Maybe it's not appropriate

for them [the current class of children with whom you are working].  Maybe

they're not ready.  Maybe I need to research it more. Maybe I am not getting the

whole picture.

Patti talked about her willingness to try an idea more than once.  She recognized

her role in the implementation of new information:

I'm always open to trying things in the classroom.…I'll try something again two

or three times to see if maybe sometimes I interpreted it wrong [or] that I need to

re-look at, well maybe you're executing this in the wrong way, you

know…because this is supposed to work.

Claudia spoke about investigating the credibility of the source of new

information.  She is willing to try new information if the source appears credible to her.

When evaluating workshop presenters, she considers the amount and types of experience

of the person.  Ann said that when she introduces change in the classroom she carefully

considers her approach to the children.  She also addresses the effects that the changes

may have on parents and other staff members.

These teachers are continually learning.  They are reflective in their practices and

interactions. These learning dispositions are intertwined with their abilities to implement

change.

**Summary**

In summary, the research question is *why are some teachers quick to adopt innovative early childhood classroom practices?* Ten early childhood teachers were identified and interviewed. These teachers worked in diverse early childhood settings. They had various amounts of formal and informal education. The findings pointed to three major constructs that define these teachers in terms of the research question. All three of these constructs focused on internal characteristics of the individuals. All three of these findings identified some of what Fullan (1999) referred to as tacit knowledge; that is, the skills and beliefs that exist below the surface. The individual contexts that shaped these teachers' ability to take new information and translate it into practices in their classrooms were analyzed for common elements. The attitudes and traits that helped these teachers conceptualize and make changes in their classrooms were identified. One of the three findings relates to their core moral values in relation to their roles as early childhood teachers. They viewed their work as a truly moral endeavor. All of these teachers demonstrated genuine concern for children and others with whom they have contact in their profession. Connected to the moral focus of their work, is a spiritual connection with their profession.

The second major finding focused on the character traits they shared. These are qualities that these teachers seem to cultivate in their jobs in regard to people, challenges, and new information. They included a positive attitude, persistence, and flexibility.

The final major finding identified some of these teachers' learning dispositions. Two primary elements contributed to these teachers' tendencies to implement changes in their classrooms. Every one of them viewed themselves as continual learners. They understood that they must constantly learn in order to be effective in the classroom. They realized that information that can help them in the classroom is in a steady state of flux. They were aware that they will be better teachers if they continually engage in their own professional development. Along with continual learning, they were also highly reflective. They engaged in reflective introspection as a metacognitive strategy. As Paolo Freire (1994) said, the ultimate purpose of education (i.e. learning) is practical application. Such practical application results in what Freire called *praxis*. These teachers engaged in praxis. They take action based on new information. They reflect with reference to their actions, and they make changes to their actions based on those reflections.

Grouped together the three findings influence the likelihood that these teachers adopt new information in to practice. These traits represent three areas of thinking and action. A Möbius loop can be used to represent the professional identities for the teachers who participated in this study. A Möbius loop is most commonly used as the three-arrow symbol for recycling. It is based on the geometric Möbius strip which is characterized as a loop that can be shown to have only one continuous side and one edge. The core moral values form one of the three continuous arrows that comprise the Möbius loop. The character traits represent another arrow. The learning dispositions signify the final arrow. These factors, taken together, ultimately form the continuous,

internal components that affect the early adoption actions of these teachers. Encircling

the loop is a ring that represents the continuousness of new knowledge. The new

knowledge is taken in and turned into classroom practices. The classroom practices may

in turn be modified by more new information.

In the next chapter, the findings from this study are connected to the existing

research. Suggestions are made for using this grounded theory to enhance early

childhood teacher training activities.

## CHAPTER V

## SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This basic qualitative study relates the internal constructions of ten early childhood teachers to their desire and inclination to make innovative changes in their classroom practices. The participants were all women who work in early childhood settings in San Antonio, Texas. For the term, "innovative practices" I used Roger's definition referring to information, ideas, or concepts that are relatively new to the individual (Rogers, 2003). As demonstrated in a review of the current literature, a teacher's internal landscape affects the likelihood that one will be amenable to change in their classroom practices. While there exists a wealth of research related to K-12 public school teachers, there is a paucity of research relevant specifically to early childhood teachers and the change process. Early childhood teachers cannot be understood in the same context as their colleagues at other levels of education. The skills demanded of them and the conditions and settings in which they work differ markedly from K-12 public school teachers. Research specific to this population is absolutely necessary in order to improve early childhood programs. Understanding how early adopters among early childhood teachers view themselves in relation to their responses to new information is invaluable. Such insight sheds light on ways to appreciate and approach those early childhood teachers and students in teacher training programs who may not fit the profile of early adopters of innovative practices.

The teachers in this study were purposefully selected for interviews; they were identified as teachers who were in the forefront in adopting new ideas in comparison to

other early childhood teachers (Rogers, 2003). This study focused specifically on teachers who work with children in two-through-six-year-old age groups and represent a variety of early care and education settings. These interviewees work with pre-kindergarten and kindergarten aged children. They were drawn from public school kindergarten classrooms, Protestant church-sponsored early childhood centers, a Jewish Community Center early childhood school, a Head Start Center, a military based child development center, and a community college early childhood lab school. These non-public school settings are all nationally accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children or meet equivalent Head Start standards.

I consulted early childhood colleagues in the local community to identify participants who were early adopters of innovative practices in the classroom. The range of formal education encompassed by the teachers is quite broad. Seven teachers had either earned, or were working toward their Associate's in Applied Sciences degree. One of the seven was working on her Bachelor's degree. The other three teachers already had Master's degrees.

Ultimately, the critical beneficiaries of this research are young children. The immediate purpose of this study was to understand *why* certain early childhood education teachers take new information garnered from workshops, coursework, or other educational venues and incorporate it quickly into their teaching. The current research focused ultimately on what Cuban (1992) called "first-order change." First-order change is designed to make what already exists more efficient without necessarily trying to modify an entire organizational structure. Using the interpretive paradigm as well as the

ideological framework of constructivism, I was able to derive a grounded theory in response to the research question. The findings of this study indicated that early childhood teachers who possess specific core values, character traits, and learning dispositions are likely to be early adopters of innovative practices in their classrooms.

These values, traits, and dispositions, taken as a group, increase the likelihood that early childhood teachers will incorporate new information and techniques into their classroom practices. Three areas of thinking and action are represented. First, the participants express values and have a definite vocational outlook that is indicative of their moral feelings and actions toward their jobs as early childhood teachers. Second, they have certain ways or patterns which inform both their lives and their work. I call these their character traits. They manifest a positive attitude, they are persistent, and they are flexible. Finally, their learning dispositions share two common elements. They perceive and practice learning as a continual, on-going, process. In addition, they earnestly reflect on what they have learned and on their past practices.

### Summary of Findings

The findings of this study focus on tacit factors shared by these teachers. I have identified internal values, traits, and dispositions that affect their propensity to readily make changes in their classrooms. Fullen (2001) stated that the secret to success in schools in implementing change may be the ability to convert tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge on an ongoing basis. Personal qualities form an essential part of the entire mosaic that characterizes effective teachers. The three major dispositions that

emerged as findings are discussed below. Literature supporting these findings is highlighted.

<div align="center">Core Values</div>

Hansen (1998) examined the etymology of the word *vocation*. It has its origins in the Latin word *vocare*, which means "to call." Initially, it was used both in religious and secular traditions to represent a calling to a particular way of life. This may be a call from God, or it may be of a more secular nature, as in a call to serve others in one's society. Therefore, Hansen says, one's "vocation," one's calling, should inform one's life and give it genuine meaning. Such meaning is clearly evident in the core values that emerged in the interviews with these ten teachers, all of whom share a moral outlook towards their profession. The moral nature of teaching was noted as long ago as the time of Plato and Aristotle (Hansen, 2001). This discourse on the combined nature of morality and teaching has continued throughout history. Although the teachers in this study did not always use the word "moral" to describe their vocation, the data analysis indicated that each of them described their work in moral terms. Hansen (1998) noted that teaching is a moral endeavor. The morality of teaching springs from the nature of the work itself rather than from the externally imposed actions of teachers. He stipulated that the moral and intellectual dimensions of teaching go hand in hand. Fullan (1999) referred to the roles teachers play in societal development. He said that "…those engaged in societal development are those engaged in the evolution of virtue" (p.84). Teachers are uniquely situated to significantly influence how children think and act (Bainbridge, 2000). Vandenberg (1990) cited the writings of Romano Guardini. In 1959

Guardini said that *who* the teacher is has more impact on the child than *what* the teacher

does or says.  Vandenberg posited that if this is the case, the younger the child, the more

far reaching is the effect of the personality of the teacher.  Early childhood teachers often

bear the responsibility for a child's very first experience in group care and education

settings. The implicit moral values of early childhood teachers in relation to their

profession must be made explicit and examined.  Teachers must be guided to examine

their values in terms of how they may affect their pedagogical practices.  It is essential

that the moral nature of the work be emphasized.

Six of these teachers overtly referenced a spiritual connection to their work.

They talked about a higher power, and some of them referred directly to their connection

to God.  The other four teachers indicated a sense of spirituality through the deep

passion they have for their work.  They also made statements that demonstrated self

confidence and a profound faith in their selves.  Bainbridge (2000) noted that "…a

recurring theme of having faith in oneself underlines the individual response to the

spiritual" (p.167).  In some professional writings related to teacher development, the

spiritual dimension of education includes discussions of morality.  Fullan (1999) referred

to "moral purpose in teaching as the spiritual dimension of education" (p. 81).  One

definition of the human spirit refers to a "person's mental or moral nature or qualities"

(Sykes, 1984, p. 1023). Bainbridge (2000) discussed the links between spirituality and

morality based on findings from his research of 1,195 pre-service teachers in England.

In his research conclusions, he cautioned that more study and reflection are needed for a

truly developed view of the spiritual dimension of teachers.  While acknowledging

multiple definitions, Tischler, Biberman, and McKeage (2002) referred to spirituality in an emotional sense and related it to behaviors such as being giving, open, and compassionate. In other words, they examined traits and behaviors that people often view as evocative of "holiness." They attempted to link spirituality with emotional intelligence (discussed in the next section), and concluded that the development of one's spirituality is both attainable and at the same time is an excellent indicator of workplace effectiveness. In his review of leadership literature, Creighton (1999) cited the importance of what he labeled "spiritual traits" such as a person's character, morals, beliefs, emotions, and values as necessary compliments to other, more tangible and objective, competencies. The teachers in the current study are leaders in making changes in their practices. Teacher preparation and professional development programs can help other practicing and pre-service teachers explicitly reveal their own sense of spirituality and examine how that relates to effectiveness in the classroom.

These teachers share a genuinely caring attitude towards others. While the clearest and most evident proof of this is their attitude towards young children, this attitude extends towards many others with whom they come into professional contact. They referenced caring actions towards colleagues, towards parents of the children enrolled in their classrooms, and toward pre-service teachers. As Noddings (2001) pointed out, many may think of the concept of *caring teachers* as superfluous or unrelated to the more central intellectual emphasis of meeting standards and competencies. She ultimately looked at *caring* as a way of being in the world. This is a characteristic that is fundamentally intrinsic and deeply important to most helping

professions. Noddings said that a person who truly cares wants the best for someone and reflects that in their actions. This includes the teacher who is preparing students to meet specified standards. In reference to teachers she said, "However, it is clear that caring implies a continuous drive for competence. In the virtue sense, it refers to a person who continually strives for the competence required to respond adequately to the recipients of care" (2001, p.101). Caring should not be viewed merely as a "warm fuzzy" (Noddings, 2001), a luxury that should only be addressed if there is time left over from the competency-based curriculum. Noddings cited numerous studies that show how modeling care and concern towards teachers encourages these same behaviors towards their students. Without exception, the participants in the present study spoke of people in their lives such as relatives, teachers, and direct supervisors who model care and concern towards them. Such caring behavior includes listening, consideration, understanding, recognition of student individuality, encouragement, enthusiasm, and an overall love of others. It is advantageous for early childhood teachers, administrators, and teacher educators to model caring interactions with children, parents, and co-workers. The concept of caring can be problematic in a current historical context where caring is still often viewed as a distinctly feminine trait. We live in a time when the traditionally female-dominated profession of teaching is striving desperately for more voice and respect. Be that as it may, this research as well as a great deal of previous findings indicate that caring remains a vital teacher quality.

Character Traits

These ten teachers share three major character traits.  These are traits that the participants appear to cultivate; they are not necessarily characteristics that have always been a natural part of their personas.  Every one of the participants made strong statements indicating a *positive disposition.*  According to Hargreaves  (1998), "Good teaching is charged with positive emotion" (p. 835). The word "optimism" is associated with a positive disposition.  The Oxford Dictionary (Sykes, 1984) includes as one of its definitions of optimism, "hopeful disposition, and inclination to take favourable views" (p. 716).  These teachers were handpicked for this study based on their willingness and ability to adopt new ideas for use in their early childhood classrooms. Consequently, it is no surprise that the statements of all ten teachers indicate a positive orientation toward new ideas.  They feel an in-service class or workshop has been beneficial even when they are exposed to just one new idea.  Their interviews also illustrate that these teachers feel positive about their abilities to influence both children and other teachers.  Even though their work is often emotionally and physically taxing, they tend to stay focused on positive outcomes.

Daniel Goleman (1995) wrote extensively on the concept of emotional intelligence (EQ) and noted the necessity of optimism for high EQ.  He argued that even though one source of optimism may be the persons' inborn temperament, experiences influence the ultimate outcome for this trait.  A second personality trait that I found to be part of these teachers' internal constructs is *persistence*.  Goleman referred to persistence, or the willingness to keep trying even in the face of challenge and failure, as

a reflection of optimism. The possibility of altering traits that appear to be inborn has been, and continues to be, of keen interest to researchers. Goleman (1995) cited Jerome Kagan's longitudinal research, beginning with very young children and following them through school, which demonstrated how temperament could indeed be influenced by experience. Goleman referenced studies that point to the actual physical alteration of adult brains through "systematic emotional learning" in order to change their emotional patterns (p. 225).   The extent to which emotional patterns are mutable is still a debatable topic for research (Dulewicz & Higgs, 1999). Goleman discussed the concept of *self-efficacy* as an integral component of optimism and persistence. This is the belief that one has some control over their life and can indeed affect outcomes.  These ten teachers understand, in relation to their work with children, that they have control over their attitudes toward new ideas, towards children, and toward other people with whom they come in contact. They make a conscious decision to be positive.  They choose to be persistent.

Researchers have long attempted to develop standardized self-reported measurement scales of emotional intelligence (Dulewicz & Higgs, 1999).  Dulewicz and Higgs discussed the work of Fischer who pointed out the difficulty of establishing such self-measures.  Simply put, it is very difficult for people to accurately perceive how others view them.  In reviewing studies of measures of emotional intelligence, and conducting their own research on MBA candidates, Dulewicz and Higgs concluded that measurements of emotional intelligence can best be used to aid in personal reflection. Personal reflection helps development and indeed impacts work success.  Tishler,

Biberman, and McKeage (2002) further related emotional intelligence to two of Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences: interpersonal and intrapersonal. Interpersonal intelligence is indicative of ones abilities for interacting with other people. Intrapersonal intelligence focuses on the extent of an individual's self-knowledge (Brualdi, 1996).

College educators and professional development personnel who work with early childhood teachers have a responsibility to address the salient character traits of positive attitude and persistence. It is essential that we incorporate teacher training activities that encourage participants to be more aware of these implicit traits. We can help them become aware of how these traits may influence their own effectiveness in teaching young children.

The final character trait identified in this research is *flexibility*. Many of the participants specifically identified this trait as an absolute necessity for an effective early childhood teacher who is open to change. Synonyms for "flexible" are "adaptable" and "versatile" (Sykes, 1984). One needs only to look at the table of contents in the National Association for the Education of Young Children's Accreditation Criteria and Procedures (1998) to get a feel for the multiple roles of early childhood teachers. Effective early childhood teachers must juggle interactions with children, with families, with other staff members. They deal with curriculum, learning environments (both indoors and out), health, safety and nutrition standards, evaluation issues, and professional development. Clearly, human beings are not always predictable. Working with a ratio of one teacher to ten children, or even 1-24 children for many kindergarten teachers, is a challenge that demands flexibility. In this study, some of the teachers

interviewed cited their ability to take new information and adapt it into what they already know.  They considered ways to integrate new information into their own context. They recognized the necessity of altering their mental structures to align new pieces of information into their classroom practices.  Students who are products of traditional public schooling where performance is often measured objectively often find that this is a difficult skill to address.  Many community college students view knowledge as objective rather than as constructive in nature. Studies show that learners who view knowledge as complex and dependent on context are more likely to engage in conceptual change than are learners who view knowledge as simply and unequivocally true.  Fromberg, (1997) cited research by Hofstadter who maintained that a significant trait of professionals contrasted with technicians is their ability to approach information with "pattern sensitivity."  The professional is able to assess and plan by flexibly considering and employing a broad range of alternatives.  This means that it is imperative that teacher educators of early childhood personnel must develop and utilize strategies that encourage and inculcate flexible thinking.

<div align="center">Learning Dispositions</div>

Teachers' ways of knowing have been specifically researched for more than twenty years (Munby, Russell, and Martin, 2001).  They cited the writings of Maxine Greene who said that it is very difficult to understand *how* to translate teacher's ways of knowing into specific guidelines for practice. Because so much of teacher knowledge is tacit, it is rarely brought to the surface.

Through analyzing these interviews, I identified two learning dispositions. First, these teachers understand and value learning as a continual activity necessary for growth and change in the early childhood profession. They acknowledge the benefits of continual professional development. They engage in both formal and informal education to help them improve upon their knowledge base. They understand that knowledge is constantly changing. The second learning disposition shared by these teachers is reflectivity. They are reflective and introspective in relation to their practices and interactions. Though the current research (along with most research on teachers' ways of knowing) does not identify exactly *how* these teachers gained these cognitive dispositions, it does indicate the importance and need for it to be addressed in early childhood teacher education. Munby et al. (2001) reviewed highlights of the past twenty years of research related to teacher's knowledge and how it develops. They reinforced the complexity of tacit teacher knowledge, as was indeed evidenced in Chapter II of this dissertation. Their research demonstrated that teacher educators are not modeling the constructivist concept of learning. They are not addressing pre-service and in-service teacher's existing knowledge and beliefs as they relate to instructional practices and the learners whom they teach. Most teacher educators still operate on the "do as I say, not as I do" principle of teaching. "The obvious implication is how teachers learn in university classrooms does make a difference in terms of teachers' knowledge and their understanding of that knowledge. Until learning experiences in university settings evolve to match our understanding of situated cognition, the development of teachers' knowledge will continue to be problematic" (Munby et al., p. 894). In order to

emphasize the importance of continual learning and reflective practices for teachers of young children, early childhood teacher educators must model and reinforce those learning schemes in their professional development activities.

## Theoretical Implications

All the participants in the study are early childhood teachers who work in San Antonio, Texas, which is an urban, multicultural city. A definite trend is seen in relation to internal attributes they shared in conjunction with their propensities to make changes in their practices as early childhood teachers. These ten women are from differing cultural and educational backgrounds yet they share common internal constructions that help define their responses to innovative information. Their engagement of these values, traits, and dispositions, combined with learning and incorporating new early childhood information into their classroom practices, is significant. These tendencies contribute to their ability to translate innovative information into practice. Figure 2 shows a conceptual model of these influences.

According to Browning and Hatch (1995), very little qualitative research has been done in the field of early childhood. That reality has probably changed somewhat over the ensuing nine years. However, this is indeed one of the very few studies that have been undertaken with early childhood teachers in regard to their responses to change. It provides a window to their internal constructions that relate to this phenomenon. The theoretical basis for making teachers' tacit knowledge explicit is well established. This study adds to that theoretical base specifically by relating it to early childhood practitioners.
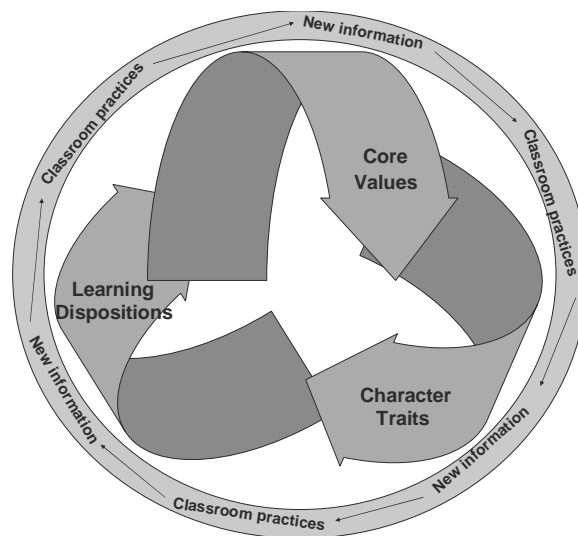
Fig. 2. Conceptual model of the internal constructions associated with the early adoption of new information**.**

These findings contribute to the existing research of both change and effective teaching. The literature search in Chapter II revealed several thematic threads. First, effective teaching is a complex job. Second, the change process is also complex. Next, change is a quality of effective teachers and some teachers are more amenable to change than others. Fourth, change comes in different orders of magnitude. Fifth, teachers have long been neglected in the research as major players in the change process. Similarly, they have rarely been taught to engage in their own action research in terms of implementing new information. Such classroom-based research entails a continual cycle of action, reflection, and action. Next, personal affective qualities contribute to a teacher's effectiveness. And finally, teacher education must improve. The current study reinforces these themes, and it provides particulars in respect to early childhood teachers.

This study parallels findings of previous teacher knowledge research that has been done with K-12 grade teachers, both in the United States and in other countries. It supports models of change that focus on biographical or human resource qualities. These perspectives of change consider one's frame of reference in terms of individual belief systems and how those impact the change process. This research also supports Fullan's (1999) highly respected change theory. He postulated that all systems, from the schoolhouse to the statehouse, need to consider three major forces as they address change: political, intellectual, and spiritual. The present study supports the spiritual and intellectual dimensions of teaching. Teachers must explicitly be aware of the moral purpose of the field. They must also realize and act upon the power of their intellects as they contemplate the use of new knowledge. It is essential that all three forces be addressed and fused in order to initiate and maintain true change.

This research supports change theories that accentuate the importance of reflective abilities. Considering one's values and beliefs in relationship to new information is necessary to facilitate change. Numerous theories reference constructivism and metacognition along with the social and educational environments in which teachers operate. These elements are critical to consider in moving toward change.

Fromberg (1997) developed a working definition of professionalism for early childhood personnel. She suggested this as a template to help early childhood personnel work towards professionalism of the field. The present research reinforces two of the six components outlined in her definition. One of the components involves the ethical

nature of the early childhood profession. Fromberg said that ethical considerations must be an integral part of teacher preparation, standards, and ongoing practices. It is not enough to teach ethical practices. We must also help early childhood pre-service and in-service personnel uncover the ethics of specific practices in relation to their own philosophical and sociocultural points of reference. The *core values* finding in the current study identifies the significance of moral purpose, caring, and spirituality. This pertains to Fromberg's premise. A second component of the professionalism of early childhood suggests that teachers must have a high level of expertise without which our society may suffer (Fromberg, 1997). Such expertise includes much more than technical knowledge of specific early childhood practices. It includes the ability to continually learn and reflect upon the range of possibilities for new information. Early childhood teachers must acquire "a repertoire of alternative strategies and tactics" are to be true professionals (Fromberg, p. 201). The *learning dispositions* identified in this study reinforce this piece of Fromberg's definition.

The findings of this research further support the dispositional theory put forth by Katz and Raths (1985). They identified integral dispositions for effective early childhood teachers, one of which is that of innovator. My findings delineate some specific traits of innovative early childhood teachers.

### Implications and Recommendations for Practice

The specific behavior that I investigated in this study is the ability to willingly make changes in the early childhood classroom based on new information gained through a myriad of professional development avenues. In order for change to be

intentional, the learner must have a specific and conscious goal orientation towards truly learning and understanding new material that may be in conflict with their existing framework of knowledge (Sinatra & Pintrich, 2003). The goal of schooling is to foster change in thinking and therefore the idea of intentional conceptual change is critical and needs to be considered in pedagogical practices. I identified specific core values, character traits, and learning dispositions that support the behavior of making first order changes. Therefore, it is necessary that these internal characteristics be addressed in training opportunities for early childhood teachers. Early childhood teacher educators must guide students in investigating these dispositions.

Reflective practices in teacher education are frequently given lip-service. Huberman (1993) did an extensive study involving 160 teachers over eight years. In response to fundamental reflective questions regarding such things as their pedagogical mastery levels, relationship to their institutions, and the influence of their personal histories on their jobs, several teachers responded, "Well, I've never thought about those things before" (p. 262). It seems that although their primary job is to guide children in their development and learning, teachers do not readily reflect on their own situations in the context of their professional development. Therefore, it is essential that teacher educators and professional development consultants assist them in accomplishing such reflection. Specific tools must be developed and/or combined with currently available devices and evaluated in order to translate the findings of the current research into usable, substantiated practices. Such field testing can best be initiated through action research in the classroom (Burkhardt & Schoenfeld, 2004). These authors stated that too

often educational research, such as this study, does not result in practical application and follow-up.

There are already tools available that help teachers assess some of their internal qualities such as those found in this study, but the extent of their field testing is not often evident. I refer specifically to the Teacher Skills Checklist included in the recent publication, *Qualities of Effective Teachers* (Stonge, 2002, p. 71). This book was widely distributed to members of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD). ASCD is a nationally and internationally recognized organization that provides extensive services to educators, pre-kindergarten through grade 12. The checklist is the result of a synthesis of research on effective teachers. For example, the quality of *caring for students* is translated into specific observable behaviors by the author. Instruments such as this can be located, reviewed for research and development measures, and used as a starting point to address internal constructions such as those found in this study.

The results of this research now necessitate classroom-based action research to facilitate such reflection. This can be accomplished in three ways. First, expose our college students to research studies related to these *core values, character traits, and learning dispositions*. Help students investigate the relationship of these values, traits and learning dispositions to early childhood teaching. Provide thoughtfully designed activities that encourage the students to construct meaning of this type of research. Second, develop activities that enable students to become familiar with their own internal constructions in regard to these values, traits, and dispositions. Third, teacher

educators and professional development specialists must consistently model these values, traits, and dispositions in the classroom context for their adult students. These actions can all be studied in terms of their effects on change in behavior.

Finally, I plan to develop a plan which can encourage and assist my fellow community college colleagues in incorporating activities related to these results into all of our departmental classes. It is critical that all of us work to insure that these tacit traits of core values, character traits, and learning dispositions are brought to the surface. We already encourage practices such as writing across the curriculum and developmentally appropriate practices across the curriculum. Now we need to implement genuine reflective thinking across the early childhood curriculum in relation to the dimensions identified in this study.

### Recommendations for Future Research

A practical avenue of future research could involve working with early childhood program directors in terms of investigating the findings of the current study. After all, the success of their programs relies heavily on the actions of their teachers. Oftentimes in hiring interviews, questions are asked of teacher candidates that relate to curriculum, classroom management skills, and developmental knowledge of children. Questions could be devised that attempt to uncover some of the tacit qualities identified in this study. The fact that the eight non-public school teachers I interviewed are employed in nationally accredited early childhood centers was not planned. A comparative investigation of the traits identified in the current research for those teachers employed

in settings meeting national accreditation standards and teachers in non-accredited centers would also be useful.

This study focused on first order changes where participants were fairly autonomous in deciding what, and how, changes would be implemented in their classrooms. Research would be valuable that focuses on the internal constructions of early childhood teachers who willingly accept more systemic second order changes. Previous research has identified some of the systemic processes that prove to be helpful in accomplishing such larger change. The field could also benefit from studies that identify the internal constructions of teachers who willingly take part in such change.

Encouraging early childhood teachers to be change agents must be an ongoing process that ought to be incorporated into all courses and professional development activities. Much may be lost in teacher training programs if personal constructs such as those identified in this study are not incorporated along with formalized skills and theoretical training. Too often, even after extensive coursework, early childhood teachers do not recognize the impact of their own internal constructions on their classroom actions. By devising ways to address the core values, character traits, and learning dispositions identified in this study we will increase the likelihood of positively influencing the development of professional early childhood teachers. Again, the ultimate beneficiaries are children. "Educational change depends on what teachers do and think—it's as simple and as complex as that" (Fullan, 2001 p. 115).

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# APPENDIX A

## Interview Guide

I.   Early Childhood Career

A.   What got you interested or involved in the field of early childhood education?

B.   What is your educational background?

C.   How many years of experience do you have in the field?

D.   How do you envision yourself professionally 5-10 years from now?

II.  Change

Tell me about how you keep up with developments in the field.

A.   Reflect about some specific information—from a workshop, a discussion, something you read, a course, etc.—that caused you to make changes in your teaching during the past year.

B.   Can you tell me about some changes you've made in your teaching during the past year that you feel good about?

C.   Tell me how making changes in your teaching affects you.

D.   Tell me how making changes in your teaching affects others.

E.   Can you tell me any stories related to earlier times in your life when you made significant changes (any type of changes) based on new information?

F.   Can you tell me about a time when making a change has had a negative impact for you?

G.   What advice do you have for teachers or teacher educators in regard to making changes in their teaching based on research?

H.   Metaphors:       Working with young children is like…because

Making changes in my classroom is like…because

Keeping up with professional development is like…because

(added 7/11/02) How do you view your role as an ECH teacher?

# APPENDIX B

**Coding Families, Major Themes, Categories, and Sub-Categories**

Key:

<u>CODING FAMILIES</u>

**Major Themes**

*CATEGORIES*

*Sub-categories*

Explanation:  The largest units of data are the <u>CODING FAMILIES.</u>  Each coding family contains **Major Themes.**  Major themes may contain smaller units of data called *CATEGORIES.*  Categories may contain smaller units of data called S*ub-categories.*

<u>SETTING/CONTEXT CODES</u>

**Background information**

*ETHNICITY*
*YEARS OF EXPERIENCE IN EARLY CHILDHOD*
*EDUCATION*
*CURRENT WORK SETTING*
*AGE GROUP OF CHILDREN*

**Why they are in the Early Childhood Profession**

<u>SITUATION CODES:  WORLD VIEWS</u>

**Ideals that matter**

*EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHING AS A MORAL ENDEAVOR*

*Do the right thing*
*Be the best you can*
*Young children deserve the best*

*GENUINE CONCERN FOR OTHERS*

*For children*
*For other people*

*THE VALUE OF CONTINUAL LEARNING*

*Importance of professional learning*

*Value of learning in one's personal life*

*A RELIGIOUS AND/OR SPIRITUAL OREINTAION*

*Spiritual growth in the context of organized religion*
*Spiritual growth in general*

**Shared Personality Traits**

*POSITIVE DISPOSITION*

*Professionally*
*Personally*

*PERSISTENCE*

*Professionally*
*Personally*

*FLEXIBILITY*

PARTICIPANT'S WAYS OF THINKING ABOUT PEOPLE, SELF, AND IDEAS

**Their View of Others**

*MENTORS AND POSITIVE INFLUENCES*

*INTERPERSONAL UNDERSTANDING*

**Their View of Themselves**

*AS INTROSPECTIVE*

*AS PEOPLE WHO CAN INFLUENCE OTHERS*

**Their View of New Ideas and Change**
*AS ADAPTABLE*

*AS POSITIVE*

*AS MAKING LIFE EASIER*

STRATEGIES FOR DEALING WITH OTHERS, GETTING NEW INFORMATION, AND MAKING CHANGES

**For Dealing With Others**

*WITH CARE AND CONSIDERATION*

*TEAMWORK*

**For Getting New Information**

**For Making Changes**

SIGNIFICANT LIFE EVENTS

**Between Participants**

*FUTURE GOAL ORIENTATION*

**Individual Cohesiveness**

*THE CONCEPT OF VOICE*

RELATIONSHIP AND SOCIAL CODES
**Workplace Relationships and Social Codes**

*TAKE A STAND*

*SUPERVISORY SUPPORT*

*COOPERATION*

**Personal Relationships and Social Codes**
*TAKE A STAND*

*GET INFORMATION TO PROBLEM-SOLVE*

# VITA
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Education

Texas A&M University
*Ph.D., Educational Human Resource Development, 2004*

Old Dominion University
*M.S., Special Education, 1981*

University of North Carolina at Greensboro
*B.A., Psychology, 1972*

Honors

Community College Consortium of the University of Michigan - Honorable Mention:
Faculty Recognition Award, 1995

National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD) – University of
Texas at Austin, Teaching Excellence Award, 1991

San Antonio College – Teaching Excellence Award, 1990

Experience

San Antonio College – San Antonio, Texas
*Associate Professor*
*Child Development*
*January, 1983 to Present*

Framingham State College – Framingham, Massachusetts
*Adjunct Faculty, Overseas Master of Education Program*
*July, 1990 to August, 1996*

Project Any Baby Can – San Antonio, Texas
*Case Manager*
*July, 1982 to January, 1983*

Old Dominion University, Norfolk, Virginia
*Coordinator, Technical Assistance Center-5 for Early Childhood Special Education*
*July, 1978 to July, 1982*