CHILD CARE DIRECTORS’ PERCEPTIONS OF CHILD CARE
AND THE THIRTY-MILLION-WORD GAP: A STUDY IN LEADERSHIP

By
Karen K Rossi

A DISSERTATION IN PRACTICE

Submitted to the faculty of the Graduate School of Creighton University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Interdisciplinary Leadership

Omaha, Nebraska
July 14, 2016
Copyright © 2016 by Karen K Rossi.

The reproduction, transmission, or distribution of this dissertation in any form or by any means is prohibited. For permission please contact Karen K Rossi at krossi47@cox.net.
This grounded theory study sought to understand childcare directors’ perceptions of caring for young children, and to identify issues not addressed previously in the literature review. This research took place at privately owned childcare facilities in the suburbs of a mid-western city. Interviews were conducted with childcare directors. Saturation was reached at 20 interviews. One additional interview with a childcare grant-funded resource person was conducted for triangulation. Rev.com transcribed the interviews. Transcriptions were manually coded by the researcher to identify topics and themes that built a grounded theory, supported by the literature review. There were six themes of expressed concerns that emerged from the interviews: director roles; hiring, motivation & retention; child education; director in-service; staff in-service; and mission or philosophy. Following the analysis of the findings, a potential gap emerged. There is an identified need to intercede with comprehensive leadership training for childcare directors, in order to more successfully address the 30-million-word gap and other issues affecting the preparation of children in childcare. Implications of this study affect preparation of childcare directors. A simple framework of topics and concepts to be addressed was presented.
Dedication

I would not have completed this program without the unselfish support and encouragement of my son, Brian. Even though Brian was seriously ill, he insisted I take time for my homework, engaged in conversation with me about my courses, and celebrated every “A.” I dedicate this to Brian’s memory.

I also dedicate this to my five grandchildren, Corbett, Jack, Madelyn, Ben, and Sam. I want each of you to remember, you can achieve anything with a goal, a plan, a cheerleader, and unwavering determination.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the members of my committee for their support during the writing of this dissertation. Even though Dr. Isabelle Cherney and Dr. Peggy Hawkins had both begun new adventures, Dr. Cherney to a new and exciting professional challenge, and Dr. Hawkins to her much deserved retirement, they were always readily available to answer questions and provide advice. I also would like to thank my Advisor, Dr. Gretchen Oltman for her support throughout the program. To all of you, your excellence and generosity are examples of the spirit of Magis.

I would like to thank the childcare directors who agreed to participate in this study. I am grateful to each of you for your time and thoughts. I have renewed respect for what you do during, what are always, very busy days.

Thank you to my daughters, Nicole and Jennifer, for your patience with the long days and nights when I was unavailable to you, your children, your dog, and your fish. I missed all my “Nana” hugs and kisses.

Thank you to Charlie for your steadfast belief I could accomplish this life goal.

Thank you for the counsel and encouragement of colleagues and friends, Kathleen Sussman, and Kay Bret.

I would be remiss if I did not include Dr. Stephen Linenburger, whose initial encouragement to apply to the Ed.D. program started my doctoral journey.

I also acknowledge the epic challenge of nurturing babies and young children with love, language, and conversation. I hope this small study will make difference for children.
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter/Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction and Background</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aim of the Study</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology Overview</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Relevant Terms</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delimitations</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biases</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Role of Leadership in this Study</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW</strong></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Historical Perspective</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High/Scope Perry Preschool Project</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aim of the Study</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Connection Between Leadership &amp; the 30-Million-Word Gap</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposed Solution</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description of Leadership Training Components</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for the Solution</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factors and Stakeholders Related to the Solution</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential Barriers and Obstacles to Proposed Solution</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Issues Related to Proposed Solution</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change Theory</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation of the Proposed Solution</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader’s Role in Implementing Proposed Solution</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building Support for the Proposed Solution</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation and Timeline for Implementation and Assessment</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications for Leadership Theory and Practice</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Research and Recommendations</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of the Study</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A: IRB-Approved Participant Contact Information</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B: IRB-Approved Script for Recruiting Childcare Directors</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C: IRB-Approved Interview Protocol..................................................109

Appendix D: IRB-Approved Interview Questions.............................................111
List of Tables

Table 1. Interview Questions as they Relate to Status, Research Question, and Aim.....43

Table 2. Reduction of Topics into Six Themes.......................................................53

Table 3. Childcare Interviews: Themes and Proposed Solution from Childcare Director Interviews.............................................................................................................77

Table 4. Childcare Director Leadership Framework: Themes through Servant Leadership.............................................................................................................85
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Introduction and Background

In December of 1991, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching issued a report stating that 35% of America’s children begin kindergarten ill-prepared to learn (Age of Learning, Inc. 1991). Twenty-five years later in 2011, 66% of the 500 Kindergarten teachers surveyed reported that Kindergarten students start school every year only somewhat or not prepared at all to learn. Fewer than nine percent of teachers who responded could say that their entering students had “very good” oral language skills (Age of Learning, 2011). With 1.2 million childcare teachers and providers caring for 13 million children less than five years of age, (Childcare Aware of America, 2015) childcare facilities are an important link in the chain of preparation for success in school.

Kindergarten is an important milestone in the life of children—a right of passage from home to school. Kindergarten prepares children for the rest of their educational careers. Many families provide activities or schooling to ready their children for the first day of kindergarten (Cheadle, 2009). Physicians and other professionals give families a list of kindergarten readiness skills. Agencies and government programs have been developed specifically to address this readiness issue. In spite of attempts by families, agencies, and government programs, research demonstrates that too many children continue to start kindergarten ill prepared to learn (Cheadle, 2009; Hart & Risley, 1995; Hindman & Wasik, 2013; Lloyd, Li & Hertzman, 2010; Mistry, Benner, Biesanz, Clark, & Howe, 2010). Countless children lack the variety of experiences and accompanying adult-child conversations that help them develop sophisticated vocabularies and language
competence (Lloyd et al., 2010). Children find it arduous to keep up, much less to compete with peers (Durham, Farkas, Hammer, Bruce, & Catts, 2007).

Historically, Head Start and Early Head Start Programs addressed this stumbling block for young children along socioeconomic lines. Since 1965, when the Head Start Program was funded by the Federal Government some progress has been made, but not nearly enough (Halle, Hair, & Wandner, 2012). Lack of readiness perpetuates school failure and prevents many children from climbing and staying above the poverty line as they approach adulthood (Durham et al., 2007; Lloyd et al., 2010).

**Statement of the Problem**

In 2016, nearly 13 million infants, toddlers, and preschoolers—more than one-half of America’s early childhood population—spent some or all of their weekdays in childcare (Childcare Aware, 2015). It is easy to conclude that the over 1.2 million childcare teachers and providers who care for these children, are an important link in the chain of readiness for success in kindergarten (Childcare Aware, 2015).

One can surmise that as leaders, the directors of childcare facilities are yet another important link. They set the mission, tone, and expectations for the staff members who interact daily with children in their facilities. Childcare directors also supervise the childcare teachers and providers who come to their jobs often inadequately trained for their positions. In order to survive financially, childcare directors are forced to pay low wages, and offer few or no benefits to their employees (Childcare Aware, 2015; Fothergill, 2013). Childcare directors and providers often do not receive respect for their role of caring for young children (Chang-Kredl, 2015; Fothergill, 2013).
Studies have shown repeatedly that children’s language and vocabulary in kindergarten set the path for their educational careers and beyond (Beck & McKeown, 2007; Durham et al., 2007). The conundrum is that researchers know the skills needed to develop children’s potential. Statistical evidence clearly demonstrated this about 20 to 25 years ago (Carolina Abecedarian Project, n.d.; Hart & Risley, 1995). Yet little progress has been made in the last 25 years (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). For the 13 million children in their care, America’s 1.2 million childcare teachers and providers (U.S. Depart. of Labor, 2015) are an important link in the chain of preparation for success in school. In spite of all the attention given to childcare, it is possible that childcare directors and their staffs do not recognize their potentially valuable contributions to the future of young children.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to understand childcare directors’ perceptions of caring for young children, and to identify issues not addressed previously in the literature review. This research took place at privately owned childcare facilities in the suburbs of a mid-western city.

**Research Question**

The researcher investigated childcare directors’ own perspectives about childcare and its inherent responsibilities and challenges. The following research question guided this qualitative study: What are childcare directors’ perceptions of their roles, challenges, and relationships that may shed new light on child development in preparation for kindergarten?
Aim of the Study

The aim of this study was to identify issues not addressed previously in the literature, and to create a framework for comprehensive childcare facility education based on findings and best practices.

Methodology Overview

Qualitative research is selected when the researcher wants rich descriptive data about an issue (Creswell, 2007). Understanding childcare directors’ own perspectives and challenges could only be accomplished through interview discussions where directors were allowed to anonymously share their thoughts. This grounded theory study sought to understand what childcare directors think about their roles, responsibilities, challenges, and relationships that shed light on children’s development in preparation for kindergarten. A grounded theory approach is one of the most commonly used coding approaches to produce a new theory that is grounded in the data and related to prevailing theory (Gibbs, 2007). The sample size of this study was determined at the saturation point when the researcher no longer heard novel information. The population consisted of directors with a minimum of three years experience as a childcare director. The researcher selected independent, privately owned facilities, located in the suburbs and surrounding areas of a mid-western city. The researcher chose to interview childcare directors only in suburban areas to remove the overriding effects of poverty that may mask the original research questions.

Definition of Relevant Terms

The following terms were used functionally throughout this study:


Childcare director: The person in charge of a childcare facility, who may also be the owner.

Childcare provider: An employee who provides direct care to children in childcare centers. These employees are often know as “Teachers” even though this is not an indication of education or certification. Some are called “Assistants.” In this dissertation, they are referred to as “childcare teachers and providers.”

Early childhood: The period of growth and development of the young child that includes the span of time from infancy through age seven.

Suburbs: Neighborhoods and communities that are located outside the center or downtown areas of a city. Suburbs sometimes are thought to include small, unincorporated towns on the outskirts of a city.

Leadership: The ability of an individual to lead and motivate others in the accomplishment of a stated objective.

Midwest: A geographic region found in the area of the United States that includes, but not limited to the states of Missouri, Illinois, Iowa, Nebraska, and Kansas.

Framework: A visual structure for the presentation and explanation of a set of ideas.

Servant Leadership: A form of leadership in which the leader serves his followers’ needs before his own. Followers of servant leaders feel safe and they know their needs matter. Followers will become better for knowing the leader.

Language comprehension: The understanding of spoken or printed language.

Language expression: The expression of spoken or printed language.

Turn-taking: The back and forth, ping pong-like communication of conversation.
Conversation: The back and forth exchange of talking that involves several turns for each speaker maintaining a specific topic.

Vocabulary: The body of words understood or spoken by an individual or contained in a story or other printed material.

Question comprehension: Questions understood as demonstrated by actions, verbal, or printed response.

Readiness: Demonstration of a certain set of skills necessary for successful completion of a test or a grade in school, such as kindergarten.

Qualitative research: A form of research in which the researcher seeks rich communication as data. This data is collected through personal interviews or surveys. The researcher analyzes the data from the interviews or surveys, by manual or computer coding.

Grounded theory: A theory that evolves from the analysis of data, grounded in the concepts communicated by the subjects, and by the literature review.

Milestone: Certain developmental skills that most children have been found to master by a certain age.

Privately owned: Owned by a local individual as opposed to a chain operation run by an individual but owned by the larger corporation.

Research: An investigation or study of related literature and compilation of data from interviews. As an example of data collection is the qualitative study used here. The terms defined above are those used in the vernacular of early childhood education, childcare, and leadership. They were included in this section to allow the reader to more comfortably read and understand the text.
Delimitations

The following delimitations exist in order to narrow the scope of study for this research. This study was conducted in a mid-western state. The delimitations of the study preclude a claim of finding answers for all people in all places. Also, the childcare directors’ answers were in response to pre-determined questions, even though toward the end of the interview, they were given an opportunity to tell anything they had not previously been asked. Finally, it should be made clear that only childcare directors were interviewed, and their centers were located in suburban areas only.

Limitations

No interactions or observations were made of children or staff in order to verify the statements made by the childcare directors. This qualitative, grounded theory study was limited to childcare directors’ own perceptions about their experiences in childcare. The results were based on the perceptions of the childcare directors in the suburbs of a mid-western city who volunteered to participate, and may not necessarily be transferred to childcare in the entire city.

Biases

The researcher admits to a bias about this topic because her entire career has been with infants and young children. She is a teacher of the deaf and hard of hearing, trained and certified in listening and spoken language. Many typically developing children who enter kindergarten do not have the prerequisite language skills necessary to succeed (Cheadle, 2009; Hart & Risley, 1995; Hindman & Wasik, 2013; Lloyd et al., 2010; Mistry et al., 2010). Teachers of the deaf and hard of hearing who specialize in listening and spoken language learn the techniques to teach deaf children to listen and talk, to ask
and answer complex questions, follow directions, clarify misunderstood information, and engage in meaningful conversation (Suskind, 2015). This is one reason the researcher is both biased and qualified to undertake this study.

The researcher suspended her biases when it came to learning from childcare directors. Before each interview, the researcher engaged in bracketing. The researcher documented in a journal about these aforementioned biases, and they were consciously set aside. Written reflections were made prior to interviews, and prior to review and analysis of data (Creswell, 2014).

**The Role of Leadership in this Study**

The childcare director is a player scarcely heard from in the literature. For this reason, the researcher chose childcare directors as the focus of this study. A preponderance of studies looked at the childcare teacher and provider role, preparation, and success with children based on the use of various child-learning programs (Reynolds et al., 2011; Schweinhart, Montie, Xiang, Barnett, Belfield, & Nores, 2005). In a Preschool Policy Brief from the National Institute for Early Education Research (2011), the researchers noted, “Conspicuously absent is any consideration of the adult work environment in which teachers operate and the extent to which it supports or undermines their ability to apply their knowledge and skills” (Whitebook & Ryan, 2011, p. 6). Furthermore, “few studies explore how variations in staffing patterns and the background of other teachers and the director impacts teacher behavior and program quality” (Whitebook & Ryan, 2011, p. 6). Following a review of literature related to leadership in childcare, Muijs, Aubrey, Harris, & Briggs (2004) issued a strong statement saying early childhood leadership research is very limited in amount and scope and also limited by the
few researchers looking at this topic. This paucity of researchers contemplating childcare leadership is not only concerning, but also unfortunate given the scrutiny childcare is receiving as legislation expands and childcare moves closer toward the public sector (Muijs et al., 2004). Considering the collaborative environment of a childcare center where a few staff members are often responsible for multiple tasks, “leadership style and preparation of directors and principals contribute to the climate of professional learning in a school or center and related teacher development” (Whitebook & Ryan, 2011, p. 7).

Talan, Bloom, & Kelton (2014) reported the majority of childcare center directors have no management training prior to assuming their position. Early childhood administrators have unique needs and their training should be designed accordingly. They need to have comprehensive and relevant training that is systematic and intensive.

Just as elementary school principals define their schools in terms of rules and tone, commitment of the staff, attitudes of the children, and mission and vision (Schoer, 2014), so should childcare directors. Looking at this problem through a leadership lens gave insight into the questions surrounding the lack of significant progress on kindergarten preparation in the last thirty or more years (Copple & Breedekamp, 2009).

**Summary**

In this chapter, the researcher presented the problem for this Dissertation in Practice. The researcher designed a qualitative, grounded theory study to look at this problem from a different perspective—exclusively from the perspective of the childcare director. The researcher scheduled 45-minute interviews with childcare directors in the search of rich information into this problem.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This qualitative study provides a review of multiple topics related to childcare in America. First the historical perspective of childcare was reviewed. Model longitudinal programs that demonstrated convincing results are included. These include the HighScope Perry Preschool Program (Schweinhart et al., 2005), the Chicago Child Parent Center program (Reynolds et al., 2011), and the Carolina Abecedarian Program (Reynolds et al., 2011). Another part of the historical discussion was the birth of the phrase, the “30-Million-Word-Gap,” which resulted from the research of Hart and Risley (2012). Next the creation, success, and failures of Head Start were presented (Halle, et al., 2012). Following this historical journey, children’s needs were delineated. The response of contemporary childcare to children’s needs was reviewed. Finally, childcare professional development was investigated because of its pertinence to the results of contemporary childcare success.

For accountability and validity, the goal was to use as many pertinent articles as possible from a diverse group of peer-reviewed journals (Creswell, 2014). Some books, lay articles, and agency official reports or monographs were used for additional comprehensive information.

The Historical Perspective

HighScope Perry Preschool Project

This landmark program began in 1962 and lasted until 1967. David Weikart and his associates began a multi-year project studying the effects of a high quality early childhood program for children of poverty, the HighScope Perry Preschool Program in
Ypsilanti, Michigan (Schweinhart et al., 2005). From a group of 123 African-American three-year-olds, all children of poverty, 58 were randomly enrolled in the HighScope Preschool program, and the remaining 65 were assigned to a control group and did not attend preschool. Both groups were tested annually from age three through eleven, and again when they reached 14, 15, 19, 27, and 40 years of age. HighScope preschool program attendees at 40 years of age, when compared to the no preschool control group, demonstrated 1) a reduction in arrests (five or more) from 55% to 36%; 2) an earned annual income rate of $20,000 or more for 60% of preschool program subjects to only 40% of the no program group; 3) high school graduation rates from 77% compared to 60% for the no program group; 4) outperformance of the program group on achievement reports at 14 years of age from 49% to 15%; 5) completion of homework at 15 years of age from 64% to 38%; and 6) an Intelligence Quotient (IQ) of 90 or higher at age five for 67% of the preschool group to 28% of the no preschool group (Schweinhart et al., 2005, pp.194-215). This study continues to be replicated and positively influence best practices in early childhood education.

**The Chicago Child Parent Center Program**

of large-scale, long-running public childcare can change lives (Reynolds et al., 2011). For participants in the program at age 21, they reported a dramatic difference in the percent of juvenile arrests, 8.3% lower, or 55% compared to 46.7%. In arrests for violent crime, the rate of 15.3% dropped to 9.0% for those participants of the preschool program. For rates of high school graduation, the number rose from 38.5% to 59.7%, and the longer the child was in the program, the better the results (Reynolds et al., 2011).
The Chicago Child Parent Center program, still in operation in 2016, was a much less expensive program than the other longitudinal programs, and it received public dollars (Reynolds et al., 2011). In a study of the participants at age 26,

…findings indicated that CPC program participation was linked to relatively high economic returns to society and the public. Total economic benefits per participant to society were estimated to be $92,220 for preschool, $15,064 for school age, and $42,520 for preschool plus school-age (extended) intervention. (Reynolds et al., 2011, p. 395)

Crime savings were by far the largest category, representing 69%. Income tax revenues (10%), special education (9%), and child welfare (5%) also contributed substantial percentages to public returns (Reynolds et al., 2011, p. 391). A certified head teacher, along with a coordinator of family support, and a coordinator of family outreach, direct all centers. A certified teacher and an assistant, teach each preschool classroom of 17 children. All teachers earned bachelors degrees and certification in early childhood (Reynolds et al., 2011).

**The Abecedarian Project**

The Abecedarian Project operated between 1972 and 1977. The focus of this demonstration program was on children from low-income families, infancy through age three. It is difficult to generalize to current early childhood practice research, because of the high cost of the program. It cost $73,159 per child, and was located on a university campus, and had small classroom sizes of 12 for three and four year olds (Reynolds et al., 2011). The results for the participants at age 21 however, are compelling. There was an increase in the number of years of completed education from 11.6 years to 12.2 years.
Thirty-six percent of those attending the program enrolled in a 4-year college as opposed to only 14% of those not in the program. Because those attending the Abecedarian Project stayed in higher education programs longer, they were 67% more likely to get a skilled job as opposed to 41% for those in the control group, who received no early education. Also the rate of teenage pregnancy dropped dramatically from 45% to 26% for those participants attending the Abecedarian Project as young children (Campbell, 2002).

**Hart and Risley 30-Milion-Word Gap**

In 1989, Betty Hart and Todd Risley began a research project at the University of Kansas to study how young children acquire vocabulary. They wanted to know what they could do about children in poverty. They visited young children in their homes interacting with their parents and recorded all language spoken during the session. The research project included 42 families and began when the young children first started talking until they were three years old. The researchers visited the families once a month for the two and a half years of the project (Hart & Risley, 1995). It took six years to collect and evaluate all the data, and they reported the results in their book, *Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children* (Hart & Risley, 1995), and what they found was far beyond what they had expected. Those who read the results were faced with the stark truth about the effects of poverty on young children. By three years of age, Hart and Risley (1995) reported that children from families on welfare had heard 30 million fewer words than their counterparts in families with professional parents. Not only had the children of professional families heard 30 million more words,
but significantly they heard them while interacting with parents or other adults in the home (Hart & Risley, 1995). Michael Gramling (2015) summarized this reality. “…the starkest contrast between poor and more affluent children is experience in hearing and using language. Simply stated, compared to their more affluent counterparts, many low-income children from birth to five suffer language deprivation” (Gramling, 2015, p. 7).

Put another way,

…in terms of sheer number of words, the middle-income child will have been exposed to over three times the language that the child in poverty will hear by the time she reaches school age (Hart & Risley, 1995), at which time the window of opportunity for language development that is open wide during the child’s early years begins to close. (Gramling, 2015, p. 7)

Dana Suskind in Thirty million words, Building a child’s brain (2015), reported that “Hart and Risley’s groundbreaking study showed with statistical force that the preliminary factor in what would eventually become known as the ‘achievement gap’ was the difference in early language exposure” (Suskind, 2015, p. 37). Importantly, they also found that this achievement gap was correctible by programs specifically designed to teach family members, preschool and childcare teachers how to talk to children in ways that would stimulate language and vocabulary growth (Suskind, 2015, p. 38).

**Head Start Program**

Following President John F. Kennedy’s assassination in 1963, Vice-President Lyndon B. Johnson was sworn in as President to complete President Kennedy’s term of office. President Johnson looked to President Kennedy’s unfinished New Frontier of Social Reform (USHistory.org, 2008-2014). Investigations at the time were reporting
high rates of unemployment and disturbing levels of poverty. In 1965 as part of a package of social reforms, Head Start began, and was designed to confront the roots of poverty through better preparation of its youngest victims, prior to entering kindergarten (UShistory.org). Head Start even went so far as to claim that it would actually wipe out poverty (Gramling, 2015).

The persistence of poverty in the face of billions of dollars invested in Head Start and state preschools over five decades, as well as the fluctuations in the severity of poverty as the economy grows and shrinks, is fairly compelling evidence that poverty is systemic and not simply a function of the lack of early childhood education. (Gramling, 2015, p. 4)

The primary public response to the significantly lower educational performance of children from low socio-economic status has been the Federally-funded Head Start Program that began in 1965. A study by Halle et al., (2012) analyzed how child progress and the characteristics of the Head Start program looked at progress and development during the program for four-year old children. They found that 43% of the children progressed from a risk profile to a strengths profile during the year (Halle et al., 2012). However they also found that children who entered displaying a strengths profile, could also move to a risk profile over the course of the Head Start year. This was anticipated if they were in a poor quality program or if their teacher was less qualified (Halle et al., 2012). Hindman and Wasik (2013) investigated vocabulary learning in Head Start. They echoed problems of program quality. After observing vocabulary teaching strategies, Hindman and Waski reported, “Classroom instructional quality was, on average relatively low...with systematic differences between Head Start centers” (Hindman & Wasik, 2013,
Interestingly, “classroom instructional quality was not linked to attending training, and technical assistance was inversely related to receiving mentoring” (Hindman & Wasik, 2013, p. 399). Much of the Head Start educational and social progress data is inconsistent and Hansen (2002) reported that it is often thought to be controversial because it varies from center to center and they do not use control groups (Hansen, 2002).

The Head Start Program is positively credited with the removal of many risk factors that can thwart brain development in children. These risk factors include such things as toxic and unclean homes, lack of vaccinations, poor dental and physical care, and hunger or poor nutrition (Gramling, 2015).

In spite of the mix and controversial reviews as indicated above, there are calls to expand the Head Start program. Touted as a promise to the American middle class family, President Obama proposes all-day schooling for four-year-olds in families falling two hundred percent or more below the Federal poverty line which is $23,550 for a family of four. The price tag for this program is $7.5 billion over ten years and this amount is funded by an increase in tobacco taxes, with the participating states providing matching funds (Kena, et al., 2014).

While educators and other child advocates repeatedly urged the expansion of formal early education opportunities for young children during the twentieth century, what had developed by the dawn of the new century was a fragmented and haphazard early learning “nonsystem” that seemed increasingly inadequate to meet the needs of both children and society. (Hansen, 2002, p. 5)
At the beginning of the 21st century, early childhood reformers came to realize that “student achievement is affected by differences in children’s development that are already evident when formal schooling begins” (Hansen, 2002, p. 5). With more women working outside the home and needing childcare, preschool and childcare was increasingly seen as not only a concern for families, but also a challenge for educators.

**The Needs of Children, Birth to Five**

The key to children’s success was revealed in the introduction to this chapter as development of language and vocabulary from birth—using the most advantageous window of opportunity for brain development and the development of language. The United States Department of Education sponsored the National Research Council (NRC) to study scientific research and make recommendations to educators, parents, and government policy makers (NRC, 2001). For three years, the 17-member Interdisciplinary Committee on Early Childhood Pedagogy (appointed by the NRC) studied the research literature and created a report. A follow-up publication was released titled, *Eager to Learn: Educating Our Preschoolers* (Bowman, Yoshikawa, & Snow 2001). The primary interest of this interdisciplinary committee was to identify the essential features of care outside of the home for ages 2 to 5, for both childcare and preschool. They wanted to know which features were found to facilitate the learning of young children (Bowman, et al., 2001). Nineteen recommendations were made across categories that have been summarized and condensed to seven recommendations: 1) professional development in both pre- and post-academic situations; 2) educational materials and their appropriate use; 3) policy concerns on a state and national level, including program and content standards; 4) development of public support through
understanding of the importance and need for early childhood education, and for home-school connections in order to create supportive environments in both home and school; 5) future research on the inputs that support child learning, cognitive and socio-emotional learning, nurturing adult-child relationships, brain development, developmental disabilities, and second language learning; 6) a more rigorous study of early childhood programs, curricula, and assessment in classrooms, diagnostics, and program quality; and 7) research to organize, finance, and support early childhood programs (Bowman, et al., 2001, pp. 311-322). A summary of the needs of children from this 443-page report included supportive context and learning, child stimulation within a supportive environment, and hands-on and interactive experiences within the reach of the child. The committee advocated for sensitivity to individual child differences, here-and-now language learning, focusing on the perceptions of the child, and knowledge and understanding of the reinterpretation of developmentally appropriate practice that included more recent study of child brain research (Bowman, et al., 2001, pp. 311-332).

In an article published in *School and Home*, a publication of the National Association of School Psychologists, the question of, “Is your child ready for kindergarten?” was undertaken (Rafoth, Buchenauer, Crissman, & Halko, 2004). The authors described current kindergarten expectations as those that used to be expected in first grade. They felt the readiness concern puts the weight of the expectations on the child, and would rather see this responsibility placed on the schools and the parents. Further, their view was that the schools must be ready to teach children at their own individual levels. “Stated in simple terms, school readiness means that a child is ready to enter a social environment that is primarily focused on education” (Rafoth et al., 2004, p.
1). In order to focus on education, a child should be able to follow routine, comply with simple rules, follow directions, cooperate and play with other children, and display independence with dressing, toileting, work skills, and play scenarios. Additionally, there are other more apparent skills children need to know upon kindergarten entry, or will be able to learn quickly, such as color, cut, paint, assemble a simple puzzle, write their names, count, identify shapes, colors, and rhyming words, and recognize sound units in syllables and words (Rafoth et al., 2004).


If the acquisition of reading skills is indeed reliant on the collective efforts of a ‘village’ of adults, but those adults themselves live in areas of higher concentrations of disadvantage, children’s reading comprehension may be set on a negative course early in life—a developmental stage that marks a critical phase in children’s literacy development (Hart & Risley, 1995)—setting the stage for worsened reading comprehension outcomes down-stream. (Lloyd et al., 2010, p. 377)

Yeung and Pfeiffer (2009) confirmed earlier findings that
the early childhood home environment accounts for much of the early
achievement gaps, which set off wider gaps in subsequent years. We also find that
prior test scores become increasingly predictive of later performance as children
advance to higher grades. (Yeung & Pfeiffer, 2009, p. 424)

Furthermore, the “clear cumulative effect of learning disadvantages reveals a deep
intergenerational root and underscores the importance of prenatal and early childhood
intervention, particularly in the home” (Yeung & Pfeiffer, 2009, p. 424). In evaluating
the practices and values exhibited by parents, verbal interaction between parents and
children was used as one variable for evaluating cognitive stimulation, emotional support
and involvement in children’s schooling (Yeung & Pfeiffer, 2009). Leech, Salo, Rowe,
and Cabrera (2013) chose to study the specifics of the use of questions and clarification
of children’s requests by fathers, two of the many differences between socio-economic
classes of parents identified early on in the research by Hart and Risley (1995). Hart and
Risley (1995) found that fathers’ language input with their young children did matter to
the overall language development of their children. Children whose fathers used more
requests of their children for clarification had children who in turn used more words and
diverse speech (Leech et al., 2013). Durham et al. (2007) added to longitudinal studies of
childhood educational achievement and the accumulating evidence that the years before a
child enters kindergarten are crucial to not only later educational achievement, but also
“much of the intergenerational transmission of socioeconomic status....” (Durham et al.,
2007, p. 294). Their findings regarding language development and its direct effect on
reading achievement and on the overall performance reported by teachers in second and
fourth grade, was consistent with earlier findings (Durham et al., 2007; Hart & Risley,
1995). Durham et al., maintained the most significant result of kindergarten language development was increased reading performance, reporting a coefficient of .75, which they defined as “extraordinarily large” (Durham et al., 2007, p. 300). They also found indirect effects of kindergarten language competency on the children’s proficiency with mathematics in the third grade (Durham et al., 2007). While the impact of language development may seem to many as a stretch of the imagination, or a stretch of statistics, mathematics is highly language dependent as is apparent by reviewing the instructions to be read by the teacher in any third grade teacher’s manual along with the expected responses of the students. Durham and associates (2007) concluded that “kindergarten language skill plays a strikingly important role in predicting later school achievement, and it almost completely mediates the effects of both mother’s education and family income on 2nd through 4th grade school achievement” (Durham et al., 2007, p. 301).

As a result of these recent studies and the earlier work of Hart and Risley (1995), many current initiatives are focused on increasing the number of words spoken to linguistically-deprived children to close that thirty-million-word gap (Hart & Risley, 2003). However, when describing the additional strategies employed by the parents of the more linguistically advanced children, Hart and Risley reported “language diversity, affirmative feedback, symbolic emphasis, gentle guidance, and responsiveness” (Hart & Risley, 1995, p. 210). In 2007, eighteen years after Hart and Risley (1995) began their study, Durham and associates (2007) reported similar results. They found, “exposing children to more extensive vocabulary, more grammatically and syntactically complex conversation, a variety of speech styles, as well as engaging them in abstract and substantive dialogue is necessary to prepare them to be successful in school” (Durham et
Carpiano et al., 2009) looked at the effects of poverty on children through the lens of neighborhood concentration of disadvantage and advantage. They demonstrated a relationship between the two neighborhoods and the outcomes of children living there. One would predict based on previously reported data that as the level of neighborhood affluence increases, so would the performance of kindergarten children. However, Carpiano et al. (2009) found that children’s level of development improved as neighborhoods became more socioeconomically heterogeneous. Furthermore they found highest scores on kindergarten performance, were produced by children in more socioeconomically heterogeneous neighborhoods (Carpiano et al., 2009). The qualities in neighborhoods that contribute to this finding should be investigated to determine if these mechanisms can be replicated in neighborhoods at large to increase child health and educational development. Another study based on the work of Lareau, looked at the intergenerational transfer of social class, and how the child’s family provides experiences that could directly affect the opportunities and choices available to the child (in Bedovski & Farkas, 2008). “According to Lareau, the highly organized activities that middle and upper-class parents engage in with their children, summarized as ‘concerted cultivation,’ foster skills, behaviors, and attitudes in these children that lead to their greater school success…” (Bedovski & Farkas, 2008, p. 904). By contrast, one has families with lower socio-economic status who believe that children should be allowed to grow and develop naturally. Bedovski and Farkas found that “parental perceptions regarding their and their children’s place in the social structure play an essential role in the process of social reproduction...[and] the perceived opportunities for success, guide individuals’ actions
and eventually produce certain outcomes” (2008, p. 916). They identified a limitation of their study as their elimination of measures of parental language input to their children. If they had included measures of formal and informal parent vocabulary instruction, they predicted parental language input to children would have played a larger role on social economic status (SES) and on elementary school performance (Bedovski & Farkas, 2008). Sektnan, McClelland, Acock, and Morrison (2010), examined the cumulative effect of family risk factors that negatively affect a child’s developmental outcomes. The risk factors included in their study were the mother’s level of education prior to the birth of the first child, family income, and maternal depression.

As expected, early family risk factors (including Black ethnicity, maternal education, income-to-needs ratio, and maternal depressive symptoms) were significantly correlated with reading, math, and vocabulary, with higher risk indicating lower achievement. In addition, family risk factors were significantly correlated with behavioral regulation at 54 months, and in kindergarten that higher risk was related to lower skill levels. (Sektnan et al., 2010, p. 470-471)

A logical question to ask at this point in the literature review is: What should we do about this life-limiting problem? In 2013 in his State of the Union Address, President Obama announced that he would be asking Congress to approve his recommendations for, 1) federally and state sponsored high quality four-year-old preschool for all; 2) expanding Early Head Start in partnership with existing child care to provide children, birth-to-three, with the highest standard of care; and 3) expansion of voluntary home visiting programs to help families connect to educational and other needed services (Obama, President Barack, Feb. 2013). This White House Press Release supported these
proposals with statistics. However, these proposals did not come without critics. Stevens and English (2016) of the American Enterprise Institute maintained that even with all the historical and current evidence (reported earlier in this chapter), pre-Kindergarten programs might not be the most appropriate way to proceed. Stevens and English (2006) warned that this pre-Kindergarten emphasis could be more harmful than good. There are valuable programs with intensive emphasis on babies and their parents (Stevens & English, 2016).

…what America’s most disadvantaged children are facing is not an achievement gap; it’s a life gap…. Researchers, policymakers, and the public alike must remain focused on the core goal: to give all children, no matter the circumstances of their birth, a fair start in life. (Stevens & English, 2016, p. 4)

To summarize, after perusing the research cited above, a list of competencies for children was extrapolated to include those associated with risk factors, such as reading, math and vocabulary. They also include competencies found in more successful children of higher socio-economic background, such as language and conversational competence. Those competencies are listed below.

**Infants and Young Children: Essential Learning Competencies**

1. Demonstrates awareness and increasing response to spoken language, singing, and environmental sounds (Suskind, 2015).

2. Demonstrates understanding and use of a rich and age-appropriate spoken vocabulary (Hart & Risley, 1995; Suskind, 2015).

3. Demonstrates age-appropriate verbal interactions with adults (Hart & Risley, 1995; Suskind, 2015; Yeung & Pfeiffer, 2009).
4. Uses increasingly grammatical, and syntactically complex conversations (Durham, et al., 2007; Hart & Risley, 1995; Suskind, 2015),

5. Follows routines, complies with simple verbal rules, and can follow multi-step verbal directions (Rafoth et al., 2004),

6. Can play appropriately with toys and pretend-play activities and can participate in three to four age-appropriate play schemes.

7. Cooperates and plays with other children (Rafoth, et al., 2004),

8. Independently dresses, uses the toilet, demonstrates work skills and multi-step play routines (Rafoth, et al., 2004),

9. Knows how to color, cut, paint, and assemble a simple puzzle (Rafoth, et al., 2004),

10. Knows how to write his/her name, count, identify shapes and colors (Rafoth, et al., 2004),

11. Identifies rhyming words; recognizes sound units in syllables and words (Rafoth, et al., 2004),

12. Interactively attends to a variety of age-appropriate books,

13. Has knowledge of numbers, counting, and increasingly learns the vocabulary and language of math,

14. Demonstrates respect for adults, using appropriate manners, and empathy for classmates and others,

15. Is able to talk about recent past events and answer 2-3 questions when asked for more information, and
16. Understands age-appropriate complex language and questions, and is able to use the same successfully.

In the next section, the manner in which childcare teachers and providers addressed these long-standing child needs is addressed. Research was reviewed observing the performance of childcare teachers and providers prior to, in response to, and/or following educational and training opportunities.

**Infants to 5 Year-Olds in Childcare: Response and Preparation of Childcare Teachers and Providers.** When reading about the current status of preschoolers and beginning kindergartners, it is a déjà vu experience that harkens back to the 1960’s and 70’s with the HighScope Perry Preschool Project (Schweinhart et al., 2005), the Betty Hart and Todd Risley 30-million-word study (Hart & Risley, 2003), the Abecedarian Project (Reynolds et al., 2011), Head Start (Grambling, 2015), and others. Are children more prepared for kindergarten than 50 years ago? “…a comprehensive view of school readiness involves interplay between a child’s inherent characteristics and past and present environmental and cultural contexts” (Halle et al., 2012, p. 613). The findings of the research programs mentioned above showed lasting results for the small number of children in those programs, and for some other children the results were dramatic and the potential trajectory of their adult lives was improved (Gramling, 2015). Head Start, though of lower quality, also demonstrated positive results for children (Currie & Neidell, 2007). “However, Head Start does not appear to bring poor children up to the average levels of achievement of non-poor children” (Currie & Neidell, 2007, p. 84).

The status of childcare as a result of responding to the needs of children defined by these historical programs was reviewed. As Head Start expanded over the years, the
funding changed and was allocated differently. More money was designated for family and community in some areas, versus in other areas, where more funds were allocated for discrete child skills and teacher salaries. Halle et al. (2012) reviewed what factors brought the most change for the Head Start membership.

Child age, family structure, parental educational attainment, classroom quality and teacher level of educational attainment emerged as important factors associated with stability and change in profile membership over the four-year-old Head Start year but receipt of social services through Head Start was not associated with stability or change in profile membership. (Halle et al., 2012)

W. Steven Barnett (1998) conducted a review of 38 studies of the longitudinal early childhood programs on children and poverty. He wanted to answer questions about poor children and their cognitive and academic development as a result of long-term early childhood programs. He also wanted to know if there were economic effects from these programs, and if these results were indicative of public policies that needed to be introduced (Barnett, 1998). About one-half of the programs studied were Head Start or other public preschool programs. He concluded that unless childcare or custodial programs outside of the home can provide sustained and intensive positive change in a child’s learning environment there could be no expectation of changes in outcomes for children in poverty. He recommended that public programs be enhanced in intensity and quality to reach the level of model programs of the past that have been shown to be successful. He further recommended that there be study of full-day high quality childcare prior to age one, compared to the outcomes from currently existing programs for three- and four-year olds, such as Head Start. Improvement for children in poverty can result in
life effects that may positively impact their education and other choices that benefit not only them, but also the community in which they live (Barnett, 1998).

In 2015, Sasser, Bierman, and Heinrichs took a different direction and reported on their work with executive function, beginning with young children. They wanted to know if executive functioning relates to academic success and social-emotional adjustment. Twenty-two Head Start programs were recruited for this study. Of the 164 children in the study who would enter kindergarten the upcoming school year, 68% of these children were considered to live in financial stress. These children were followed and tested at the beginning of pre-kindergarten and in the spring of the subsequent four years. Researchers discovered executive functioning was predictive of math skills and teacher estimates of academic success in third grade but had less impact on reading. This finding is particularly significant for the one-fourth of children in the United States who live in poverty, and the one half of preschoolers whose families are considered low income (Sasser et al., 2015). The researchers suggested that executive function deserves attention in the preschool years to support kindergarten readiness, and that it should become a priority for teachers, and those who are in a position to make policy changes (Sasser et al., 2015). Researchers found that a more global and balanced approach of exposing children to executive function skills and behaviors was more effective than training children in discrete elements of executive function (Sasser et al., 2015). In other words, as is typical of early education in general, concepts are taught from the whole to its parts or from the global to the specific.

The following research programs investigated training preschool teachers to use conversational strategies with young children. Cabell, Justice, McGinty, DeCoste, and
Forston (2015) studied conversation as a key element in developing language and vocabulary in preschool children. These researchers were interested in finding ways to increase the use of language learning techniques in preschools, particularly those that encourage teacher-child conversation. These techniques included responding to children’s attempts to initiate conversation, and extending the conversation by taking turns to maintain and expand the topic. In general, the researchers found little success with teacher training initiatives that enhanced these techniques, and wanted to find other more effective ways to train teachers. As a novel approach of this current work, the researchers isolated two types of conversation strategies: “distributed and concentrated. A distributed pattern involved teachers using relatively few strategies within any single conversation and rather distributing them over a variety of conversations, while a concentrated pattern involved teachers embedding numerous strategies within fewer conversations” (Cabell et al., 2015 p. 81). The back and forth, ping-pong like nature of conversations between teacher and child has been documented as beneficial to the development of language and vocabulary (Justice, Mashburn, Pence, & Wiggins 2008).

In this year-long study, one half of the preschool teachers were trained to use conversational strategies through the format of two full-day workshops, followed up with readings dispersed throughout the school year, the submission of video tapes two times per month to a consultant for feedback, and full access to a consultant. The remaining teachers who were placed in a control group received no additional instruction, and continued with their usual teaching strategies. The researchers found that the teacher training used was effective in improving the number and quality of conversations. Furthermore, the method of professional development was considered a positive
approach for improving practices. However, it must be mentioned that even though teacher response to conversation was improved, the researchers found that vocabulary increased more by the quality of the vocabulary used in the conversational exchanges, rather than just a function of conversations alone (Cabell et al., 2015).

Another approach to training teachers to support vocabulary development was one in which Chilean kindergarten teachers were offered training in literacy instruction (Bowne, Yoshikawa, & Snow, 2016). United States research has demonstrated that many early childhood teachers do not consistently use known literacy strategies to support child language and vocabulary development. Bowne et al., (2016) wanted to know what vocabulary instruction was currently in practice. They wanted to provide a quality-improvement program of explicit vocabulary teaching, and wanted to find how it could change vocabulary support for literacy instruction in early childhood classrooms. Additionally, through a two-year program, the authors wanted to investigate if the early childhood teachers understand how to implement these teaching techniques. In their initial evaluation of current professional development for early childhood teachers, they found that coaching was an important component of professional development, so it was included in their study as well. Those teachers, who accepted the offer of training, increased the likelihood of literacy instruction by 25%. However, they also found that focus on literacy instruction diminished the odds of other-topic teaching by 25%, and vocabulary support during other-topic teaching by 39%. Interestingly their results also showed that,

…when planning such an intervention, researchers and implementers should consider not just providing training around instructional practices that meet local
needs, but also identifying the full range of existing practices so that new approaches are integrated comprehensively. Training could then be designed to support teachers in both learning the new practices while integrating them effectively with those already in place. (Bowne et al., 2016, p. 37)

This was significant for the development of teacher training programs. In other words, for a program to be effective, teachers must first understand and then conceptually accept it. Also, if teachers can initially integrate new ideas with their own, it may be more likely that teachers will accept change more enthusiastically.

Another model of teacher training incorporated a different way to help teachers understand and accept change: “a relationship-based model of professional development as a means to address many of the challenges inherent in the current early childhood education landscape” through teacher study groups (Cunningham, Etter, Platas, Wheeler, & Campbell, 2015, p. 62). Other studies, reported previously found that children develop language and vocabulary skills more easily through relationships with teachers and classmates in interactive activities. These researchers hypothesized that a move away from one-day workshops held off-site and out of the classroom, and toward an interactive relationship with a highly qualified coach, mentor, facilitator, or consultant could be an effective approach with adults as well (Cunningham et al., 2015). The model used in this research was the teacher study group that met regularly with their facilitator over a three-year period with a focus on emergent literacy, specifically, phonological awareness. The ability to identify the individual sounds that letters make, along with oral language development are known to be central to the development of literacy skill. Unfortunately, phonological awareness and oral language development are two of those elusive
components of teacher skills that are often missing from their core knowledge (Cunningham et al., 2015).

Following a review of professional development programs, researchers found five important considerations in the development of successful professional development programs. The researchers recommend that a framework for successive learning experiences that has specific rather than general goals is primary. Also included should be opportunities for practice and observation of knowledge and skill that is intensive and long-term, with feedback, self-reflection and assessment (Cunningham et al., 2015). Other similar reviews of professional development provided more recommendations related to teacher selected goals, self-reflection, provision of activity guides, and charts of summarized key points within the construct of teacher learning communities with a cohort of educators. It is further helpful for the teachers to have the opportunity to form relationships and have a system built-in for communication (Cunningham et al., 2015).

To summarize, after paying particular attention to the research cited above, it was reported that teaching isolated skills out of the context of the preschool day, is an often repeated research method, but it has not been completely successful in reducing the language and vocabulary deficiencies of young children. Segments of valuable information were found in the recommendations for further research by all of the authors in this section of the dissertation. These recommendations were included in a list of competencies for preschool teachers and childcare providers and teachers.
Childcare Teacher and Provider: Recommended Competencies to Address the Needs of Children.

- Demonstration of sensitivity to individual child differences (Bowman, et al., 2001),
- Use of supportive context and learning with here-and-now language focusing on the perceptions of the child (Bowman et al., 2001; Durham et al., 2007),
- Willingness to help parents with emotional support and involvement in child’s schooling (Yeung & Pfeiffer, 2009; Fothergill, 2013),
- Understanding of how to use comprehension checks and requests of children for clarification in natural ways (not punitively) (Yeung & Pfeiffer, 2009),
- Use of a variety of age-appropriate sentence forms, and positive feedback and responsive attitude (Hart & Risley, 1995, p. 210; Durham et al., 2007),
- Understand and use of extensive and rich vocabulary in hands-on interactions with the children (Gramlin, 2015),
- Knowledge of children’s favorite activities, and also awareness of what might incite a negative response from each child, and how to intercede with suggestions for a change in behavior or location,
- Understanding of how to respond immediately to child’s attempts to communicate, with appropriate verbal comments and interactions (Suskind, 2015),
- Knowledge of how to model appropriate verbal language for a child who attempts to communicate (Suskind, 2015),
Knowledge of appropriate children’s books, and knowledge of nursery rhymes to recite and dramatize (Suskind, 2015),

Understanding of the idea of “narrating” own actions and activities with a baby or young child, describing what he or she is doing (Graming, 2015),

Understanding and knowledge of the developmental milestones for children, and how to give children experience with the next milestone (Rafoth, 2004),

Understanding the use of spoken language with young children so they can hear the melodic and meaningful features of their language (Suskind, 2015), and

Knowledge and ability to engage in the back and forth exchange of ideas through teacher-child conversation (Cabell et al., 2015).

Other Needs of Childcare Teachers and Providers

Childcare teachers and providers have the same needs as other working people. They need a safe and comfortable place to work. They want to be appreciated by employers, parents, and the general public. They deserve to earn a comfortable living wage, with healthcare and other benefits to protect them and their families. Furthermore, they should have the ability to learn and advance in their positions (Fothergill, 2013).

Parents of children in childcare want to know that the people who care for their children are educated in ways that will optimize their children’s development. Concordia University researcher Sandra Chang-Kredl, (2015) believed that society needs to rethink and revalue the work of childcare teachers and providers if they are expected to change the future path of children’s lives with the care they provide. “Invariably, the focus of the debate is on the children’s needs, the parents’ needs and society’s needs. The educator is
rarely mentioned….” (Chang-Kredl, 2015, p. 1). “I think there are two issues,” said Chang-Kredl.

First, our society doesn’t really value the work of teachers in general—look at the situation with public school teachers in Quebec. This devaluation gets amplified in early childhood education. There is this flawed perception of education as transmission: ‘if you can read, you can teach English; if you can tie your shoes, you can teach preschool.’ But there’s much more to teaching than a subject knowledge. (Chang-Kredl, 2015, p.1)

The work of parenting is a valued role, and yet society does not grant that same value to the men and women who care for children while mothers and fathers are at work. If society expects dramatic changes to occur in childcare through professional development and its consistent center-wide implementation, perhaps childcare teachers and providers should be granted elevated status and an adequate wage (Fothergill, 2013).

Effective pedagogical design elements for professional development are listed below. These design elements were gleaned from bits of information researchers mentioned either in the results section or discussion section from the papers presented in this chapter. These could be helpful in the development of any educational product designed for childcare teachers and providers.

**Childcare Teacher and Provider Development: Effective Pedagogical Design**

- Coaching is an important component of professional development (Bowne et al., 2015).
- Existing teacher practices should be recognized, so that new approaches can be integrated systematically (Bowne et al., 2016, p. 37).
Facilitating intensive and long-term teacher study groups is helpful (Cunningham et al., 2015).

Scaffolding of successive learning experiences is provided so teachers know where they are going and where they have been (Cunningham et al., 2015).

Specific, rather than general goals for teachers, are preferred, so there is no confusion about what is being taught (Cunningham et al., 2015).

Opportunities for practice of knowledge, and observation of master teachers should be provided (Cunningham et al., 2015).

Feedback, self-reflection, and assessment are included (Cunningham et al., 2015).

Provision of useful materials, such as activity guides, future reading assignments, and charts of summarized key points are helpful to learners (Cunningham et al., 2015).

Learning communities are successful with a cohort of educators who have the opportunity to form relationships, through a system provided for individual and group communication (Cunningham et al., 2015).

Instruction in research-based practices is important. If teachers do not know the “what” and the “why,” they will not be able to effectively teach young children (Cunningham et al., 2015).

Teaching in response to children’s attempts to initiate conversation is valuable (Cabell et al., 2015).

Training on the development of the back and forth nature of conversations between teacher and child has been documented as beneficial to the development of language and vocabulary (Justice et al., 2008).
Training on the development of childcare teacher and parent interactions, is important so that the emotional involvement of both the caregiver and the mother are healthy (Fothergill, 2013).

**Childcare Director Development: Needs and Pedagogical Design**

During the literature review, only a few studies were found that specifically addressed childcare directors. These studies tended to be state-by-state programs developed for an individual state’s childcare director training initiative. Following a review of literature related to leadership in childcare, Muijs, Aubrey, Harris, and Briggs (2004) issued a strong statement saying early childhood leadership research is very limited in amount and scope and also limited by the few researchers looking at this topic. This small number of researchers contemplating childcare leadership is not only concerning, but also unfortunate given the closer look childcare is receiving as legislation expands and childcare moves toward public sector sponsorship (Muijs et al., 2004).

This would seem to be a most serious oversight for two reasons. First, because it leaves effective leadership practice to chance and implies that there will inevitably be weak leaders. Second, because it knowingly leaves those in leadership positions unprepared for the significant management and leadership tasks they face on a daily basis. (Muijs et al., 2004, p. 167)

**Summary**

Chapter 2 began with a review of multiple topics related to childcare in America. 1) the historical perspective was reviewed highlighting model longitudinal programs, 2) the birth of the phrase, the “30-Million-Word Gap,” from the research of Hart and Risley was defined (2003), 3) the creation, success, and failures of Head Start were presented,
4) children’s needs were delineated, 5) the response of contemporary childcare to children’s needs was reviewed, and 6) finally, childcare provider development was investigated.

After studying the literature cited above, lists of competencies for children and childcare teachers and providers were formulated from various research studies. Further, effective pedagogical design elements for childcare teachers and/or childcare teachers and providers were developed to address the child, and the childcare provider and/or teacher competencies. It was clear from the studies that there exist a variety of needs to help these children and future generations. Copple and Bredekamp (2009) edited the National Association for the Education of Young Children’s (NAEYC) position statement on developmentally appropriate practice (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Many of their concerns revolved around teaching practice. In order to provide the services infants and young children need, teachers much know all about the children—how they talk, what they understand, how they play, their favorite activities, what directions they follow, and so on—in order to set challenging and reachable goals (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). “A teacher’s moment-by-moment actions and interactions with children are the most powerful determinant of learning outcomes and development. Curriculum is very important, but what the teacher does is paramount” (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009, p. 2).
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Many American children start kindergarten every fall unprepared for the academic and social challenges they face (Hindman & Wasik, 2013). Nearly 13 million infants, toddlers, and preschoolers spend some or all of their days in childcare. This number is more than one-half of our nation’s preschool population. The over 1.2 million childcare teachers and providers play an important role in the preparation of young children for kindergarten (Childcare Aware, 2015). Given the current outcome for children it is plausible to question if childcare directors and workers understand the importance of their communicative interactions for the future of the babies and young children in their care. The researcher studied existing literature in order to describe the current state of childcare, and the 30-million-word gap (Hart & Risley, 1995), one of the delays that exist for many young children upon kindergarten entry. Literature was found that described childcare directors, but this was primarily demographic in nature with some description of directors’ own needs for in-service education. However, for this study, the researcher did not find literature regarding childcare directors and their own perspectives on childcare, child skill introduction, kindergarten preparation, and job-related continuing education for childcare providers, teachers, and directors. The researcher conducted 20 interviews with childcare directors to supplement existing research.

Purpose

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to understand childcare directors’ perceptions of caring for young children, and to identify issues not addressed previously
in the literature review. This research took place at privately owned childcare facilities in the suburbs of a mid-western city. Suburban childcare facilities were selected in order to mitigate the effects of poverty found in other areas of the chosen city.

**Research Question**

The aim of this study was to identify issues not addressed previously in the literature, and to create a framework for comprehensive childcare facility education based on findings and best practices.

**Research Design**

The researcher chose a qualitative grounded theory approach. Grounded theory speaks to real-world situations such as those that are found in childcare. This approach was selected primarily “because it is a means to describe systematically, factually, and accurately the characteristics of an existing phenomenon” (Creswell, 2014, p. 149). First, the researcher wanted to hear directly from the childcare directors when they could speak with anonymity. Qualitative research allows researchers to go to participants’ work environments and speak to them directly through a confidential interview process (Creswell, 2000). “Rather than numbers, the data are words that describe people’s knowledge, opinions, perceptions, and feelings as well as detailed descriptions of people’s actions, behaviors, activities, and interpersonal interactions” (Creswell, 2014, p. 143). Second, the researcher wanted rich data in order to gain new perspectives and discoveries about childcare and the childcare director’s role in preparing children, birth to five years, for kindergarten. “Researchers are interested in the meanings people attach to the activities and events in their world and are open to whatever emerges” (Creswell, 2014, p. 143).
Participants

The participants for this study were defined by: a) position as director for three years or more, b) location of the daycare facility in a suburban area, c) location in the designated mid-western city, d) facilities locally owned and operated, and e) directors who agreed to participate. The researcher compiled a list of potential suburban childcare facilities from the local phone book. The researcher selected 26 childcare facilities for the initial contacts based on the criteria above. A contact letter, approved by the Creighton University Institutional Review Board (IRB), was sent to each of the 26 childcare facilities to announce the research study. Ten days after mailing the contact letter, the researcher made phone calls and explained the purpose and procedure for this childcare research study from the IRB-approved script, and scheduled 30 to 45 minute interviews with those who chose to participate. At the beginning, 15 of the 26 agreed to participate. Following interviews, participants referred the researcher to directors of other facilities who made up the remaining five interviews. The overall sample size was 31, reaching saturation at 20 participants. Although not part of the study criteria, or under the control of the researcher, it should be noted that all participants were Caucasian women.

Data Collection Tools

Interviews play a major part in data collection in qualitative methodology, but prior to deciding definitively on interviews for data collection, the researcher also considered focus groups, observations, and surveys. The focus group could be described as a group interview. The focus group can be advantageous particularly when data
cannot be collected through observation (Creswell, 2014). However, the most outspoken individuals in the group could unduly influence the focus group, and specific answers were desired from all childcare directors. Observation of childcare providers and teachers was also considered. Due to the phenomenon under study, observation would make data collection more complicated with infants and young children present in the childcare setting, due to the myriad of necessary approvals from parents, childcare teachers and providers, directors, and the Creighton University Institutional Review Board (IRB). Finally, surveys were considered for data collection, but were not appropriate for the purposes of this study. Surveys lend themselves more to numeric analysis of trends and other statistics rather than rich verbal information (Kvale, 2007).

**Data Collection Procedures**

The researcher conducted interviews on site at 20 childcare facilities. Before beginning each interview, the researcher re-stated information about the study, its purpose, intent, and possible outcomes. Each director received a copy of the stated background information, and the researcher initialed and retained a dated statement indicating that she presented this information before beginning the interview. The initialing of the dated statement signified that by the director’s acknowledgement and the interviewer’s opinion, the interviewee understood the introductory information presented. After the introduction, the researcher wanted the directors to understand they did not have to sign the consent form if they decided against participation. None of the directors declined the interview at the time of the appointment. The researcher informed the participants of the minimal chance of injury by participating in this study. The researcher
emphasized that she preferred to record the interview for accuracy, and all directors gave a verbal approval to record the interview. Each interview lasted around 30 to 45 minutes.

The researcher asked each director ten to twelve questions (See Appendix B). The questions were designed with the study purpose and research question in mind. The researcher asked all questions in the same manner for each interview and attempted not to influence the director by showing any positive or negative responses, either verbally or non-verbally. The researcher gathered rich responses from the participants for analysis.Originally, the researcher considered interviewing childcare providers and teachers. However, the researcher perceived the childcare director as the gatekeeper—those who arrange release time for staff and authorize payment for staff development.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status, Research Question, and Aim</th>
<th>Corresponding Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Status: Many American children start kindergarten every fall ill prepared for the academic and social challenges they face, some with a 30 million-word-gap.</td>
<td>5, 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question: What are childcare directors’ perceptions of their roles, challenges, and relationships that may shed new light on child development in preparation for kindergarten?</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 8, 9, 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aim: The aim of this study was to identify issues not addressed previously in the literature, and to create a framework for comprehensive childcare facility education based on findings and best practices.</td>
<td>4, 7, 8, 11, 12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The childcare director’s attitudes and beliefs toward the role of childcare, the role of the childcare worker, and the responsibility of the childcare program to the child and his or her family, are pivotal to the preparation of childcare teachers and providers. The researcher wanted to understand these research questions from the childcare director’s point of view. “In an interview conversation, the researcher asks about, and listens to, what people themselves tell about their lived world, about their dreams, fears and hopes, hears their views and opinions in their own words, and learns about their school and work situation, their family and social life” (Kvale, 2007, p. 1). The interviewees were asked for referrals to other directors who might be willing to participate. Five referrals were scheduled for interviews. As the researcher approached the 20th interview, no novel concepts were emerging. Saturation was achieved. The researcher concluded the daycare director research with 20 interviews. It should be noted that the participants did not receive any compensation for their participation in the study.

One additional participant was added following the childcare director interviews. During those interviews, the name of a resource for childcare directors (“Participant 21”), who was not a childcare director herself was mentioned by seven of the 20 directors interviewed. The researcher contacted Participant 21 for an interview and explained the purpose of the study. The interview was scheduled and each childcare director interview question was amended slightly to make it appropriate for Participant 21. All other steps in the interview process were followed. This was an opportunity for triangulation of responses. “In research, the accuracy of the data is paramount. Therefore you are obliged to employ validation strategies such as triangulation…to check the accuracy of data” (Roberts, 2010, p. 38). “If themes are established based on converging several
sources of data or perspectives from participants, then this process can be claimed as adding to the validity of the study” (Creswell, 2014, p. 201).

Attention to detail in writing the questions was critical to the success of the interviews and the study. The researcher wrote the interview questions to prompt rich conversational data, and not lead the participant in any way. “Faulty theoretical conceptions of interview conversations, such as the empiricist prejudice of leading questions, may lead to superficial interview practices” (Kvale, 2007). The researcher wanted to ask only enough questions to gather the necessary data and not ask questions that invaded their privacy (2007). The researcher conducted each interview on site in the childcare director’s facility. Even though there were different locations for the interviews, in order to demonstrate validity other features of the interview had some degree of standardization of content, presentation, and researcher reaction (Creswell, 2014; Flick, 2007). The researcher issued a number to each interviewee and childcare facility to protect anonymity. The actual names of the interviewees, the childcare facility, the date interviewed, location, and contact information were compiled, and safely stored on a password-protected laptop computer. Any copies of data made for analysis were stored in a locked file cabinet.

A qualitative researcher wants to do more than find the answers he or she is already expecting. This researcher wanted to find answers she was not expecting in an attempt to make a true contribution to the field of early childhood education (Flick, 2007). After each interview, the researcher used reflective practices to review what she learned, and to identify any information gaps. The researcher was free to modify the
interview questions for subsequent interviews in order to more clearly understand the perceptions and needs of the childcare director.

The researcher used Rev.com for verbatim transcription of each interview. Once Rev.com transcribed all the interviews, member check of responses was achieved by sending the transcription to each interviewee to double check for accuracy and integrity of ideas. Participants were told at the time of the interview and on the attachment included with the mailed transcription that they could make changes directly on the transcript and send it back in the enclosed postage paid envelope. If participants did not have changes, they could send the transcript back and indicate there were no changes. They were also informed on both occasions if the interview transcript was not returned within two weeks of the postmark, it was assumed that the transcript was acceptable to the participant. There were nine transcripts returned. The researcher made the two changes—typographical in nature.

At the time of the interviews, it is unknown how each Director’s philosophical statements, frustrations, or intents translated into practice in the childcare facility. No observations of the childcare providers and teachers, support staff, or of children in attendance took place.

**Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations are important for the researcher to consider. If ethics are breached, the results of the research may become invalid. Creighton University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved all the scripts for the scheduling call and the interview questions before beginning the study.
Prior to each interview, the researcher engaged in bracketing. The researcher wrote in a journal about biases and then recited them aloud. The biases were then consciously set aside. This written reflection would be revisited prior to interviews or when transcribing data (Creswell, 2014). The participants’ honest perspectives were important for consideration.

Other ethical considerations included the processes followed in the collection of data. The researcher adhered closely to the use of approved documents at every step. There were also ethical considerations to take into consideration when collecting, recording, and storing data. The anonymity of participants and their employers was critical and was respected. The researcher assigned a number to the participants and all records will be stored on a password-protected computer for five years. When reporting data in the dissertation and any other publications, no personal names or facility names will be used. The city name will be kept confidential as well. If these ethical considerations are not followed, there could be repercussions for the participants as well as for the validity of the research.

Summary

The childcare setting is a likely link in the chain of preparation for kindergarten because today 13 million American children under five are in childcare for all or part of their days. This qualitative study sought to add to the field of early childhood education by studying the interview responses of 20 childcare directors. Childcare directors cast a different light on the problem of the poor preparation for kindergarten that plagues many young American children.
In this chapter, the Purpose Statement, Research Question, and Aim were reviewed. The research design was described as a qualitative, grounded theory study. The criteria for, and number of participants were revealed and saturation was met at 20 participants. In the data collection section, the data collection practices were described. Member check was employed, by sending the transcribed interviews to the participants for review. Also, triangulation was accomplished by scheduling a follow-up interview with Participant 21 who was mentioned by seven of the 20 participants as someone helpful in finding appropriate in-service events for staff and directors. Themes from directors were crossed checked with the Participant 21 to check the validity of directors’ perceptions. Additionally, ethical considerations were described.

The following chapter will discuss findings from the interviews and the themes extrapolated from the data. An evidence-based solution will be described in Chapter 5.
CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

In this chapter the rich data from the childcare director interviews were presented. The following research question guided this qualitative study: What are childcare directors’ perceptions of their roles, challenges, and relationships that may shed new light on child development in preparation for kindergarten?

In 2014, 13 million American children, infancy through age four were in childcare for all or part of their days (Childcare Aware, 2014). The childcare setting is a likely link in the chain of preparation for kindergarten. This research study focused on the childcare directors who provide care for this group of children.

The aim of this study was to identify issues not addressed previously in the literature, and to create a framework for comprehensive childcare facility education based on findings and best practices. This qualitative study sought to add to the field of early childhood education by studying the interview responses of 20 childcare directors.

Qualitative Research

The qualitative method of conducting scholarly research is:

a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures; collecting data in the participants’ setting; analyzing the data inductively, building from particulars to general themes; and making interpretations of the meaning of the data. (Creswell, 2014, pp. 246-247)

Each interview was conducted on site in the childcare director’s facility with direct interaction between the researcher and the participant. Using the natural setting is a basic
characteristic of qualitative research (Creswell, 2014). The research protocol was approved by the Creighton IRB. Each potential interview subject was sent a letter explaining the study. A few days after the letters were sent, the researcher called each potential interview subject to schedule the interview. On the day of the interview, prior to beginning, the researcher reiterated the purpose of the study and gained permission to record the interview for accuracy. The participant was given a copy of the information and signed a statement saying she understood the purpose of the study and gave permission for the researcher to record the interview (See Attachment A). All interviews were recorded and verbatim transcription was provided by Rev.com. Even though there were different locations for the interviews, in order to demonstrate validity, the researcher attempted standardization of content, presentation, and researcher reaction (Creswell, 2014; Flick, 2007). All the questions posed to the childcare directors were taken from the IRB approved script (See Attachment B). The questions were presented without using vocal tone that might influence the answers. The interviewer reacted neutrally to responses.

Another demonstration of validity was member checking. The researcher mailed the 20 interview transcripts to each of the corresponding childcare directors. Nine transcripts were returned with only two edits to the transcripts that were typographical in nature. All of the childcare directors were told if they did not have changes to the transcript, they did not have to return the transcript. One more expression of validity was the addition of information from Participant 21. Participant 21 was mentioned by seven of the twenty Directors (35%) as a professional who was a primary source of information
for childcare facilities. The researcher did not plan in advance to interview Participant 21. However, since her name came up seven times, the researcher felt it was important to hear her comments and get an additional angle on the information given by the childcare directors. This type of checking is called triangulation (Creswell, 2014). Participant 21’s services have been shared among several school districts for the last 10 years through an annual renewable grant. Participant 21 was responsible for arranging workshops, support, and also training for licensure and accreditation for childcare facilities. The interview was scheduled with her after the other 20 interviews were completed and reviewed. The same questions were asked, but were modified slightly when necessary to fit her professional role, as she was not the owner or director of a childcare facility, although she was a director in the past. In order to maintain her anonymity, a more specific description of her professional role was not provided.

The researcher had 283 pages of transcribed data. In the preliminary analysis of these data, the researcher read all the childcare directors’ transcripts two to three times until she was familiar with the interviews. Then the researcher cut apart with scissors segments of data from each interview and sorted them into the various developing topics, i.e., statement of mission, hiring, director in-service training, and so forth in order to make the data more accessible. After this was accomplished with all 20 interview transcripts, the researcher read the sorted data segments on each topic, moving some around if appropriate. Out of this manual-coding process the following 14 topics emerged:

- Responsibilities of the director
- Frustration with new State requirements for staff training
Lack of family involvement and support

Participation in family education

Childcare Centers offer low pay and no benefits

Creation of a team environment with everyone getting along

Hiring and retaining staff is difficult

Lack of affirmation from public and family for what they do

Childcare teacher and provider needs for training

Director needs for training

Lack of time to do everything

Communication of mission and vision

Searching for people who want a career and not just a job

Child education standards and needs

**Presentation of the Findings**

In grounded theory, after topics were identified from the participants’ interviews by the use of open coding, the researcher re-examined the topics to ascertain if it was possible to combine some of the topics into larger units through the process of axial coding (Gibbs, 2007). Through axial coding, the 14 topics were combined into six themes. These interview themes paired with the corresponding interview responses provided some insight into the participants’ perceptions of their roles. See Table 2, *Reduction of Topics into Six Themes*.

These six themes included areas that seemed to have strong consequences for the childcare directors. They included: Communication of Mission; Director Roles; Hiring, Staff Motivation, and Retention; Child Education; Director In-service Training; Staff In-
service Training; plus “Queen or King for a Day.” The data from this final theme was subsumed into the other six themes.

**Theme 1: Communication of Mission**

This particular theme was phrased to encourage a description of their mission, core values, and/or their vision for the future of their childcare center. They were asked, talk about anything important or special about their childcare facility they wanted the

---

Table 2. Reduction of Topics into Six Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mission, Vision, Core Values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication of mission effectively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family support/involvement/education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child education needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of affirmation for childcare career</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creation of team environment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Director Roles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Director training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of time to do everything</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director responsibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Required state Management Training</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hiring/Staff Motivation/Retention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hiring/retention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low pay/no benefits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff Motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restraint of hiring without required hours</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child Care and Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Required seven domains for early childhood</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Director In service</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Director training</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff In-service</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher/provider training</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Topic, “Queen or King for a Day” was subsumed into other areas*
researcher to know. In some cases, when they did not speak up, they were prompted by the actual word, “mission.” The communication of a mission statement was varied among the participants. Participant 2 articulated her center’s mission as,

…the first foundation for forever learning…. So our goal is not to be one of, but the best early childhood education provider…. We’ve got core values that we utilize that’s important for us as a teaching staff as well as our commitment with our families, and that talks specifically about teamwork, commitment, honesty, integrity, and fairness. So those are our five values. (Participant 2)

Participant 4 described the mission of her facility and said their center tries to focus on being the best childcare center they could for the families whose children were enrolled. Participant 19 wanted the researcher to know,

We are not just a daycare. We’re also a preschool, so our main focus is education besides, obviously, providing a safe and secure facility, but we start our curriculum and our learning process already in the infant room by having individualized lesson plans for children, depending on where they are developmentally…. So a lot of people think it’s a daycare, and they just, you know, drop off and go, but there’s a whole lot of education going on here.

(Participant 19)

Participant 5 said, “Our main mission is that children learn at their own pace and that children learn through play” (Participant 5). For Participant 8, cleanliness and safety were most important to her, along with greeting parents and children so they felt comfortable coming to the center every day. Participant 11 said her center’s mission was unique because they want the children in their center to be loved and taken care of the
same as their parents would, and Participant 12 opened her center because of her passion for children. She wanted to make a real difference in children’s lives. Participant 13 said,

We stay within state ratios so we make sure that all teachers are, um, providing accurate care for the children. We pretty much stay with a strict schedule obviously with flexibility in that but we try to stay pretty structured so we think that that provides a better environment for the children when they know what’s coming next and what to expect. (Participant 13)

Participant 15 said their childcare facility was distinguished with a Christian mission that directed the curriculum and set the tone for their environment. The last mission statement that was mentioned here is from Participant 17. The Director talked about their structured educational environment for infants through preschool that included sign language, yoga, and country of the month.

**Theme Two: Director Roles**

This theme encompassed the roles, responsibilities, or duties that the director assumed. In some instances, the responsibilities were divided among directors and co-directors, or directors and supervisors. Participant 2 stated three goals as director. The first goal was managing day-to-day events—doing it all and wearing many hats. Her second goal was to guide and lead by providing an example for the staff. Her third goal was to position her staff so in the future the center would be able to seek an advanced education accreditation to become a training school. Participant 6 had the clearly defined role of running the business side of the childcare. The other owner and co-director ran the center. That involved staffing, approving lesson plans, and maintaining state
Participant 3 was another director who does anything and everything.

I come in every day, if I, if I’m not out of town I’m here, you know. I come in, I make sure everybody’s here, doing what they’re supposed to be doing, everybody’s you know, nobody’s sick, everybody’s showed up, um, you know everything is going the way it’s supposed to be going. Make sure that I’ve staffed for the whole day and everybody’s, nobody’s sick or needs to go home, ah, you know I get my billing done, I deal with any issues with the parent or the kids.

Same with the staff, um I do whatever needs to be done, really. (Participant 3)

Participant 8 explained that her favorite part of her job is the children—getting involved and interacting with the children. She also likes dealing with staff and complimenting them on art projects, and keeping them upbeat. She likes to hurry and get her administrative duties done before the owner comes in, so she can do things in the classrooms. Participant 16’s childcare center is affiliated with a hospital and she described the difficulties she has with making a daycare fit into the hospital world with all its rules and regulations, unconventional parent work schedules, and the need for extreme flexibility. Participant 19’s center is locally owned but under the umbrella of the home office when it comes to policy implementation and change, and it is the director’s responsibility to make sure each individual staff member understands a policy or policy change. Additionally, she reported that she guides her staff, makes sure they have everything they need, and keeps them informed about research, and changes in center-wide policies. Participant 14 explained that she is the owner and the director, and she does everything. She summarized her situation by saying,
Well, I think what I thought when I first started this because I was a teacher, I thought, I would have time to work in the classroom, I thought I would have time to teach preschool, I thought that, you know, I could be more involved in the hands on day to day with the kids. But the administrative part of it is so much more than I knew about. There’s a lot more paperwork involved, you know, we’re on the food program and all of that kinda stuff. So I think that changed a little bit…. Yeah, and it didn’t turn out quite, quite, like that. (Participant 14)

Participant 21 confirmed this participant’s situation. She said that many times those who are tapped for the director position, “myself included, you work your way up through the ranks. And you aren’t taught along the way. Managing a classroom and teaching young children is an entirely different bug, than human resources and managing a budget and all of the components that go into running a program (Participant 21).

Theme 3: Hiring

This theme included the process of hiring personnel for the workforce and its problems and difficulties. Some of these problems and difficulties were related to the low pay and lack of benefits in the childcare industry. Also the job of working in childcare is not one that receives accolades or affirmation and may impact hiring.

Participant 10 ran one of three centers, all owned by a local couple that resides in the community. The owners provide human resources for all the centers, and the salary is set and the background checks are done. The director conducts the interviews, looking for a bachelor or associate’s degree, or a minimum of six months of classroom experience. If the Director likes the person interviewed, she submits the information to human resources. Participant 3 said,
…when I started doing this I was younger. I had more energy. I liked the younger girls, Um, but then you kinda find where the younger, inexperienced girls are kinda trouble, you know, outside problems, outside, you know stuff comes into work and….So now I kinda try and avoid that…. (Participant 3)

She did not necessarily look for experience because without prior experience sometimes it was easier to train them the way she works and the way she wants them to be. She had been advertising at universities with the intent to hire girls who are studying education. She knew that she would lose them to a better job, but for the present time they were more interested in the children and the job they were doing. Participant 20 ran a relatively small program and said that she had not had to hire anyone, except for summer help, for about three years. She was proud of her center’s staff longevity and felt it contributed to children and parents loving to come to school every day.

Participant 18 mentioned her general frustration with hiring in the area. For example, she wished there could be a registry of some kind for times when they had to terminate an employee for pinching a child or leaving a child unattended. No one shares that information when one calls for references. She said very rarely does any other childcare facility call her and ask for a reference prior to hiring. Participant 17 described a straight forward hiring process in which she receives a resume, makes sure the applicant is qualified, has the applicant come in for a formal interview, fills out an application, contacts references, does the criminal history check, and if all checks out, offers the job, and hires the applicant. Participant 16 is the director whose center is affiliated with a hospital. All the recruiting, advertising and initial screening are done through the hospital. Then those who pass the initial screening are sent on to the director.
She interviews, using a predetermined script, but modifies the script so she can learn what she needs to know about the applicant. She then sends her notes and recommendations to the recruiter and then they offer the applicant the position. Then the waiting begins while they complete the background check and first go through hospital orientation. The director was frustrated because from the point she tells human resources that she wants to hire someone, it can take as long as two to three weeks. Participant 6 added,

It’s just been a challenge, they’re just, people are under experienced and we really also don’t love to hire people that don’t have experience. Only because, you know the famous words of, oh I either, I have two kids so I know what it’s like to work in childcare or I have been a nanny before so I know. But it’s a whole lot different when you have a room of 12 infants, you know. Um, it can be really overwhelming, so it’s nice to know somebody can handle that level of stimulation and multitasking and all those things prior to. We will hire people without prior experience but have to just get the right, I guess vibe from them. You know. (Participant 6)

In general, hiring was a challenge. For the last year, many said there have not been enough applicants. One director said she had an opening advertised for almost a year and nobody even came in, whether qualified or not.

**Theme 4: Staff Motivation and Retention**

When the directors were asked about their biggest challenge, 85% put staff first on the list. Some of that had to do with hiring, as presented above. Other issues were with employees who called in sick all the time or were late. One director commented that
one cannot put the children on hold just because a staff member was late or absent. The center must keep the state required teacher-to-child ratios. She would like to see a vetted substitute list established like ones they have in the public schools. Once having hired new staff members, they report finding it difficult to motivate and retain them.

Participant 3 said that in order to keep employees professional one has to watch them all the time. She did not want them to bring outside problems into the center and influence the children in any way. She wanted them to be good role models for the children. Participant 1 said her challenge is employees and keeping them motivated. She would also like employees to speak up when they have an issue with someone or something. If she could have what she wanted, she would hire a room full of people who did the job for a purpose and not just a paycheck. She did not want high turnover in her daycare, although childcare is a high turnover industry. Participant 5 revealed that

…her biggest challenge is staffing…and making sure everyone’s doing what they’re supposed to be doing and following, our guidelines and what we want, we expect from staff. Keeping them off their cell phones and …I, yeah, it’s like a whole new generation too, where some of them are just so plugged-in that they, it’s like, that’s not okay, you have to be focused on your job. Your cell phone is, needs to be put away. So that’s probably my biggest challenge. (Participant 5)

Participant 8 stated she wanted her teachers structured and organized. It was important to this director that the room was conducive to learning through play. If she went into a room and there were toys all over the floor and the children were running around, they were not learning. Participant 11 indicated that she thinks the job is too tough. Childcare is not a high paying field, and it is hard work. When taking care of children, no two days
are the same, but they are all hard work. She indicated that one has to find the right people who have passion for the job. Participant 4 indicated, “Things fluctuate. I’d say over the years for this center, it’s probably been sometimes finding the right staff to work” (Participant 4). She said that whenever she finds the right people they are like gold to her and they become the essence of the center, so she tried to be very good to her staff. Participant 18 said that her teachers and staff were like family, while Participant 2 said that the toughest part of her job was hiring and retaining employees. She tells her staff that they have the most important job in the world. Participant 1 tried to create a center that has a team environment. Her goals were to find the right way to work with different people so they felt appreciated. Also, she struggled to find a way not to necessarily discipline, but teach staff to approach things from her viewpoint. She stressed communication as “huge.” She summarized this theme by saying a study she read said income is not the first thing that motivates people in their jobs, rather that they wanted to feel appreciated and to like their jobs. Participant 21 added that one of the problems with retention of staff is that when a provider gets a credential, then an associate’s degree, then a bachelor’s degree, they were off to the public school early childhood programs because they had better pay, great benefits, shorter hours, and no evenings or closing the center. Participant 21 confirmed the perception that the job of working in childcare does not receive much in the way of positive recognition. She thought we need to make it clear that every person who touches the life of a child whether in childcare or in a daycare home is important. Participant 21 thought we need to work on raising the perception of early childhood as a profession, and that childcare teachers and providers should say they work in early childhood or childcare with pride.
Theme 5: Child Education

In this theme, priorities for child education were explored. Child education requirements appeared to be on a spectrum from lots of free play to structured education. Participants’ responses were reflected here whose childcare facilities were examples of this spectrum. Participant 18 taught Spanish and sign language beginning at 18 months of age, and she felt that if the children were talking and have large motor skills, she was satisfied. Participant 5 wanted the children to have fun in a controlled setting. If the classroom was controlled and no one was running around they would not get hurt. She wanted hands on experiences for them where they were learning through play, but unaware they were actually learning. She had a preschool coordinator who designed activities. Also, the director was “big” on reading to children. She felt children pick up a lot of language through listening to books and also through singing. Participant 13 said the staff is not there just to babysit but rather to make certain the children grow developmentally. Beginning with infants they worked on sign language, and also wanted the infants and toddlers to at least be able to speak up. They expected the children to progress through milestones, based on developmental checklists and the staff communicated any concerns they might have to the parents. Participant 9 expected childcare staff to love and appreciate children. She wanted the staff to have a true understanding of who the children really are, and not necessarily the children the staff might want or expect them to be. Furthermore, she wanted children to be in a safe and empowering environment where they could make their own exciting discoveries. She wanted the teachers to allow children to solve their own problems when appropriate, rather than have someone always answer for them and not let them figure things out for
themselves. Participant 1 wanted children to be safe and happy during the day. They teach two-year olds the alphabet song and once they learned that song they teach children to recognize letters. They broke it down by age groups, but by the time the children matriculated to kindergarten, they should be able to write the alphabet. Parents wanted their children reading, and a lot of the children can read when they leave the center.

Participant 2 said that children should meet or exceed developmental milestones in her state’s seven learning domains. She said beyond that, character development and social skills would be even more important. Participant 10 would like children to learn life skills, making friends, developing the ability to make choices and decisions for themselves. She wanted her staff to promote in-the-moment learning. They did assessments throughout the year to determine what the children learned.

But then so their final year of preschool before they go to Kindergarten, we do a Kindergarten Readiness Assessment to assess everything that they’ve learned. Like, you know, in our eyes is this child ready to go to Kindergarten? Yes, they’ve scored above and beyond on their assessment. And so, you know, like we have that information to send to parents, who then can deliver that however they want. (Participant 10)

Participant 4 told the researcher that if a teacher is working with infants, then she really wanted the teacher to know what an infant is about and what is appropriate for that infant’s age and developmental level. The director saw her teachers and staff almost like helpers for the parent. When the teachers are in tune with the children and with what is age appropriate, then they could talk and be more confident with parents. Participant 7 wanted her staff to work on social emotional teaching, “I think one of the things that we
really focus on, how they can get along with their peers and how they can talk and try to figure out their problems without needing constant intervention from somebody else.” (Participant 7). Participant 16 said that each child has an assessment grid in the classroom. On these assessment grids they kept track of cognitive skills, social and emotional skills, literacy, and all of their physical skills. Then their needs were incorporated into lessons. However, their real push was on social-emotional development. Participant 6 told the researcher,

> So we’ve got a preschool program and pre-k program, preschool is for 2 years up from kindergarten. So that’s that three year old, some four year old age, and down. Really prior to that pre-k class we’re predominantly growing through play. So we’re working on social-emotional development all those things, so, we’re trying to teach them to interact with other children appropriately, try to ask for something, express their emotions appropriately. So I would say honestly the biggest goal from 3 on down is, trying to get the children to feel safe of course and express themselves. Express themselves in a constructive way, which is really a challenge. (Participant 6)

Preschool and pre-kindergarten were both very structured, plus they have a teacher who sees all the children in small groups of four to six, based on developmental level.

Participants 6, 20, and 8 all had specific learning goals when children reached pre-kindergarten at four years old. In these programs children were taught skills including: read and write first and last name, know their address, phone number, and simple site words, counting, days of the week, months of the year, colors, recognize letters and their sounds, and perhaps do simple math problems. Participant 21 said,
I think school needs to be ready for kids, regardless of where they’re at. I don’t like the idea of early childhood programs the mission being we’ve got to get them ready for school. No, actually, we don’t. The school needs to be ready for children wherever they are. (Participant 21)

Along those lines she mentioned socio-emotional training multiple times. She also mentioned the importance of language development. As the reader can see, the goals and objectives for educating children of the 20 childcare programs were varied.

**Theme 6: Director Pre-Service and In-Service Training**

Next, what kind of pre-service or in-service training did the directors and childcare providers receive that prepared them to care for children? First, director in-service training and then childcare provider in-service training was explored. Participant 4 said that she tries to improve herself by reading articles and keeping her eyes and ears open. She attended in-service trainings sometimes, but she said it is often what she already knows and preaches to her staff. However, she always tried to look for something good in what she heard. Participant 8 told the researcher that she had three years of college unrelated to childcare, but she earned her Child Development Associate (CDA) credential after entering the childcare field. Now she exceeded the annual state requirements for training, and she always learned something she brings back to the Center and suggests as a tool for different children. Participant 9 had her degree in elementary education with a specialization in early childhood, however she did not keep her teaching certificate current. Her state requirement for in-service hours was 12 per year, but the owner expected 24 hours, part of that included *Conscious Discipline* training (Baily, 2015). Participant 12 was required by her state to take a one-time management
class that was held one day per month for three months. When she attended training for her annual required hours, she chose management topics. She received information about upcoming trainings from the state’s monthly news flyer. For Participant 15, in addition to the required one-time management class, she took a lot of training on the early learning guidelines. She said she always looked for any training that regarded motivating staff.

Participant 16 said,

I think a lot of lacking of training is like, dealing with parents. That’s such a huge part of our job. How to talk to parents, how to, like body language when you’re talking to a parent about something that went wrong. I just experienced it last week, I, whatever I said was really not, she was not happy with how I presented it and I wasn’t trying to, but apparently my body language and the way I spoke, really, it was hard, it was really offending to her and I’m like, ‘Ugh, I wish I knew what I did.’ (Participant 16)

Participant 17 was the director of a school that is locally owned, but was under the umbrella of a national company. They provided director training and they occasionally sent someone out from headquarters to do training with the director and staff. They provided monthly interactive webinars on different topics and some were appropriate for other staff members. Participant 2 said that, “I actually am trained to facilitate all the departments of the Health and Human Services Regulation courses materials. And so, we’re able to do that ‘cause we hold monthly staff meetings, and then we have two staff development days.” Participant 19 felt that she did not really have any needs when it came to training because she received monthly trainings from their local office. They all close their centers every Presidents’ Day and have workshops all day.
Participant 18 took the one-time business management training that included, how to create an inviting environment, human resources, and so on. She thought the most beneficial thing about the training was to meet other directors, and she wished there could be directors’ groups in different areas of the city. Participant 3 did not have any training needs as director of a program. Participant 10 wished she could get more information about human resources and decision-making skills. Participant 11 did not really have any specific needs, but she liked inspiring and uplifting trainings. Participant 7 preferred to attend topics dealing with management, or children with behavior needs. Participant 16 wanted to find trainings on staff motivation, because she wanted her staff to go one step beyond what they are doing now. Participant 4 did not have any specific needs, but spoke of herself as a mentor to her staff. Participant 21 talked about the required 45-hour management training for childcare directors. It is required for licensing and renewing licenses. The problem she had is that some attend just to get the certificate of completion and it was very difficult to keep them motivated during the sessions. Others took it not only for a certificate, but to learn something, and teaching to both groups simultaneously was difficult.

In general, the directors interviewed did not appear to feel they needed any additional training beyond the one-time director’s training required by the state. When they did have needs for training, the topics tended to be in the areas of staff motivation, and other human resource topics.

**Theme 6: Childcare Teacher and Provider In-Service Training**

Participant 14 mentioned that she had new staff members shadow experienced
teachers for a couple of days. Their center also was in a network of excellence through their state. They use Better Kid Care (http://extension.psu.edu/youth/betterkidcare) for a training program with 15-minute modules that she could select and give to specific staff members based on observed needs. Each module came with a worksheet. She used topics like hand washing, supervision of children, and creating safe places for children. Participant 9 focused on programming with Conscious Discipline (Baily, 2015) and Creative Curriculum (Teaching Strategies, 2015). When asked about specific training in child development, Participant 18 responded that if newly hired staff members already had training, they photocopied their certificates and put them in their employee files for documentation. If they did not have previous training, their responsibilities would be different depending on the type of experience they had. For example, if they did not have any training, they could not be a lead teacher, but an assistant teacher or just support staff. Full time teachers must have 12 hours of in-service per year and it all had to be regarding childcare education. Participant 12 chose trainings offered by the state that she felt were important and then told the staff which ones to take. Other times they paid to bring a state trainer to their center. Participant 2 said that her program had become more deliberate and intentional with staff training. She asked her curriculum director to create an agenda for the year. She thought that many childcare directors were unaware of available resources. There are a lot of opportunities, but they cost more than certain centers may be able to pay. Participant 4 preferred getting several teachers to attend a big conference together so they could talk about the value of what they learned. However, she said that just because someone hears an idea, unless that person chose to change, it made no difference, because it was all about implementation. Participant 20 wanted her
staff to attend an in-service on managing anger and stress. Participant 8 said she and her staff attended training at state offices and it was mostly hands-on, like dancing, singing, cooking, and learning ideas for projects to do with the children. Participant 16 commented that her staff liked to go to the 2-hour free trainings that were usually held in the evenings, but then they complained that they didn’t learn anything new. Participant 7 said that finding time for staff to attend training was difficult because many were scheduled evenings and weekends and staff members have families of their own. A lot of the trainings revolved around social emotional issues and behavior problems because those things are a struggle for childcare staff. They also offered science and math topics. Participant 9 liked literacy and math trainings, would like training on difficulties with needy and demanding parents. Participant 10 told the researcher that trainings do provide knowledge for her staff but that a lot of her staff learned better by peer-to-peer discussions, pairing a very experienced teacher with a newer teacher. She also encouraged her staff to pursue trainings related to the age of the children in their care. A couple of years ago, Participant 11’s center focused on the environment and room arrangement. Participant 13 said that she posted all the opportunities available and then let the teachers and assistants choose ones they wanted to attend. Participants 12 and 15 told the researcher that infant and toddler training was difficult to find—not even enough for the required twelve hours. Participant 6 also mentioned specific training for infants and toddlers, for example, soothing children, dealing with toddler tantrum behavior, or biting.

It was clear that preferences for in-service trainings were as different as the 20 childcare directors in this study. One thing similar was that directors, childcare
teachers and providers at least some of the time, selected in-service trainings based on
days of the week and time, or to fulfill state requirements, rather than based on content,
mission, or vision.

“Queen or King for a Day.” The last topic was called “Queen or King for a
Day” and their answers were in response to being asked, “If you were Queen or King
for a day, how would you change things here in your childcare facility or with
childcare in general?” The researcher hoped the directors would think creatively about
their facilities, about their jobs, about their missions, about the entire field of childcare, or
anything else that might need “fixing.” These responses were dispersed throughout all of
the six identified themes, as the answers related to most of them.

Participant 1 said she would promote speaking up, communication, and a team
environment. She said life was “catty” in a childcare center with all women sometimes.
That problem would require more than being a queen. She would have to be a magician.
But, you know, gosh we’re paid to play with kids, you know how can you not find
the joy in that? Help people see that, you know, more than, more than just
coming in and punching the clock. But, the excitement and the amazing part of
what we do. (Participant 1)

Participant 11 also thought along the same lines as Participant 1.

A Queen for a day? It could be anything? Um, everybody coming to work
focused on their classroom and all staff members getting along with each other
and being full staffed. And the happy parents. Because that’s the other thing.
That’s the other thing. Happy teachers, happy parents and all fits in together.

(Participant 11)
Participant 13 was another director who wanted everybody to be happy and get along. She wanted no stress on anyone, and the drama to disappear. Participant 18 said her number one thing would be staffing for everyone. She would also like directors communicating more, working as a team to make things better for all, and not feel as though they were always in competition. Participant 12 wanted to be a magician and put a spell on her staff so they could see the center through her eyes and understand why she was frustrated and upset. She would like her staff to do basic things like clean up after they made a mess, all work together, have more respect for the center, and make it look nice. She was tired of the staff always expecting someone else to clean up after them.

Participant 9 said she had one teacher she would like to let go because she gossiped too much, and just does not recognize her own gossiping. She also wanted to hire two more teachers. Participant 4’s request also had to do with staffing. She wanted staff to listen to children when they misbehave, and respond appropriately instead of almost taking on the children’s personalities. She wished staff-child interactions would change and be more like those of parent-child interactions. She wanted them all to become role models for the children. Participant 3 added a different perspective. She wanted to make all the children good—with no behavior challenges. She felt that parents are just not involved with their children and seemed not to care. When they saw problems they talked to the parents, but it was like talking to a wall. Participant 17 would like to have more time in the day to get things done, and focus on the big picture, while Participant 6 wanted to have better communication between home and school.

Participant 14 would like to have more resources available so they could have the things they wanted to have for the kids, and Participant 16 echoed wanting resources and
more technology in their center, like computers, iPads, and security cameras for parents so they could watch their children throughout the day. Both directors commented on the lack of funds available for them in the way of grant money. Their centers had just as many needs, but did not qualify for public assistance and grants. Participants 8 and 20 both wanted a new building. Neither wanted more children, or different children, just to move to a brand new building. Participant 10 wanted to sit on a throne and observe, relax, and feel like she was on vacation for the day.

Participant 15 said she would like some new equipment, but her biggest wish would be for better pay and benefits for her staff. Participant 19 also said she would like to pay childcare staff more money because for what they do, they were definitely not paid enough. Participant 7 would lower all the classroom ratios because a ratio of ten little children to one adult is very difficult. They are little with lots of needs and they could do a lot of things by themselves or very well by themselves. That was hard work for the staff. She went on to say that they should be paying childcare providers a lot of money. Participant 5 would like to see more money allotted for their hard working staff, so she could give them all appropriate raises. Participant 2 would also like adequate salaries for her staff, and felt that education needed to be mandated for young children much sooner than kindergarten. Participant 9 would also change the salaries for her staff because it was difficult to work in early childhood and financially be able to live on your own. And last, Participant 21 said that the community thinks that early childhood education is important and that community members needed to support childcare not only with their voices, but with tax dollars. Participant 21, when she was Queen for a Day, wanted enough money to completely support early childhood.
The Kindergarten 30-Million-Word Gap. There was one other question that was asked that should be reported here. During the interviews, the following question was asked of all of the 20 directors: “Can you recall if you have heard of the kindergart
c30-Million-Word Gap?” Nineteen of the 20 directors replied “no” to that question. The significance of this question relates specifically back to the research reported in Chapter 2 that language and vocabulary are key to success for young children.

In grounded theory, after topics were identified from the participants’ interviews by the use of open coding, the researcher re-examined the topics to ascertain if it was possible to combine some of the topics into larger topical units or themes through the process of axial coding (Gibbs, 2007). Initially, the topics were sorted into eight themes. The researcher perused the topics, confirming topics, and sorting once more to determine if they could be reduced further. Through this process, described as axial coding, the 14 topics became eight themes, and ultimately were combined into the final six themes.

These interview themes provided some insight into the participants’ perceptions of their roles. See Table 2, Reduction of Topics into Six Themes.

Interconnection of Themes

Communication of Mission.

The communication of the organization’s mission has an impact on almost all the other themes. When employees interview for a job, they want to know what the childcare center is about so they know if they want to be a part of the organization. If they are hired, the mission is what should inspire them to come to work because they feel they are making a difference. Some of the directors mentioned that they wanted their employees
to not just be there for a paycheck, but also for a career. Without a clear definition of a mission for the present, and a vision of what could be, the job is only a paycheck.

Communication of mission is also important when enrolling children. Many families financially have to work, and take their children to childcare because they have to—not because they really want to. Under these circumstances, they need to hear a clear mission statement of what the childcare stands for and what the staff plans to accomplish with their children.

A skill that could be helpful to directors of childcare centers is the ability to articulate the mission, core values, and vision for their center in order to inspire the staff and parents. As the staff and parents begin to understand, support for the mission should follow. This theme obviously impacts all other themes.

Interestingly, a topic like “Queen or King for a Day” in many ways should relate back to the integration of the mission for the childcare facility, or to fulfill a long-term vision. “Queen or King for a Day” could also reflect on resources the teachers need in their classrooms, or conferences they would like to attend. Several Directors responded to this question by saying they wished they could pay their staff what they deserve and what the profession is worth.

**Director Roles**

From reading the interviews, some directors did not appear to have a well-defined role, so they tried to do everything, expressing frustration for their lack of time to complete their work, or having time to do the things that fueled their passion for young children and childcare. The mission, vision, and core values should dictate the job
descriptions of the director and others in the childcare facility. Once job descriptions are clear, the business of the organization should become more efficient.

**Hiring, Staff Motivation, and Retention**

It is intuitive that Hiring, Staff Motivation, and Retention should be combined. Who a director hires, and how they are trained, can make a big impact on a business of any type. If things appear disorganized when an applicant goes for an interview, it is unlikely that the employer would be able to hire the top candidates. The mission, vision and core values should all be included and explained in any training. If the mission statement is well written and understood, it should extend a challenge to the staff. They would want to see the mission succeed, thereby ensuring retention.

**Child Education**

In Chapter 2, the researcher extrapolated child competencies from the literature review of variety of programs that successfully prepared young children for kindergarten. These competencies should factor into the answer to the big question of how to prepare children for kindergarten. It would be helpful if the childcare director would have knowledge of child competency information prior to determining how their center would proceed with educating children. A childcare director would need strong leadership skills to help staff succeed with any program of child education.

**Director In-service Training**

A childcare director could seek enrollment in leadership training to learn how to write a mission statement and use it for inspiring employees to stay. She would also need some training to set priorities for daily schedules based on their mission. Part of the
leadership training would also look at the children’s educational program with an eye on
the mission and vision. The leadership training would help the director evaluate if their
center’s selected educational program would help the children achieve the overall
mission of the childcare facility, and prepare children for kindergarten.

**Staff In-service Training**

In order for a school to continue improving, recommendations for staff in-service
training could be given as a result of observations done by the director or classroom
supervisor. The Director could also conduct formal, written evaluations that include
areas for improvement. The director could then find in-service opportunities that would
provide needed information and practice.

**Analysis and Synthesis of Findings**

Following analysis and synthesis of the Childcare Director interviews provided in
this chapter, coupled with the literature review found in Chapter 2, a potential gap was
found that could affect children’s readiness to learn when they enter kindergarten.

The potential gap to be addressed was leadership. When the researcher began the
study, it was anticipated that leadership would be needed to implement any staff training.
However, it was unanticipated that this would become a major leadership study. But
looking at the six themes identified from the director interviews, a clear statement was
made (See Table 2, p. 53). As seen in Table 3 below, all of the six themes directly point
to potential gaps in leadership training and practice. Leadership should be learned and
practiced so the director can direct the childcare center in order for the philosophy or
mission to be realized for children. The process that was mentioned often in the
interviews was “manage” or “management.” One cannot manage someone if they do not
have a clear picture of what that person is supposed to do and what the outcome should be.

Table 3.
Childcare Interviews: Themes and Proposed Solutions from Childcare Director Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes Mentioned In Interviews</th>
<th>Proposed Solution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mission or Philosophy</td>
<td>Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director Roles</td>
<td>Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hiring, Motivation &amp; Retention</td>
<td>Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Education</td>
<td>Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director In-service</td>
<td>Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff In-service</td>
<td>Leadership</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One cannot manage the direction and completion of an educational mission or any mission if it is not clearly pictured in the minds of all those in charge. A clearly articulated philosophy (mission) outlines the content, or what they want the children to learn, and how they will provide an environment where the content can be cultivated as they care for the children.

Summary

The interconnectedness of themes is paramount to the success of any business, but particularly in achieving a clearly presented mission in the closely scrutinized childcare industry. In Chapter 5, the researcher discussed in more detail what was learned from this process. A brief review of related literature is presented. Paired with the words from
director interviews, the literature review, and personal teaching experience, a brief leadership and educational framework for childcare centers emerged and was presented in Chapter 5.

It was recommended that a clear and unpretentious leadership program be developed for Childcare. Directors would complete the leadership core before the rest of the staff becomes involved. The leadership core could potentially close the identified gap. The only way the rest of the staff would function autonomously and feel empowered to do their jobs is to start at the top with a Director who has a clear picture of how he or she wants the center to look, feel, sound, and operate. The Director would also have a clearer picture of the outcomes for the children.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

To summarize the study thus far, Chapter 1 defined the real world problem of the deficits experienced by many children upon entry to kindergarten. Studies demonstrate effectively that these deficits in kindergarten limit the child’s educational career and to some extent life choices (Campbell, 2002; Lloyd et al., 2010; Mistry et al., 2010; Reynolds et al., 2002; Schweinhart et al., 2002). Chapter 2 began with a review of multiple topics related to childcare in America. 1) The historical perspective was reviewed highlighting model longitudinal programs; 2) from the research of Hart and Risley (2002) the birth of the phrase, the “30-Million-Word-Gap,” was defined; 3) the creation, success, and failures of Head Start were presented; 4) children’s needs were delineated; 5) the response of contemporary childcare to children’s needs was reviewed; and 6) finally, childcare teacher and provider development was investigated.

Literature was found that described the role of childcare directors, but this was primarily demographic in nature, with some description of directors’ needs for in-service education. “Directors play a major role in building and sustaining high-quality early childhood programs…. Yet much of the discussion about ensuring high-quality preschool has been about the professional development of teachers and not about those who supervise them” (Ryan, Whitebook, Kipnis, & Sakai, 2011, p. 12). However, this was one of the few studies in the literature regarding childcare directors and their own perceptions of leading their facilities and of caring for young children. “This would seem to be a most serious oversight for two reasons. First, because it leaves effective leadership practice to chance and implies that there will inevitably be weak leaders.
Second, because it knowingly leaves those in leadership positions unprepared for the significant management and leadership tasks they face on a daily basis” (Muijs et al., 2004, p. 167). This indicates a gap in the literature around childcare director leadership, so for this study, further consideration will be given to the leader, or the childcare director. “There are no agreed upon standards or common qualifications for leaders in programs serving children birth to 5 years” (Ryan et al., 2011, p. 12). To add to information about childcare directors, 20 interviews with childcare directors were conducted to supplement existing research.

This research took place at privately owned childcare facilities in the suburbs of a mid-western city. The researcher chose a qualitative grounded theory approach. Grounded theory speaks to real-world situations such as those that are found in childcare. This approach was selected primarily “because it is a means to describe systematically, factually, and accurately the characteristics of an existing phenomenon” (Creswell, 2014, p. 149). As described in Chapter 3, interviews gave a valuable opportunity to hear directly from the childcare directors when they could speak with anonymity. Also in order to gain new perspectives and discoveries about childcare and the childcare director’s role, rich data from interviews could provide that opportunity. “Researchers are interested in the meanings people attach to the activities and events in their world and are open to whatever emerges” (Creswell, 2014, p. 143).

In Chapter 4, looking at the six themes identified from the director interviews, a clear connection appeared linking the six identified themes to leadership (See Table 3). The potential gap to be addressed emerged as a leadership study--leadership first for the childcare director.
Chapter 5 will summarize and provide recommendations.

**Aim of the Study**

The aim of this study was to identify issues not addressed previously in the literature, and to create a framework for comprehensive childcare facility education based on findings and best practices.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to understand childcare directors’ perceptions of caring for young children, and to identify issues not addressed previously in the literature review. This research took place at privately owned childcare facilities in the suburbs of a mid-western city.

Taken together, insight from childcare directors and the literature review could possibly shed new light on the long-standing problem of preparing young children for kindergarten.

In 2015, Michael Gramling summarized the reality for America’s youngest children that early childhood educators have known since the early longitudinal studies of childcare education in the 1960s and 1970s,

> It became clear in the 1990s that language-rich experience was the missing piece that could be provided by an effective child development program to make lifelong differences in the lives of the children of poverty….It has never happened….The failure of early childhood education in America is that it has failed to educate. (Gramling, 2015, p. 15-16)
The Connection Between Leadership and the 30-Million-Word Gap

The quote above by Gramling stated clearly, “The failure of early childhood education in America is that it has failed to educate” (2015, p. 16). In business, whenever complete failure of critical issues occurs, people automatically look to the leaders. In childcare, to develop a center-wide environment with rich and meaningful conversations throughout the day should have people looking to their leaders. The words of Simon Sinek (2009) give validity to this concept.

Those who lead are able to do so because those who follow trust that the decisions made at the top have the best interest of the group at heart. In turn, those who trust work hard because they feel like they are working for something bigger than themselves. (Sinek, 2009, p. 85)

The concept of an enriched language environment in which children listen to, overhear, and engage in meaningful conversations is a bold move (Suskind, 2015). However, before a childcare director/leader could effectively implement a center-wide change in philosophy, leadership training is needed to develop a strong leader.

It takes a leader to create momentum…. But creating momentum requires someone who can motivate others, not one who needs to be motivated. Just as every sailor knows you can’t steer a ship that isn’t moving forward, strong leaders understand that to change direction, you first have to create forward progress. Without momentum, even the simplest tasks can seem insurmountable. But with the momentum on your side, nearly any kind of change is possible. (Maxwell, 2003, p. 237)
In the remaining pages of Chapter 5, a framework for leadership development is presented. Based on the results of the childcare interviews and the literature review, first create strong leadership in childcare facilities, and then create the atmosphere that will reduce the 30-million-word gap (Gramling, 2015; Muijs et al., 2004; Suskind, 2015.) “One of the main reasons organizations fail is because people don’t have the knowledge or skills needed to do their jobs” (Burchard, 2009).

**Proposed Solution**

Because childcare is obviously a service organization serving families and children, the researcher felt the tenets of Servant Leadership would be a perfect vehicle around which a childcare director leadership framework could be developed. The researcher wanted to find a method of leadership that would assist childcare directors in establishing an environment of engagement and care. Servant Leadership seemed to be a perfect match. “A Servant-Leader is a *person of character* who puts people first. He or she is a *skilled communicator*, a *compassionate collaborator* who has *foresight*, is a *systems thinker*, and *leads with moral authority*” (Sipe & Frick, 2015, p. 4). As any leadership theory, servant leadership can be very complex. Keith’s (2012) rendition of the four ethical principles important to servant leaders and modified specifically for the childcare director simplifies and frames this leadership program.

- Serve Staff, Families, & Children First
- Help Staff, Families & Children Grow
- Exercise Reflection & Planning
- Care about Everyone You Touch (in Sipe & Frick, 2015).
Description of Leadership Training Components

The Leadership Training will be a long-term, transfer to practice presentation. Many of the recommended pedagogical principles that were identified from the literature review in Chapter 2 will be utilized in the development and presentation, and are listed again here.

- Coaching is an important component (Bowne et al., 2016),
- Identifying full range of existing practices and integrating new approaches comprehensively is suggested (Bowne et al., 2016),
- Meeting regularly with a facilitator in a teacher study group is helpful, particularly if intensive and long-term (Cunningham et al., 2015),
- Scaffolding successive learning experiences is preferred so participants know what they will learn next and what they have already learned (Cunningham et al., 2015),
- Providing specific rather than general objectives for participants is preferred to eliminate confusion about what is being presented, for example: Director will schedule a meeting with staff to brainstorm on vision of the childcare facility by October 1, 2016 (Cunningham et al., 2015),
- A mix of downloadable curricula, online access to educational modules, live classes at least in the form of real time webinars, and face-to-face seminars (Weigel, Weiser, Bales, & Moyses, 2012),
- Providing opportunities for transfer of knowledge to practice should be provided (Cunningham et al., 2015),
• Including feedback, self-reflection, and assessment is important (Cunningham et al., 2015; Interview Participants 8, 5),

• Providing activity guides, reading assignments and charts with summary of key points are helpful to learners (Cunningham et al., 2015),

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Six Themes of Concern to Directors (Plus Initial Topics from Interviews)</th>
<th>Servant Leadership Principle Assigned to Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mission, Vision, Core Values</strong></td>
<td>Exercise Foresight &amp; Planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Communication of mission effectively</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Family support/involvement/education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Child education needs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lack of affirmation for childcare career</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Creation of team environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Director Roles</strong></td>
<td>Exercise Foresight &amp; Planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Director training</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lack of time to do everything</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Director responsibilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Required state Management Training</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hiring/Staff Motivation/Retention</strong></td>
<td>Put Staff, Families &amp; Children First</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Hiring/retention</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Low pay/no benefits</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Staff Motivation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Restraint of hiring without required hours</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Director In service</strong></td>
<td>Care About Everyone You Touch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Director training</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Child Care and Education</strong></td>
<td>Help Staff, Families &amp; Children Grow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Required seven domains for early childhood</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Staff In-service</strong></td>
<td>Help Staff, Families &amp; Children Grow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Teacher/provider training</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Facilitating the access to research based practices Facilitating the organization of learning communities is successful with cohorts of participants who have had opportunity to make relationships through individual and group communication (Cunningham et al., 2015), and

- Facilitating the access to research based practices through publications, etc. (Cunningham et al., 2015; Interview Participants 12, 16).

Other design factors, such as online presentations, as opposed to in person presentations, or a combination of both, will be researched more as final design of the leadership product progresses.

**Support for the Solution**

From the many studies conducted, (Bus, 1995; Durham et al., 2007; Gramling, 2015; Suskind, 2015; Yeung & Pfeiffer, 2009) adult-child interactions developed during infancy resulted in the real and lasting results. “As leaders, early childhood administrators must be able to envision goals, affirm values, motivate staff, achieve unity of purpose, and foster norms of continuous improvement for their programs” (Bloom, 2004, p. 23). The aforementioned skills require effective leadership beginning at the director’s level. Considering the childcare crisis in America today, all should be concerned “because the majority of center directors assume their leadership positions without prior management training” (Talan et al., 2014, p. 1).

The life experiences of young children prior to beginning kindergarten are predictive of their ability to function in an environment that is focused on education (Rafoth et al., 2004). An environment focused on education could also become an environment focused on reciprocal language interaction, conversation, and vocabulary
expansion. Researchers reported little success with teacher training initiatives to develop these conversational techniques (Cabell, et al., 2015). To achieve and maintain that focus requires strong leadership at every level. Childcare directors and providers must integrate into the culture of their setting the important and continuing role of providing meaningful communicative interactions throughout every day with the children in their care. Leadership that guides and instructs all staff to make a change in the way they care for and talk to children is essential.

Factors and Stakeholders Related to the Solution.

The first thing to do would be to produce a prototype of the program for the steps in the childcare director leadership journey (Kelley, 2001). A pilot group to vet the leadership program could be formed. At the conclusion of the pilot study, there would be a report of evaluation and results.

Potential Barriers and Obstacles to Proposed Solution.

There are many factors related to the implementation of the proposed solution that present potential obstacles. All childcare directors are not owners of their childcare facilities. If a director wants to take the training, he or she would first have to get permission from the owner, or have the owner participate with the director. In addition, there are multiple locations in some cases, for a childcare facility. In that case, the director would have to work within the already-established mission. Primarily directors with college degrees attend a well-funded and well-staffed program through the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership in Chicago, Illinois as one example. Out of 502 participants, 59% had a bachelor degree and 24% held a graduate degree (Talan et al., 2014).
Financial Issues Related to Proposed Solution.

Another factor that could relate to the implementation is, of course, financial. Finances would be needed to produce the prototype and the necessary number of materials for the pilot group. Also it would be important to keep the cost of producing the materials as low as possible. The purchase price of the child language-training program would have to be included for the entire pilot group childcare facilities. Additionally, the cost of instructors for the program must be included in the budget, whether in person or online. Ideally, after training, the director could help facilitate the program for his or her center. Another barrier could be language. There are facilities directed by those who speak a language other than English and translation would eventually be needed. Access, travel, lodging, and tuition could prevent some directors from attending. Perhaps a funding vehicle could be secured to make this program available for all, and/or portions could be provided online.

Change Theory.

In some ways, change theory could inform the final structure of the program. The instructors could certainly utilize the leadership strategies in their presentation. In selecting a plan, it is important to note that the change necessary for childcare is continuous. Given that this change is one of strategy and service, a model such as the one described in Organization Change as a Transition (Burke, 2014) could be considered. Beckhard and Harris described their model’s three distinct conditions:

The future state, where the leadership wants the organization to get to; the present state, where the organization currently is; and the transition state,
the set of conditions and activities that the organization must go through to move from the present to the future. (as cited in Burke, 2014, p. 178)

**Implementation of the Proposed Solution**

For the purposes of this dissertation in practice, the proposed solution will not be presented in its entirety, but rather as a framework or outline.

**Leader’s Role in Implementing Proposed Solution**

Until the materials are in final form, the author will take a key role in the writing, design, and completion of the project. When the project is nearing completion, the author will recruit a cohort for the Pilot Study.

**Building Support for the Proposed Solution**

In order to build support for recruiting a cohort, the leader could contact childcare facilities that did not participate in the dissertation study. Other Stakeholders would be the owners of childcare facilities in multiple cities. In the case of a national affiliate, even though owned locally, perhaps a program could be proposed to the national office as one they might want to consider for all their facilities, nationwide. Obtaining state-by-state approved for annual credit hours for directors, childcare teachers, and providers in states where the leadership program may be promoted, would be another way of building support.

**Evaluation and Timeline for Implementation and Assessment**

The implementation plan for this project would occur in stages: from writing, developing, and prototyping (the look and packaging), to implementation.

Because this will be a program of long-term (i.e., 12 months) implementation, evaluation should be provided following each phase of implementation as well as a final
overall evaluation. For the childcare director, one to two conference calls per month should be scheduled to check in and do some analysis and perhaps re-structuring.

**Implications**

**Implications for Leadership theory and Practice**

When the proposed solution for childcare director leadership education became apparent, the researcher was noticeably mindful of the concept that leadership does not reside on the twenty-second floor, or in the corner office. A leader cannot accomplish change alone. The leader must also persevere because change takes time, often a lot of time. Leadership must be center wide, cultivated, bestowed, and nurtured. This could be the reason why much of the learning from continuing education for childcare providers was not always sustainable. When the childcare directors were asked what type of change they saw in their childcare teachers and providers following an in-service workshop, some said “depending on the person,” or “some for a week or two,” or “a little.” The probable reason is that the childcare director did not support the teacher or provider in his or her continuous training. “Ultimately the goal of implementation is transfer of training, or on-the-job use of knowledge, skills, and behaviors learned in training” (Noe, Holleneck, Gerhart, & Wright, 2013, p. 217. In order for transfer of training to occur, other employees, management, and technical support if needed must support the employee in these efforts. If a greater awareness of leadership training were present center-wide, the teachers and childcare providers would plan and support one another in the implementation of change in their classrooms.
Limitations

This qualitative, grounded theory study was limited to childcare directors’ own perceptions about their experiences in childcare. The results are based on the perceptions of 20 childcare directors in the suburbs of a mid-western city who volunteered to participate, and may not necessarily be generalized to childcare in the entire city or beyond. The interviews were also limited by the questions designed for the current research study. There are things that one could do differently to improve the study. More specific information about the education and background of the directors could be helpful. It also might be helpful to ask directors to describe their strengths and weaknesses as leaders. Additionally the results of the study might be enhanced with computer analysis.

Future Research and Recommendations

In the future it would be helpful to replicate this study in different parts of a city, and beyond to get a clearer picture of childcare directors’ perceptions of childcare and the 30-million-word gap. The first recommendation would be to implement leadership training with childcare directors followed by training in establishing a center in which pervasive natural language and conversations are the basis of their language program. The childcare director would study natural interactive language and conversations between adults and babies, adults and toddlers, and adult and preschoolers. The childcare director would lead training for the entire center in this type of whole-center, interactive language development program. Doherty, Ferguson, Ressler, and Lomotey (2015) found that “enhancement in classroom quality occurs only after the effects of enhanced director
leadership and center administrative practices trickle down to the teaching staff” (Doherty et al., 2015, p. 8). Unfortunately, they found that “there was little change in adult-child interaction” but the adult-child language interactions in the centers where the research was conducted were judged to be already good prior to the research project (Doherty et al., 2015, p. 8). Many other centers may not be found to be of the same quality. In this particular study, no language instruction for the childcare director was provided. So it is recommended that such language development instruction should be included. The administrative training that is recommended is more than management. It should be a true leadership program such as the Servant Leadership (Greenleaf, 1977) program suggested.

The second recommendation is that given the language, vocabulary, and pre-academic standards imposed on childcare and preschools, instruction programs for childcare teachers and providers must be developed to help teachers and providers understand how to advance these standards through natural language interactions during hands-on experiences. Learning vocabulary and concepts in isolation is inefficient and unsuccessful and can prevent children from generalizing these concepts to other situations.

In incremental instructional mode, words drip from the faucet slowly, one noun at a time. “Can you say, ‘am-phib-i-an’?” But in communication mode, nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs flow in a mighty torrent. As the child listens to these stories and conversations, inside his developing brain synapses are firing, new pathways are constructed, neurons are connected, and words are added to the child’s vocabulary as fast as they are heard. (Gramling, 2015, p. 9)
The third recommendation is that there should be less concentration on 30 million words and more concentration on naturally occurring language and vocabulary through interactions between child and parents (and/or caregivers), throughout the day.

In the end, quantity of words is important, but only as an adjunct to the loving, nurturing relationship that is determined by a baby’s caretaker. There may be many words, but their positive effect on the brain is dependent on responsiveness and warmth. (Susskind, 2015, p. 55)

The fourth recommendation is to approach some of the community foundations and other sources that subsidize childcare facilities in low-income areas. Perhaps a childcare representative could request that a $50,000 fund be set up and monitored by someone like Participant 21. Childcare directors could apply annually for a maximum pre-determined amount. Only childcare centers that are not already funded or subsidized could apply. In addition, maybe a representative like Participant 21 could do a search for foundations that may fund young children, educational facilities as their beneficiaries, recreational equipment, playground structures, children’s books or libraries, and so forth. Then it would be necessary for Participant 21 to recruit a grant writer to hold a workshop giving simple instructions for writing a grant.

In an effort to study how to change the public’s view of childcare, the fifth recommendation is to conduct a research study to determine the general public’s reactions to interview questions related to childcare. For example, “When you hear the word ‘childcare’ or ‘daycare’ what does that bring to mind?” Then for respondents who had negative reactions to earlier questions, the interview could end with a question like, “What could change your view of childcare to a more positive opinion?” The result
could potentially identify some measures that could be taken with public service billboards or announcements to elevate the status of childcare.

Summary

Kindergarten is an important milestone in the life of children—a right of passage from home to school. However, many American children start kindergarten behind their classmates. Their delayed language, vocabulary, and conversation skills put them already at risk for learning. Since more than half of our nation’s preschool population spend some or all of their days in childcare, the over 1.2 million childcare providers who care for these children are an important link in the chain of preparation for success in kindergarten (Childcare Aware, 2015). The researcher hoped to gain insight from interviews with childcare directors about this long-standing problem. Finding an answer to this problem was the impetus for this doctoral dissertation.

This qualitative, grounded theory study sought to understand the literature regarding childcare directors’ perceptions of caring for young children, and to identify issues not addressed. Through personal interviews conducted by the researcher, the study also endeavored to understand childcare directors’ perceptions of child development and in particular, the 30 Million-Word-Gap identified by Hart and Risley (2012).

The interviews took place at privately-owned childcare facilities in the suburban areas of a mid-western city. Saturation was reached at 20 interviews. Interview 21 is an additional interview with a grant-funded childcare resource, conducted for triangulation. Transcriptions of interviews were manually coded by the researcher to identify topics and themes that built a grounded theory. The literature review and the data from the director interviews combined to tell a story.
There were six themes of expressed concerns that emerged from the interviews: mission or philosophy; director roles; hiring, motivation & retention; child education; director in-service; and staff in-service. Following the analysis of the literature, a gap appeared regarding the preparation of childcare directors in leadership that could account for the six themes identified from the interviews. One can surmise that as leaders, the directors of childcare facilities and their preparation for their job are important. Childcare directors set the mission, tone, and expectations for the staff members who interact daily with children in their facilities. Childcare directors also supervise the childcare teachers and providers who come to their jobs often inadequately trained for their positions. A need became apparent for the preparation of childcare directors with leadership tools to successfully address the six themes of expressed concerns listed above, the 30-million-word gap (Hart & Risley, 2012), and other issues affecting the language and cognitive development of children in childcare. This advanced leadership training was different from the management training required in 2016 as part of initial director training in the state where this research was conducted. A simple framework of topics developed for this advanced leadership training is presented.

Following implementation of the leadership training, it was also recommended to establish a childcare center where language and conversations would be integrated with their overall curriculum. The childcare director would study natural interactive language and conversations between adults and babies, toddlers, and preschoolers. The childcare director would then be prepared to lead training for the entire center in this type of whole-center, interactive language development. Doherty, Ferguson, Ressler, and Lomotey (2015) found that “enhancement in classroom quality occurs only after the effects of
enhanced director leadership and center administrative practices trickle down to the teaching staff” (Doherty et al., 2015, p. 8). It is recommended that such language development instruction should be included with the childcare director leadership training. Childcare directors need to lead and support their staff in language and vocabulary development.

The childcare director training that was recommended is more than management. It is leadership. The theory of leadership selected for this training was Servant Leadership. Servant Leadership seemed an appropriate vehicle through which to address the simple framework of topics.

Again, based on these findings, the literature review, and the reported fact that more than half of our nation’s preschool population spends some or all of their days in childcare (Childcare Aware, 2015), childcare directors were determined to be an important link in the chain of preparation of children in childcare for success in kindergarten. In order to reduce the 30-Million-Word Gap and accompanying deficits in language proficiency, the childcare director should have access to advanced leadership training that includes training in the importance of language and vocabulary, and instruction for supervision of language and vocabulary development integrated into the childcare center’s curriculum.
References


Talan, T., Bloom, P., & Kelton, R. (2014). Building the leadership capacity of early childhood directors: An evaluation of a leadership development model. Early...
Childhood Research and Practice (ECRP). Retrieved from:
illinois.edu/v16n1/talan.html

https://teachingstrategies.com

Independence Hall Association. Retrieved from
http://www.ushistory.org/us/56e.asp

Retrieved from http://www.bls.gov/ooh/personal-care-and-service/childcare-
workers.htm.

and needs of early childhood professionals. Early childhood research and
practice 14(2). Retrieved from http://ecrp.illinois.edu/v14n2/weigel.html

Whitebook, M., McLean, C., & Austin, L. J. (2016). Early childhood workforce index:
2016 executive summary. Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care
Employment, University of California, Berkeley.

Whitebook, M., & Ryan, S. (2011). Degrees in context: Asking the right questions about
preparing skilled and effective teachers of young children. Preschool Policy Brief
of National Institute for Early Education Research and the Center for the Study of
Child Care Employment, 22. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early
Education Research.
Appendix A

IRB-Approved Participant Contact Information

A-1: IRB-Approved Preliminary Information Letter

Date____________________

Karen K Rossi
Doctoral Program in Interdisciplinary Leadership
Creighton University
2500 California Plaza
Omaha, Nebraska 68178

RE: Research Study

Dear___________________________:

You are invited to participate in a research study entitled “Childcare Directors’ Perspectives on Childcare: Their Inherent Roles, Responsibilities, and Relationships.” The purpose of this study is to understand the opinions of childcare directors about topics related to the duties and job-related education of childcare staffs who care for young children under five, as well as the duties and job-related education of childcare directors. With the insight of those childcare directors who participate, we hope to make recommendations for job-related education for childcare providers and directors, and the best format in which to present this education.

If you choose to participate, you will be able to influence the recommendations for childcare job-related education for the future. Your interview will be recorded for accuracy. Your participation will include about 45 minutes for a personal interview. In addition, it may take 20 minutes for your approval and editing after you receive your copy of the typed interview in the mail. We want to be sure that we accurately represent your ideas and what you intended to say. You will not be paid or receive any direct
benefits for your participation. No more risk is expected to you than you would encounter in a typical day at work.

We will do everything we can to keep your records confidential. Both records that identify you and this consent form signed by you, will be kept on a password-protected computer and/or in a locked file for five years. We may present the research findings at professional meetings or publish the results of this research study in professional journals. However, we will always keep your name, childcare center, or any other identifying information anonymous.

You are free to refuse to participate in this research project or to withdraw and discontinue participation in the project at any time.

If you are not satisfied with the manner in which this study is being conducted, you may report (anonymously if you so choose) any complaints to the Institutional Review Board by calling 402/280-2126, or addressing a letter to the Institutional Review Board, Creighton University, 2500 California Plaza, Omaha NE 68178.

Thank you for your participation. Without volunteers like you, research studies of this type would not be possible.

Sincerely,

Karen K Rossi

Name_____________________________________________

For the Investigator: I have discussed with this participant the study described above. I believe he/she understands the contents of the information letter.

Investigator’s Initials __________ Date____________________
Appendix B

IRB-Approved Script for Recruiting Childcare Directors

“Hello. Thank you for taking my call. I am a doctoral student at Creighton University and I am studying childcare and continuing job-related educational opportunities for childcare staffs and directors. I want to have your views as the childcare director about your center, about your staff, and specifically about the care of young children five and under. I am interested in getting your point of view to 10 or 12 questions. The interview should not last any longer than 45 minutes. I hope you will join this important study. Is there a day and time that would work for your interview during the next couple of weeks? Thank you so much. I will send you a postcard as a reminder of our appointment. I will see you on ______________ at ______________ o’clock.”

If denied,

“I certainly understand. Thank you for your time. Have a nice rest of your day.”
Appendix C

IRB-Approved Interview Protocol

Date____________________ Time of Interview ________________

Place_____________________________________________________

Address__________________________________________________

City________________________________________________________

State_______________________ Zip___________________________

Phone_____________________________________________________

Interviewer: Karen K Rossi

Interviewee_________________________________________________

Assigned name for

Interviewee_________________________________________________

Position

____________________________________________________________

Name of Childcare

Facility_____________________________________________________

Number assigned to Childcare Facility________________________

Additional information to look for in brochures or on website:

Mission and purpose of the childcare facility

____________________________________________________________

Is the childcare facility a single location? ________ Or a childcare chain? ________

How many locations in Omaha? ________________
How many young children (under Kindergarten age) attend childcare on a regular basis? 
_____________

How many full time childcare providers/preschool teachers for young children are employed on a regular basis? ______

**Description of the Project:** “The study’s purpose is to understand the opinions of childcare directors about topics related to the duties and training of childcare staff who care for young children under five, as well as the duties and training of directors.”

**Directions to Interviewees:** “I would like to record this interview because it is impossible for me to write down all of your responses with total accuracy. However, I will also listen and take notes. It is possible a transcriptionist may listen to the tape. But I want to assure you that your comments will remain confidential and anonymous.

**TURN ON RECORDING DEVICE, TEST, AND ADJUST VOLUME.**

“After your interview is transcribed, I will mail you a copy for your approval and editing. I want to be certain that I accurately represent your ideas and what you said.

You can take a break whenever you need. You can ask me questions any time you don’t understand. Also, in order to be professional and proceed with the interview in the same manner with all childcare directors I interview, I will ask the questions, but will not be commenting or nodding my head in agreement, or anything like that. Don’t be worried or intimidated by my lack of response between questions, okay? Do you have any further questions? Are we ready to start? Here is the first question.”
Appendix D

IRB-Approved Research Interview Questions

_____ 1. Can you tell me about your childcare facility? Tell me anything you would like me to know that is important to you. (Can you tell me more about your mission or purpose?) Or (I would like to hear more about that.)

_____ 2. What has been your role as director of this childcare center? (Mostly administrative? Supervision of teachers and classes? Day-to-day management?)

_____ 3. Recall a time when you were hiring childcare providers. Will you take me through that hiring process? (Tell me about the orientation they have on their first day). Or (Can you describe for me any specific training in child development they receive?)

_____ 4. Could you share a little about your biggest challenges? (Day-to-day? Or throughout the year?)

_____ 5. Explain what you expect your childcare staff to accomplish with young children from infants through 4 years old. (I would like to hear more about that.)

_____ 6. Can you recall if you’ve heard about the Kindergarten 30-million word gap? (Is that something you want your childcare staff to think about when planning for their students?)

_____ 7. What type of specific job-related training needs do you have? (Can you explain that a little more for me?) Or (Tell me what kind of resources you have been able to find for your own needs.)

_____ 8. Is there anything else you would like to add about your position, staff, job-related training, or your responsibilities to young children and their parents that I have not asked? If so, can you please describe that for me now?
**Additional questions if the above do not prompt rich descriptions:**

9. When you think about job-related training for childcare providers, what have you found to be the most effective? I’m thinking of things like conferences, lunch meetings, online programs they can take whenever they want, and so on.

10. When you think of job-related training for your staff, what type of content or subject matter are you looking for? (Can you be specific?)

11. When you plan job-related training, do you choose on the basis of amount of time staff members are away from work, distance to travel, topic, or cost?

12. Describe the type of improvements you see in your childcare staff after attending job-related training. (About how often do you observe your staff?) Or (If you notice improvements, can you estimate how long these improvements last?)

13. If you were King/Queen for a day, how would you change things at your center?

“Thank you so much for your participation. I want to remind you that this interview will be transcribed word for word. I will send you a copy so you can check it for accuracy and to make certain this clearly represents your thoughts about the questions. You can return it to me with your comments in the enclosed, postage paid envelope. If I do not hear from you within 15 days, I will assume it is correct.

DO YOU KNOW ANY OTHER CHILDCARE DIRECTORS WHO MIGHT WANT TO BE A PART OF THIS STUDY?

______________________________

MAY I TELL HER/HIM THAT YOU SUGGESTED I CALL? ________________

Resources