Power of Equality Myths:

A Transdisciplinary Study Examining

the Influence of

Equality Policy on Teaching and Learning

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## ABSTRACT

There has been steady interest in the ideology of equity in schooling practices reflected in the written artifacts of the United States, especially in the last thirty years. However, equality-laden language is often used without definition or critical examination. The assumed meaning of equality terminology is problematic—especially for classroom teachers who are directly held accountable for the practice of equality policy. This inquiry critically evaluates the multiple implications of this common-sense usage of language related to issues of equality, equity, sameness, and even democracy. Using the combined methodologies of educational criticism, critical discourse analysis, and self-ethnography, this transdisciplinary investigation describes, interprets, and evaluates the way staff members in a Head Start/early childhood education organization conceive of, and act upon, conceptualizations of equality policy. A close examination of these conceptualizations can serve to assist educational researchers, policymakers, and practitioners in evaluating the implications equality policies have on the teaching practice as a whole, and by extension, the specific learning lives of students.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION & OVERVIEW

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Two male students walk into the room, eyes lowered, "What's up, Ms. Gu?" I get

the chin nod as they walk past and find a seat. It is the first day of the Hip Hop Club. I

tried recruiting the loudest, most popular kid in the school but he declined, believing this

really to be the Black and Latino—Land of Misfit Toys—Club, and he wanted no part.

I'd fought administration to make this club happen, and I didn't know what to expect. I

sense a rustle of movement. The kids suddenly sit up straighter in their seats. "Great,"

I'm thinking, "the Head of School must have decided to pop his head in."

When I'd first proposed the idea for the club, the Head of Upper School told me,

"Here, we do not see color. We see students. What you are proposing, Ms. Gutiérrez, is

*exclusion.* The truly wonderful thing about this school is that the small size makes

inclusion so easy. In your own words, the club you are proposing would 'cater to the

interests of marginalized students.' I cannot see any good coming from such a club." The

Head of Upper School did not have the final say, however, and her superior, The Head of

School, overruled on the condition that I make it perfectly clear to the student body that

the club would be open to all students and that the focus would be on the historical and

sociological significance of the Hip Hop Movement as a counterculture.

I turn toward the door. It's not the Head of School. It's one of our more solitary students on campus—a senior this year. His six-foot-something stature is intimidating, his form of dress—head to toe in black, head covering, and silver jewelry—perhaps even more so. He takes a seat away from the others and offers no greeting. I've seen him in the library tucked up in a corner by himself a few times, but we've never spoken. I'm suddenly self-conscious, believing I, a mixed-race Latina, might not carry the authority to speak about the topic of Hip Hop. Before long, I'm listening to their stories. It proves impossible to discuss social conditions of the past without marrying them to incidents of the present.

They were playing basketball at the court, they said, just a few blocks away from Darrell's house. Returning, sweaty and tired, they realized they'd lost the key. They'd have to go in through the garage door. Once inside, they congregated in the kitchen for a snack. "We were making *san-wiches,* Ms. Gu—they come in, guns drawn . . . tell me to drop my *weapon.* I've got a freakin *butter* knife! Next thing, we're outside with our face pressed to the cement . . . ."

"It was hot!" interjects Darrell. "It was burning my face off!"

\* \* \*

This story, like so many still left unspoken, is significant to our understanding of equality and how it plays out, or fails to play out, in our schools. When I later retold this tale to a colleague, he said it had nothing to do with inequality. The witness who spotted the boys going in through the garage was doing his or her duty as a citizen. The officers were doing theirs. This is what we pay taxes for—that sense of security. In my heart, however, I know my fairer complected students would have been able to eat their

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sandwiches in peace. At the very least, they would have been given the opportunity to explain their predicament before being hauled outside and pushed to the ground. I know that blind justice, like blind schooling, is a noble ideal. But I am also aware that humanity's well-meaning attempts to put either into practice often creates scenarios that can only be described as ignoble.

To not see color, to pretend there no longer exists any marginalization of minority students in predominantly white institutions, is to rob individuals of the very equality we are attempting to create. Colorblindness is not uncommon, for as Sonia Nieto and Patty Bode (2012) explain:

> In the United States, color blindness and colormuteness begin early in childhood, when children are admonished not to say anything about racial differences, because "it's not nice." We learn early on that even admitting that we notice race is wrong. (p.73)

Well, isn't it? Isn't it more ideal to see everyone just as people? As Nieto and Bode further point out "the reluctance to discuss race can result in overlooking or denying issues of power that are embedded in race. . . . Failure to discuss racism, unfortunately, will not make it go away" (p.73).

The Head of Head Upper School was attempting to block the club's formation out of her perception of *in*-clusion, yet that perception was negating the lived experiences of the students she sought to protect, and therefore, not in accordance with the idea of inclusive excellence (Clayton-Pedersen & Clayton-Pedersen, 2008). The quiet student who joined us on that short nine-week adventure instinctively knew that because his own lived experiences confirmed it. He showed up at that first meeting out of curiosity, but by

the second week, I had all but handed the club over to his direction. He later went on to Columbia where he helped found the Columbia University Society of Hip Hop (CUSH).

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *</p>

The current *Race to the Top* has further emphasized the call for a "level playing field," and, as a result, it has catapulted interest in the efficacy of teacher assessment measures because many policymakers in education believe that the teacher is the single most contributing factor to creating a culture for student success (Duncan, 2009). But how can we assess good teachers vs. bad teachers? It appears evident the two modes of assessment receiving the most focus are student achievement on standardized tests (or demonstrated progress toward achievement) and consideration of diverse populations (and/or inclusive excellence). Teacher assessment and evaluation processes in every state currently participating in the new *Race to the Top* have at least these two items in common. The question then is: Are these two equality measures imposing contradictory pressures upon teachers who are asked to strive for inclusive excellence (with the use of differentiated instruction and individualized learning accommodations) while simultaneously holding those same teachers accountable by up to 50% or more to student achievement on standardized assessments?[1] Standards-based reform is meant to "close the achievement gap" and specifically targets "at-risk" populations. However, education theorists such as Rochelle Gutiérrez (2007) and Nel Noddings (2005) argue that these attempts are far from equitable. According to Gutiérrez, the only truly equitable approach to education should be one that incorporates different approaches and expects different

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[1] Each state has its own percentage allocation, but in Colorado, under SB 10-191 (2010) concerning Ensuring Quality Instruction Through Educator Effectiveness (EQITEE), it is 50%.

achievements. Likewise Noddings (2005) posits that "There are few things that all students need to know, and it ought to be acceptable for students to reject some material in order to pursue other topics with enthusiasm" (p. 19).

This study examines the way educators and administrators in one early childhood education organization perceive terms and concepts such as inclusive excellence, standardization, and equity and the way in which those perceptions are transformed into conscious (or unconscious) actions within an early educational classroom setting. Each new quality and *e-quality* measure being enforced by public policy combines to influence the way in which teachers teach—and ultimately the way students are conditioned to learn (or not learn). In fact:

> Reports repeatedly find that no matter the intent of . . . policymakers who are far removed from classrooms and schools, those policies cannot be truly implemented under thousands of differing circumstances with equal regard to prevailing democratic values and the educational needs of all students (Ambrosiio, 2004; Apple, 2006, Ch.4; Flinders, 2005; Finnell-Gudwien, 2005; Fuscarelli, 2004; Giroux, 2003; Hess & Petrilli, 2006; Mathis, 2003; Meier & Wood, 2004; Popham, 2004). The dictates of these policies, therefore are seldom fulfilled. (Short, 2008, p.421)

While students in the early years of education are not yet required to pass a state-mandated exam, the imposition of equality measures starts as soon as children enter a socialized setting and often lay a kind of cow path for the later years of their educational experience. The Department of Health and Human Services, overseeing the Administration for Children and Families, is a federal program that grants or denies funding to Head Start and Early Learning programs (HS) at the local level. As of 2010,

> Head Start children, 3 to 5 years old, are expected to progress in all the areas of child development and early learning outlined by the [Head Start Child Development and Early Learning] Framework. Head Start programs also are

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expected to develop and implement a program that ensures such progress is made. (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010, p.1)

It is evident that not even early childhood teachers are exempt from top-down mandates. One of the central questions of this study is how does ideology play into a teacher's discretion when making day-to-day decisions with and for his or her students?

## Background & Rationale

There are four imperative reasons this study of equality perceptions is needed. First, equality and fairness are terms used interchangeably to serve as catalysts for the imposition of new norms or accountability measures for schools. They are terms researchers and policymakers neglect to define for their audiences because the conceptualization of equality is something United States values so highly that it has become a given. Common knowledge needs no definition. This in itself is problematic. The "given" nature of the concept of equality may be our "unconditional preference" at work. French philosopher, Jacques Derrida (2002) tentatively asserts that we (presumably all humanity) share:

> . . . an unreserved taste, if not an unconditional preference, for what, in politics, is called  republican democracy as a universalizable model, binding philosophy to the public "cause," to the *res publica*, to "public-ness," once again to the "lights" of Enlightenment, once again to the enlightened virtue of public space, emancipating it from all external power . . . . (p.47)[2]

Assuming Derrida is correct in this assertion, this "unconditional preference" for the "universalizable model" of shared space might just be the driving force behind our constant desire to make public education more democratic—democratic in the sense of

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[2] This quote is from the first section titled, "Italics," in *Of Religion* and is italicized in the original. I've chosen not to italicize it here.

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universally fair. In the essay, "Force of Law," Derrida (2002) says the difficulty of

formulating laws or policies out of a desire of justice is:

> How to reconcile the act of justice that must always concern singularity, individuals, groups, irreplaceable existences, the other or myself as other, in a unique situation, with rule, norms, value, or the imperative of justice that necessarily have a general form, even if this generality prescribes a singular application in each case. (p.245)

This is what all societies struggle with and always have. Society demands a degree of

"good for most," and yet there is the difficulty of balancing the good for most with the

singular, individual applications of goodness.

President Obama and U.S. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, consistently use

the phrase "level playing field" to describe their shared vision of equitable opportunity

for all citizens to receive a quality education.[3] And yet, the terminology used to create

universalizable, "level playing fields" in education deconstruct at the seams as soon as it

is put into practice because the terms associated with leveling the playing fields for all are

constantly having to negotiate with the issues of individuality.

When explanations are no longer provided, they become "embedded in features

of discourse which are taken for granted as matters of common sense" (Fairclough, 1989,

p.77). However, as Norman Fairclough (1989) argues, the common sense world is:

> . . . a world which is built entirely upon assumptions and expectations which control both the actions of members of a society and their interpretation of the actions of others. Such assumptions and expectations are implicit, backgrounded, taken for granted, not things that people are consciously aware of, rarely explicitly formulated or examined or questioned.
> . . . There is a constant endeavor on the part of those who have power to try to impose an ideological common sense which holds for everyone . . . But there is

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[3] See "A Level Playing Field, an Equal Starting Line." Retrieved from
http://www.ed.gov/news/speeches/level-playing-field-equal-starting-line

always some degree of ideological diversity, and indeed conflict and struggle, so that ideological uniformity is never completely achieved. (pgs. 77, 86)

Teachers become the actors of these common sense terms, and, as Fairclough points out in the above passage, not every teacher will process the vocabulary in the same way because:

> Teaching is an intentional and moral activity: it is undertaken for a purpose and is validated by reference to educational goals and social principles as well as to operational efficacy. In any culture it requires attention to a range of considerations and imperatives: pragmatic, certainly, but also empirical, ethical and conceptual. (Alexander, 2001, p.517)

In other words, each teacher comes to teaching (and stays teaching) out of his or her own convictions. Teaching is one of those fields where you find highly educated individuals earning a fraction of the income those in the corporate world holding the same level of degree earn. In fact, "The typical bachelor's degree holder working in home health care or child care earns about half that of someone working in the tech industry with just an associate's degree" (Sparks cited in Noddings, 2013). If it's not for financial security, what is it that draws them? Most teachers have stories about children, about students who they come to believe in, and many see those stories swaddled within the larger context of social operations. They are intentional about why they chose to teach and why they choose to stay. The influence of individual belief systems is necessarily carried into those convictions. And where there is belief, there are words like freedom, justice, liberty, and democracy.

According to David Harvey (2005), "It has been part of the genius of neoliberal theory to provide a benevolent mask full of wonderful-sounding words like freedom, liberty, choice, and rights, to hide the grim realities of the restoration or reconstitution of

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naked class power" (p.119). U.S. policy is strewn with these "wonderful sounding

words." In education policy, it leads to conceptualizations such as the level playing field

ideal of standardized testing. Ultimately, posits Antonia Darder (2005):

> This veiled moralism . . . permeates educational discourse and the acceptance of high stakes testing actually socializes populations to accept uncritically the inferiority of the other and the need for corrective action, in order to assure the participation of the majority within the labor market as rightful citizens of this nation. (p. 221)

Teachers, then, come to not only act out these policies—but believe in them because they

are tied to the discourse of morality. The irony is, it is the teacher who becomes the

inferior as a result of this kind of discourse. They are the victims of what Darder

describes as in "need for corrective action."

My research contributes to the existing body of research concerning the U.S.'s

understanding of these terms by pulling together contrasting images of the way

educational discourse is used to both support and resist the exact same equality measures

such as standardization, accommodation, and differentiation.

A second reason to study equality terminology relates directly to the classroom

practices of teachers. Classrooms are where the clash of ideologies is felt by students and

exerts pressure upon teachers in such a way as to be almost overwhelming. Because of

standardized, high-stakes testing, teachers must adequately prepare all students to pass a

specified set of standards. Because of accommodation, teachers must know their

students' Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and accommodate them accordingly—

and be certain to document all measures so that they can get those students to achieve at

the same or at least a "comparable" level. Because of differentiation, teachers must know

each of their student's individual learning needs and design methods of instruction that

will touch all of their students in an equitable way. As a society, we mistakenly believe that this pressure does not occur until third grade when teachers are required to prepare students for their first standardized exam, but even early education teachers are feeling pressured to prepare, accommodate, and differentiate their students' learning needs. A great deal of literature already exists on the way pressures are playing out in K-12 settings (Fullan, 2009; Mearns & Cain, 2003; Hakanen, Bakker & Schaufeli, 2006; Apple, 2008; Chang, 2009) while early education is thought of as a separate entity, yet the reality of today's youth is that nearly 47.4% of children between the ages of three to five are enrolled in some type of formal schooling (US Census, 2011), and this number is likely to jump in the years just ahead.

In President Obama's February 12, 2013 State of the Union Address, he calls for increased funding to make "high-quality preschool available to every American child" (n.p.). Examining the way early childcare settings deal with the issues of equality can greatly enhance our existing understanding of how these same issues are encountered and dealt with in children's later years of schooling.

A third reason this study of equality conceptualization is imperative for better informing researchers, administrators, teachers, and policymakers is because this valued ideal is what is behind the Obama Administration's recent revisions to the NCLB Act. The new *Race to the Top* may prove to be even more pressure-inducing to schools and students because teachers' individual livelihoods are being linked to student performance whereas previously school institutions as a whole were being linked to student achievement. This could result in situations where, as Apple (2008) contends when he

speaks about the consequences of high-stakes policies "students actually get less in the guise of getting more . . . " (p. 31).

Finally, the financing of education is continually being cut. The practice of schools being held accountable for doing more with less is far from new. What is new, however, is the amount of methods and practices streaming into classrooms from the top down all said to level the playing field. According to Woodside-Jiron, (2004), "This top-down decision making by elected officials in deciding what is important in education and how best to implement related content and practices is significant" (Chapter 8, Assigning 'Current and Confirmed Research,' para. 3).

## Significance of This Study

The true significance of this study lies outside the borders of what one narrow study can reasonably accomplish. However, as one of many, perhaps we can get a better handle on the big-picture issues and questions that a study such as this can only begin to address. In the United State's *Race to the Top* we may just be crippling ourselves to the point where few of our students will graduate with the ability to lead, to think, or to create because none of these abilities are truly assessable. If teachers can't prove they are doing right by their students, their income and job security will suffer. Is this equitable or just to the individual teacher? What is the probable outcome of such increased pressure? Will it really force teachers to better serve their students? And ultimately, are we truly creating the society we want our children to live in?

This study critically evaluates the multiple implications of this common-sense usage of language related to issues of equality, equity, sameness, and even democracy. Using the combined methodologies of educational criticism, critical discourse analysis,

and self-ethnography, this investigation describes, interprets, and evaluates the way staff members in an early childhood education organization conceive of, and act upon, conceptualizations of equality policy. While this study focuses on just one organization located in central Colorado, a close examination of the conceptualizations being operationalized will assist educational researchers, policymakers, and practitioners in evaluating the implications equality policies have on the teaching practice as a whole, and by extension, the specific learning lives of students.

Occasional "boundary breaking" is essential to progression. Habits of mind become just that—habits. Without occasional re-examination of commonly held beliefs, the ornamental becomes problematic. Like a trumpet vine, equality, heralded as the United States of America's crowning accomplishment, could potentially choke the life force of its surrounding species and cause harm to the very foundation it was meant to decorate. It is the job of the connoisseur to be the tendrils' gardener.

This study seeks to provide insights into issues of classroom equity. The aim of the study is not to "disrupt the status quo," but rather to better inform those most directly affected by the constant stream of mandates all seeking to achieve the ideal of a competitive finish line. The constant progression of this "being and becoming" is what Aristotle called the Theory of Potentiality. We all want to believe that educators have within their power the ability to set students on a common track and give them a common starting line. We desperately want all kids to have the "same" opportunity to reach their own unique potentialities. The question is how—the question has always been *How*? This study might not solve the puzzle, but perhaps it will provide insights into the ways in

which we are getting it right and those that are still missing the mark. And hopefully, that insight will encourage more educational practitioners to begin their own process of boundary breaking.

## Terminology

Any study involved in a critical analysis of discourse will necessarily run into the difficulty of having to use language to describe and analyze other uses of language. Many terms are used interchangeably in the literature, which is a core problem that this study hopes to unpack. However, when evaluating any one term, it will be necessary to rely upon others in the interim. This complicates things.

A quick Eric Proquest search of peer reviewed journals pulled up 54 articles that include both "accountability" and "equality" while a separate search with the terms "accountability" and "equity" pulled up 261. A search of "accountability" and "democracy" triggered 107 results. This topic is messy, so a quick conceptual definition of terms is appropriate.

**Discourse** – the term discourse in the context of this study will encompass the full spectrum of social, cultural, and cognitive contexts of language usage.

**Accountability measures**—because I am arguing that accountability policies are being created to level the playing field, I prefer the term **equality measures** over accountability. Accountability is often used to mean "responsibility," but I am arguing that the concept of responsibility alone conceals the more problematic intention of responsibility—that of equality.

**Equality**—In the context of this critical analysis, I see equality as having the root word **equal,** and equal in mathematical terms implies **same.**

**Equity**—I see as a term synonymous with **"fairness."**

**Liberty, democracy, justice**—These terms I lump together because the issue of equality and equity is an assumed component to the U.S.'s conceptualization of our political structure.

**Inclusive excellence & social justice**—these two terms are not interchangeable; however, I see them both as reactionary terms that seek to right the misconception of taken for granted language. Inclusive excellence is different from inclusion solely because it is about more than just including people—It is also about identifying and meeting individual needs. Social justice has a political edge to it in that, again, it is about more than numbers or quotas for inclusion. It actively seeks to end the historical injustices of societal ways and seeks "a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure" (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2007, p. 16).

## Research Questions

The research questions guiding this study focus on discovering how individuals in the field of education conceive of the idea of equality and the process by which those conceptions become measured actions.

This study is woven together by four main questions. The first question, "How do theorists and/or practitioners of accountability measures conceive of the idea of fairness and equality?" is first undertaken with a profile of equality terminology in education literature beginning in the late 1970's (discussed in Chapter Two). Like Eisner (2002), I believe that it is important for educators to possess some degree of historical understanding. Eisner, in his text, *The Educational Imagination*, takes us through the

emergence of the 1991 U.S. Department of Education's *America 2000,* under President Bush. I began just a couple of decades earlier to paint a wider social context of this push toward standardization. This allowed me to critically cross-examine the narratives of administrators interviewed in this study and their procedural documents against historical uses and origins of the concept.

The second question, "How do accountability measures direct the pedagogical approach undertaken within the early education organization selected for this study?" enabled me to examine and identify the methods of practice that are linked to intentional, as well as unintentional, equality measures that are used within classrooms.

I collected authentic narratives from teachers and administrators who feel the pressure to meet the competing ideologies of equality on a daily basis as well as from those who do not seem affected by these clashes with my third question, "What is the educational outcome of the way theories of equality may or may not collide within the early education organization selected for the study?"

The fourth question I attempt to answer is, "What are the potential implications of contradictory perceptions of equality on the American public education system?" Students attending low-income, highly concentrated underserved population schools experience the effects of these competing equality and accountability measures most directly because they take on the most significant focus (i.e. "closing the achievement gap") when justification of a measure is needed. This question examines what these effects mean for students in particular and for the U.S.'s public education system in general.

In summary, the following questions guided this study:

1.  How do theorists and/or practitioners of accountability measures conceive of the idea of fairness and equality?

2.  How do accountability measures direct the pedagogical approach undertaken within classrooms?

3.  What is the educational outcome of the way differing theories of equality sometimes collide (or fail to collide) within the early education organization selected for this study?

4.  What are the potential implications of contradictory perceptions of equality on the American public education system?

While a common terminology of equality, fairness, liberty, and democracy are used to defend each new accountability measure and method of instruction, contradictory conceptualizations of the terminology necessarily result in contradictory outcomes of these measures and methods, for as Anderson-Levitt (2008) posits when describing the contextual reality of teaching lives:

> . . . teachers around the world operate within schools that are structured along similar lines and draw from a small, common stet of lesson elements. Yet their classroom activities vary considerably because of regional differences in resources, regional and local differences in pedagogical philosophy, and national and local differences in basic cultural assumptions about schooling, learning, and children. (p. 360)

Furthermore, the new incentive to race into the arena of global competitiveness may further aggravate a system already struggling to meet the day-to-day needs of students.

After the initial round of data collection from engagement with fourteen early education teachers, administrators and staff (i.e., informal interviews, observations, and

artifact examination), subsequent returns to the participants and locations took place as needed to seek more detailed explanations and to lay the groundwork for thematic coding which I discuss further in Chapter Five. More detailed focus included inquiry into: What might we describe as universal in the conceptualization of equality schooling? (the core phenomenon); Is it possible to isolate and identify pressures that directly influence the day-to-day actions of educators while they seek to adhere to the phenomenon? (causal conditions); What conscious strategies are undertaken in this process by educators and/or administrators? (strategies); and What effect does the phenomenon have on American students in public education? (consequences).

Having been an educator in a public educational setting, it proved difficult, perhaps undesirable, to completely remove myself from the social network of the research setting. Therefore, a constructivist approach that allowed flexibility of some social relationship to emerge between myself as the researcher and participants proved most useful.

To minimize the potential negative bias of my own historical experiences in the classroom, I chose to focus on a setting that is under direct influence of standardization pressure, but one I do not have direct professional experience with—the early education setting.

## Overview of the Methodology

This study is transdisciplinary. In order to evaluate problems that cross discipline boundaries, I chose to draw upon three separate methodologies: educational criticism, critical discourse analysis, and self-ethnography. While my primary focus is on education, I see education as being directly affected by the larger social science context,

and therefore, could not limit my methodology nor could I make it strictly inter-

disciplinary. This research strategy seeks a holistic approach toward identifying and

evaluating contradictions that are deeply embedded in the American culture (Leavy,

2011).

**Educational Criticism and Critical Discourse Analysis**

Both educational criticism and critical discourse analysis involve the processes of

description, interpretation and evaluation (Eisner, 1998; Fairclough, 1989). Educational

criticism goes one step further and also carries into the data analysis portion of examining

emergent themes. However, the two methodologies differ in that educational criticism is

concerned specifically with the educational setting whereas critical discourse analysis

zeros in on the language in use.

**Self-Ethnography**

I could easily have been satisfied with using just these two methodologies.

However, two things complicated this clean approach to my study—my prior experience

as a creative writer and my own personal history as an adult child of the kind of

environments being considered. In my former studies as a creative writer, I learned to

process knowledge through the act of writing. I often do not know how I feel about a

topic until I've had the opportunity to begin putting thoughts on a page. Furthermore,

because the educational setting I chose intentionally serves the "neediest of the needy," a

phrase I heard from multiple participants, I began linking my understanding to my own

childhood. Furthermore, having already been an active volunteer for the organization, I

could not see myself as an outside researcher. I was more like an observing participant,

utilizing the position I was already in as both a current volunteer and a former member of

the population being served (Alvesson, 2003). Self-ethnography provided me with the tools and freedom to explore these links rather than remove them from my study.

**Choosing Participants**

I chose one early childhood education organization in central Colorado as my setting. The organization has over 300 employees, so I used a snowball sampling approach resulting in a total of fourteen participants working in nine different job positions within the organization ranging from educational assistants (EAs) to the organization's CEO. This diversity provided me with enough representative voices from the various stakeholders to formulate a holistic picture of the varied attitudes and beliefs. It was interesting to me that I did not receive confirmation of participation all at once. The process was true to its name in that it did take on a kind of snowball effect. I had the encouragement of the CEO, which may have helped gain participation in some cases and hinder in others. However, it was the participants themselves who encouraged one another to participate. I had been a classroom volunteer with one participant for two years, so it was easy to gain her trust, and she was able to encourage a few others who encouraged a few others, and so forth.

Although I did observe classroom teachers in their interactions with children, I did not directly observe the children themselves, except through the lens of teacher directed activity, nor did I examine artifacts from the children. My focus was primarily on the adults in charge of the learning experiences.

**Data Collection**

Data collection was triangulated with interviews, observations, and artifact reviews. Twelve of my fourteen participants were interviewed twice within a four month

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period. Two participants were year-round teachers who were both interviewed and observed. The organization's Chief Operating Officer also provided me with detailed artifacts on the demographics of all families currently being served by the program.

**Data Analysis**

Chapter Four is devoted to the full descriptions of the participants and our conversations. Throughout the description process, I also provide my interpretations of the concepts uncovered, drawing again upon the literature. These concepts began to emerge as themes. I begin the evaluation process near the end of the same chapter. Data was organized according to Domains and were placed in the document according to the way they helped answer my first three research questions.

In Chapter Five, I begin threading my evaluations and interpretations into the larger context of social themes and pose potential ways this study might serve to inform policymakers as well as educators as they seek to provide the most good for the greatest number of our youngest, most vulnerable, citizens.

<center>**Summary**</center>

The problems addressed in this study are larger than life problems. They cannot be solved in the context of a single study. However, this study does provide valuable insight into the way concepts of equality are internalized and acted upon within individuals who have deliberately chosen a profession that works with the poorest families in our society. Chapter Two highlights examples of contradiction found in literature that feed into these internalized concepts, thereby providing educators and policymakers with a more comprehensive view of the problems present in contemporary educational discourse. In Chapter Three, I provide a detailed overview of the three

methodologies used in this study as well as provide a full view of the theoretical

frameworks behind this study. Although many dissertations do not provide overly

detailed focus on the theories that help guide them, I felt it was necessary to devote

extensive attention to this discussion because it plays such a vital role in the final analysis

of data., and in Chapter Four I provide the description, interpretations, and evaluations of

not only the participants in the study but on the language and concepts of equality I found

in use. Finally, in Chapter Five, I attempt to draw a thematic landscape of education

programming and the difficulties facing our nation when it comes to our ideas about how

to provide all citizens with equal opportunities early in life. In this chapter, I answer the

four research questions of the study and offer implications and limitations of my findings.

CHAPTER TWO

PROFILE OF KEY TERMS AS REFLECTED IN LITERATURE

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The intention of accountability is honorable. It carries with it the message that all

children are valued. It reminds educators they are charged with the most essential task of

society—instructing the young. Without accountability, any system runs the risk of

mediocrity. It is right and just to ask those in charge of our public education system to

take their jobs seriously and treat every child in their charge equitably. However, there is

a moral good to opening the path to the space of absence—in following the thread back to

the aporia, the unpassable boundary of our conceptualizations of democracy in practice

because, as Derrida posits, the yet to come from providing this passage is full of

anticipatory faith. Just as Derrida says there are some actions that can be lawful and yet

unjust[4], I argue that there are educational policies that are equal but unfair. There is a

moral good in critically examining realities against good intentions. It is also my belief

that there are some things that are unequal (yet still potentially fair and equitable) by

nature, and that to deny this truth is to do more harm than good. An examination of the

literature of accountability measures related to equity such as standardization,

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[4] In the essay, "Force of Law," Derrida says that "If I were content to apply a just rule, without a spirit of
justice and without in some way and each time inventing the rule and the example, I might be sheltered
from criticism, under the protection of law, my action conforming to objective law, but I would not be just"
(p.245).

accommodation, and differentiation reveals contradictions. A close re-examination of terms used to argue for the ideology of equality, liberty, freedom, and/or democracy, as well as their potential origins, in American public education reveal that the competing philosophical perspectives guiding these terms complicate the adequate application of any viable accountability measures currently being undertaken.

There has always been a steady interest in the ideology of equity reflected in the written artifacts of the United States. This profile of some of their treatment in literature provides an overview of literature specifically related to equality initiatives in PreK-12 education. It focuses on articles and texts published since the mid 70's, just prior to the emergence of our current standards-based reform movement. The literature suggests that there is a wide variety of discourse concerning equality and equity in public education and that, upon closer examination, the sociocultural significance of who is doing the talking matters.

### Standardization in U.S. as a Means Toward Equality

Although social achievements made by the Civil Rights Act of 1964 brought with them desegregation and more access for traditionally marginalized populations, economic and educational stratification became increasingly more complex. Beginning in the mid-late 1970's, the focus in education shifted from just integration to quality. However, as Landon Beyer (1985) argues, the social and political context surrounding the potential reasons for this shift are worth critical inquiry.

Three seminal documents mark an approximate time frame for the emergent philosophical backbone upon which standardization in education took form: the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (Public Law 94-142, 1975), *A nation at*

*risk: The imperative for educational reform* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), and *State mandated testing and educational reform: Context and consequences* (Airasian, 1987). All three documents cite democracy, freedom, and equality as core American values that direct their cause.

The first document, EHA, mandated that "all children . . . who are handicapped, regardless of the severity of their handicap," were guaranteed a "free and appropriate public education" (Public Law 94-142, 1975). Prior to the passing of the Act it was estimated that over one million children were in need of free public education but were excluded due to their disabilities (Public Law 94-142, 1975). It was argued that it was in the best interest of the nation as a whole that these needs were met. Likewise, according to the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983):

> A high level of shared education is essential to a free, democratic society and to the fostering of a common culture, especially in a country that prides itself on individualism and freedom . . . . All, regardless of race or class or economic status, are entitled to a fair chance and to the tools for developing their individual powers of mind and spirit to the utmost. (n.p.)

Airasian (1987) too cites democracy and equality as key tenets to standardization. According to Airasian (1987), between 1960 and 1980, standardized testing in the United States began to morph from traditional school-based testing which informed classroom practice and monitored public education policies at district and state levels to the kind we see today which are "more intrusive" and "have become powerful motivators and implementors of educational reform" (p.403). One primary reason, posits Airasian (1987), is that by 1984:

> The press for equality [had] introduced two new social goals to the educational system. First, it . . . required that the educational system serve a variety of groups

that previously were either underserved or not served at all. Second, it . . . focused attention on the results or outcomes of education. (p.396)

Furthermore, Airasian (1987) asserts:

Equal educational opportunity has been a salient feature of social and political policy in America since the early 1960s. Through legislation, litigation, and other means, equal education opportunity has been extended to an increasing number of groups. In order to address the factors that are believed to produce inequalities, institutions have had to identify, accommodate, and monitor groups not identified, accommodated, and monitored before. In some cases the accommodation has involved fairly straightforward remedies, such as integrating sexes in gym classes or providing ramps and toilet facilities for the physically handicapped. In others, it has involved developing whole new educational programs for groups of pupils never before served by the school. Moreover, given growing emphasis on equality of opportunity defined in terms of the results of education (Coleman, 1968; Madaus, Airasian, & Kellaghan, 1980), increasing attention is being devoted to measuring and comparing the outcomes of education stratified by various racial, ethnic, gender, and handicapped categorizations in order to assess society's movement toward equality. (p.399)

As indicated in the above citations, freedom, democracy, and individualism are all said to be core American values that are the undercurrent of ideology upon which education as a whole, and standardization as a specific practice, is said to be based. Our current President echoes these thoughts in his literature and public education addresses. For example, in his attempts to revise the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, President Obama (2008) says it is time that we "finally meet our moral obligation to provide every child a world-class education" (Acceptance Speech). In his commentary on President Obama's plans for revising NCLB, Kahlenberg (2009) identifies a plausible starting point:

Originally, standards-based reform was driven by the idea that there was a big hole at the center of American education: a lack of agreement on what skills and knowledge students should master. Expectations varied widely between schools, and there was little outside pressure for anyone in the system—students, teachers, or principals—to work very hard.

In their influential 1991 paper "Systemic School Reform," Marshall S. Smith and Jennifer O'Day suggested an alternative to this chaos: the establishment of standards, which would guide curriculum, testing, and teacher training and development. (p.45-46)

Standardization is valued as a means to ensure "every child [receives] a world-class education." The thought process is that we as a country can best help the many and fill in the hole by creating equilibrium through standardization. It sounds justified. However, as Beyer (1985) posits in his critical comment on *A Nation at Risk*:

Throughout their [*A Nation at Risk*] report, the Commissioners allege that schools are the source of a variety of economic, military, and spiritual ills. Yet the possibility that schools may reflect a range of social problems that continue to plague American society—problems that have their origins elsewhere—is not examined. (p.46)

Those in charge of determining state and federally based standards, such as the Colorado Department of Education (CDE), are in line with E.D. Hirsch's (2006) belief that: "Reading ability correlates with almost everything that a democratic education aims to provide, including the ability to be an informed citizen who can actively participate in the self-government of a democracy" (p.3). In the 2012 legislative session, Colorado passed the Colorado Reading to Ensure Academic Development Act (Colorado READ Act) which attempts to ensure that "all children in Colorado [will] graduate from high school having attained skill levels that adequately prepare them for postsecondary studies or for the workforce" (HB 12-1238, 2012, p.8). The CDE's stated values for assessment include "what Colorado sees as the future skills and essential knowledge for our next generation to be more successful" (CDE, 2013, n.p.). Preparing students for an increasingly diverse and complex world means helping them navigate through the obstacles that may intercede in their ability to protect the most treasured value of our

nation—democracy. Hirsch and the CDE assert that measuring reading comprehension skills of students can help unleash their subsequent success in school overall and purport that academic success will necessarily open up options toward eventual economic success.

Despite the nearly thirty years which have passed between the *A Nation at Risk*'s (1983) call to action to right the wrongs of inequality in education, there still exist vast gaps in the measured successes between demographic groups. "What gives the reading gap between demographic groups a special poignancy," warns Hirsch (2006):

> is the dramatic failure of our schools to live up to the basic ideal of a democratic education, which, as Thomas Jefferson conceived it, is the ideal of offering all children the opportunity to succeed, regardless of who their parents happen to be. (p.3)

The tests are there to help determine whether or not schools are doing their jobs in adequately preparing students for the changing world they will later encounter. Unfortunately, as Apple (2008) points out, standardized testing can in many ways result in a paradox wherein "students actually get less in the guise of getting more, and schools and entire systems becom[e] factories that are aimed at producing one thing—increased test scores (McNeil, 2005)"(p.31). Students receive practice tests in place of other educational activities that might be deemed non-essential, such as creative projects or field trips.

**The Competing Perspective of Standardization as a Threat to Equality**

Many believe the central argument against the use of a core curriculum or standardization is the "but who shall decide?" question, but that's not the most crucial aporia that comes out of the push for a standardization aimed at leveling the playing field.

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It's the inherent difference in others—the singularities of otherness. Multitudes dictate variety—they can not be standard by nature. There is no solution that anyone could ever come up with that would make things equal without seriously altering other preciously held beliefs. For example, returning momentarily to *A Nation at Risk,* individual freedom stands right alongside "shared education" (see earlier citation). Communism suffered a similar paradox. In creating a "shared" vision, the individual freedoms suffered. In present-day US policy we see individual freedoms continually rubbing up against the good of all—in talks about gun control, health care, national security, etc.

Individual freedom has always had to negotiate against shared values. From the moment children enter school, they are asked to repress what they'd like to do individually (such as be the sole player of a particular toy) and submit to the common good of the classroom (share and take turns).

Standardized assessments traditionally have not made adequate allocations or accommodations for the varying sociological factors that also influence results. While education is a viable tool in gaining access to economic privilege, it is not the job of schooling alone to eradicate poverty which, as demographic marking systems alert, plays a key role in the success or failure of student achievement (Rothstein, 2008; Nieto & Bode, 2012). Similarly, schools also should not suffer negative consequences from the equitable attempt of inclusion of students with disabilities. Are students with learning needs such as severe dyslexia or severe dysgraphia to be held to the *same level of proficiency* as those without these obstacles? According to Thurlow and Johnson (2000), "students with disabilities in particular are significantly affected by high stakes testing programs" (p.308). However, as of 2000, when their research was published, over 98% of

students with disabilities were still receiving the *same* assessment tests as students without learning disabilities (Thurlow & Johnson, 2000).

Another area that was once overlooked was the area of English-language learning. As cited by Nieto and Bode (2012):

> There are over 5 million ELLs enrolled in grades pre-K through 12, roughly 10 percent of total public school student enrollment, and nearly 80 percent of ELLs are Spanish speaking . . . At the same time, the greatest growth in the percentage of students with limited English proficiency was in states that had previously had very low numbers of such students. (p.221)

Although determination of when to require high-stakes testing of ELLs varies by state, studies indicate "Reforms in assessment policy need to advocate native language assessment . . ." and that "it takes longer than one year to learn English" (Mahon 2006, p.495). In Colorado, students are required to participate in the Colorado State Assessment Program after attending three years of U.S. schooling. These students are taking the same exam their U.S. English native language peers are taking (Colorado Accommodations Guide for English Learners, 2012-2013). How can students new to the language be asked to score comparably to students for whom the tests are written in their native tongue? All of these factors would appear to be common sense—and yet until very recently, none of them were adequately accounted for while scoring.

Current mandates are beginning to recognize these variables. Teacher effectiveness rubrics, which include student scores as one of the proficiency indicators, now include language such as: "Expectations of student growth can take into consideration such factors as student mobility and numbers of special education and high-risk students" (EQITEE, S.10-191, 2010). Although clear definitions of what "take into consideration" might look like are still being defined.

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**Accommodations & Modifications as Means to Equal Opportunity**

Much in the same way standardization is used to foster equality, so too are accommodations. According to the National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities: "The State must have in place policies and procedures in effect to ensure that—all children residing in the State . . . regardless of the severity of their disability are identified, located,  and evaluated . . ." (NICHCY, 2010). Furthermore, "Each public agency must ensure that—To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities . . . are educated with children who are not disabled" and that "a child with a disability is not removed from education in age-appropriate regular classrooms solely because of needed modifications in the general education curriculum" (NICHCY, 2010).

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments issued in 1997 (Public Law 105-17), which prompted today's accommodation mandates, form the basis of our ideas regarding equal opportunities for education to all students. In 2004, the Senate and House of Representatives enacted the Individuals With Disabilities Improvement Act (IDEA) which opens with the statement that:

> Disability is a natural part of the human experience and in no way diminishes the rights of individuals to participate in or contribute to society. Improving educational results for children with disabilities is an essential element of our national public policy of assuring equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency for individuals with disabilities. (p.1)

It is clear that, much like standards-based reform efforts, reforms aimed at improving the quality of education and opportunities to gain equal access to education for children with disabilities is derived from recurrent themes regarding what it means to live in a democratic society. A democratic society will assume responsibility for those who find

themselves underserved by public policy and work to improve those policies to assure

equality of opportunity. A paradox again forms out of this belief.

**Unintended Consequences to Full Inclusion**

Although Thurlow and Johnson (2000) are by and large in favor of high-stakes

testing for students with disabilities because of their potential benefits for students to gain

access to historically able-bodied positions in society, they cite Garmoran & Berends's

caution that scores on standardized exams can have unintended negative consequences:

> A primary concern is that scores on high-stakes tests will be used to place
> students with disabilities in low-track classes, where they learn less than they are
> capable of learning. Research shows that when students with disabilities are
> placed in low-track classes, they do not catch up with their peers in other tracks
> (Garmoran & Berends, 1987). (p.308)

Tracking is a concern for all students in relation to issues of equality. However, as

Thurlow and Johnson (2000) also point out, tracking not only affects student learning for

students with disabilities but can further peril students when scores on standardized tests

are used for retention and promotion of students to subsequent grade levels. Early studies

indicated that students with disabilities already had a 40% drop out rate (Wagner cited in

Thurlow & Johnson, 2000). Retention of students with disabilities would presumably

aggravate that percentage. Furthermore, state testing scores are also used to determine

diploma options for students with disabilities. While it is reasonable to offer students with

disabilities diverse options such as Certificates of Completion or Special Education

Diplomas, Thurlow and Johnson (2000) also point out that many other scholars have

examined the way students who are exempted from earning a traditional high school

diploma or equivalent have suffered:

There is critical need to better understand the implications of state graduation requirements because of findings that [show] students with disabilities experience significant negative outcomes when they fail to earn a high school or equivalent diploma (Bruininks, Thurlow, Lewis & Larson 1988; Edgar, 1987; Johnson, McGrew, Bloomberg, Bruininks, & Lin, 1997; Wagner, 1992). (p. 309)

Should students with disabilities be exempted from the demands of earning a traditional diploma or is this equitable act of exemption denying them equal opportunities later? This paradox of equal education vs. equitable education is not easily solved. If students with disabilities are appropriately accommodated to achieve state standards are they receiving an equal education or an equitable one? Are the terms interchangeable? If we look to Espinoza's (2007) definitions, equality encompasses a guarantee that all people have "equal access to quality education (access), the same level of educational attainment (survival), the same achievement on tests (output) and the same occupational status and income" (p.356). Furthermore, for those students without disabilities who struggled to meet the same standards but who did not receive means of accommodation for their individual learning modalities is the system treating them equitably or equally when they are designated below proficient, retained, or denied a diploma because they did not qualify as having a documented disability?

### Differentiation: The Biggest Hurdle to Equitable Education in United States?

As Airasian (1987) so aptly asserted:

Increasingly, criteria for and decisions about curriculum, instruction, certification, funding, and evaluation are being made at the state or federal, not the local, level. . . . One consequence has been a clash between the values advanced to justify increased state control, namely equality, accountability, and efficacy, and the values of freedom of choice and differentiated treatment, which are embodied in justifications for local school control. (p.400)

Values of freedom in choice and differentiation of treatment are the key obstacles to accountability measures designed to create equitable education for all. Gardner (2004) affirms Airasian's (1987) notion saying that:

> In the past, serving a smaller and less diverse clientele, schools faced certain problems; today, in a rapidly changing world, where the schools are expected to serve the multiple needs of every young individual, the limitations of this institution are sometimes overwhelming. (p. 16)

Gardner (2004) further asserts:

> Studies of cognition suggest that there exist many different ways of acquiring and representing knowledge; these individual differences need to be taken into account in our pedagogy as well as in our assessments. Sometimes students who cannot pass muster on the usual measures of competence reveal significant mastery and understanding when these measures have been elicited in a different, more appropriate way. (p. 14)

> The question is how? How are individual differences to be assessed equitably?

And is that truly the most equitable approach to student achievement and learning? Elliot Eisner's (1994) response to the 1983 *A Nation at Risk* and the 1991 *America 2000* was this:

> Whether the public display of student report cards will make it possible for schools to become better places for students or teachers is not entirely clear. Also a mystery is why it is thought that an appropriate cure for educational ills is a common examination for 47 million students attending 108,000 schools overseen by 16,000 school boards located in fifty states serving a population as diverse as ours. (p. 2)

> Eisner (1994) further takes issue with the often confused interchange of sameness

and equity:

> So the idea of the race emerges: each child on the same track, jumping the same hurdles. To the victor go the spoils. Whether one track is appropriate for all children in this nation of ours or whether all children are starting at the same start line when the gun goes off is a neglected consideration. Thus, our culture's not so tacit meritocracy supports the idea that in schools, as in socks, one size fits all.

Ironically, this idea is often embraced in the name of educational equity, as if sameness and equity were identical. (p.4)

Like Gardner (2004), Eisner (1994) presses for a more diversified approach to instruction as well as assessment. However, other theorists, equally devoted to issues of social justice, argue that accountability is still important because, school officials and teachers, left to their own means, may treat students in accordance with their own biases and even prejudices. For instance, Nieto and Bode (2012) posit that:

> . . . in schools where few teachers know much about the students they are teaching, expectations of student achievement are likely to be quite low. As a result, some children have been chronically underserved for many years. It is little wonder that too many children in these circumstances have failed to learn and that their parents have become staunch advocates of stringent accountability measures, including standardized testing. As we have seen, however, standardized tests alone rarely guarantee equality; in fact, they may intensify inequality. Nevertheless, reliable and effective assessment of student learning is necessary. Teachers and schools must be held accountable for what students learn or fail to learn, especially in the case of those who have received low-quality schooling. (p. 119)

Not to be unclear, Nieto and Bode (2012) have harsh words for the methods currently employed as measurements of assessment. Their social justice perspective here, is to emphasize that it is reasonable for a population that has been traditionally overlooked by, and underrepresented in, the arena of "quality education" to join the push toward more accountability.

**Discursive Language, Discursive Power**

As demonstrated in the above literature, the methods employed to reach equality in education is widely disputed. What each of these views has in common, however, is the language of *equality*, and by extension, *democracy*. This is why language itself needs critical examination. Scholars like Fairclough (1989) argue that disputes over the

meaning of language are often mistakenly seen as competing reflections of language that grows out of social processes but should really be interpreted as an integral component of the social process itself—not an outgrowth. In Fairclough's words:

> People sometimes explicitly argue about the meanings of words like *democracy, nationalization, imperialism, socialism, liberalism or terrorism*. More often, they use the words in more or less pointedly different and incompatible ways— examples are easy to find in exchanges between leaders of political parties, or between, say, the Soviet Union and the United States of America. Such disputes are sometimes seen as merely preliminaries to or outgrowths from the real processes and practices of politics. What I am suggesting is that they are not: they are politics. Politics partly consists in the disputes and struggles which occur in language and over language. (p.23)

Any mention of politics inherently encompasses the issue of power structures. The intent of politicians to create public policy to control the process of schooling and the actions of teachers is unnerving. It prompts the contemplation of control itself. When we fail to examine the language being used to win people over to accept and implement control over a process the very notion of democracy becomes problematic.

In Eisner's (2002) *The Educational Imagination,* he warns that this acceptance of terminology makes them ubiquitous—"their conceptual implications are taken for granted, they become a part of our way of educational life without the benefit of critical analysis. The consequences of such concepts and the images they imply are, in my view, devastating" (p. 361). Furthermore, says Eisner:

> When one is working in complex organizations that do not lend themselves well to systematic control and long-range planning or prediction, the illusion of control and prediction can be *secured by using language from domains where control and prediction are possible*. (p.361, my emphasis)

Let's turn now to the individual teacher. While policymakers and administrators are creating and handing off discourse that they use to secure this method of control,

classroom teachers are the primary agents of these discourses. Teachers are continually handed multiple "scripts." James Paul Gee (2012) expounds this metaphor further: "Humans spend a good deal of their time negotiating over which script or play (which Discourse) is operative in a given instance (Giddens 1984: 83-92, 1987; Goffman 1959, 1967, 1981)" (p.191). Gee explains that this negotiation sometimes amounts to more of a balancing act between competing discourses, much like one who might attempt to "play two or more roles in a play simultaneously" (p. 191).

If it is true that educational discourse contains multiple sub-discourses, multiple intentions and political stances, does it make education impossible? Not necessarily. Again, we must turn to Eisner to fully comprehend the outcome of living with an understanding of multiple ways of knowing. According to David Flinders (2005), "We know from experience that although misunderstandings are common as we go about interacting with others, these misunderstandings can sometimes be resolved through reaching agreements" (p.131). Writing about Eisner's understanding of multiple meanings and ways of knowing, Flinders trumpets Eisner's contribution to educational research, and specifically this understanding of the multiplicity inherent in our endeavors as educators, as powerful. Agreements about how and when we are going to favor one script over another is one way to deal with the seeming contradiction. We can acquiesce to those who are attempting to force accountability on a system that has historically failed whole sectors of society. We can also acquiesce to those who are actively engaged in the art of teaching and allow them to retain the primary professional judgment of making in the moment decisions within the context of individual instances.

**Conclusion**

Education reform efforts rely on the concept of justice and elicit our core commitment to American democracy. Contradictorily, however, theorists opposed to current education reform efforts, such as the implementation of stricter accountability measures, validate their accusations of inequality with the same language, citing American core values of freedom, liberty, and differentiation as the cornerstones of a democratic society. According to Gutiérrez (2007), "How we define equity has serious implications for how we seek to achieve or measure it" (p.40).  Again we see the discussion of sameness vs.  fairness: "Although equity means 'justice' or 'fairness,' it is often blurred with equality, which means 'sameness'"(p. 40). Gutiérrez (2007) argues that the only truly equitable approach to education should be one that incorporates different approaches and expects different achievements (p.41).

The notion of sameness is one also addressed by Nel Noddings (2005). Noddings (2005) argues that a recognition that "not all individual children can learn everything we might like to teach them" (p. 19) more genuinely captures a legitimate demonstration of care. She goes on to say that, "Further, the good intentions captured in the slogan ['All children can learn'] can lead to highly manipulative and dictatorial methods that disregard the interests and purposes of students" (p. 19).  Noddings (2005) is content with the fact that "There are few things that all students need to know, and it ought to be acceptable for students to reject some material in order to pursue other topics with enthusiasm" (p. 19). For instance, in an attempt to enforce equality, students who have strengths and interests that fall outside the range of the core curriculum are in essence "denied" access to showcasing their unique strengths or talents. In the traditional public

school environment, a student who is a master at Legos or Kinex, for example, must be content with an occasional club opportunity—even though that talent may lead to an interest in engineering or architecture. He or she must pursue that interest on his or her own time unless a creative teacher finds a way to sneak it into a unit or two.

Despite all good intentions, we are left with the reality that the United States does not have a universal concept of any of the terms usually flung into the debate of accountability and schooling practice. Competing philosophical perspectives will necessarily cripple any efforts made until, as members of a unified country, we stop to more fully examine what we mean by liberty, equality, freedom, and democracy. And if we come to find out that there is not, and cannot be, a unified conceptualization of equality, we may need to live with negotiation and agreements that are transitory and that necessarily depend on the unique ecologies of schools themselves. However, this does not imply an "anything goes" solution, either. Schooling practices and government policies should not adopt any single ideology that excludes the other possible ideologies (as in the case of policies which lend themselves to dogmatism). Rather, in the negotiation and agreement process, there should be room for evolution of practices and ideologies. This negotiation process will be looked at further in Chapters Four and Five.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODS & THEORETICAL/CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

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**Research Methods**

This study is transdisciplinary in nature. The term "trans-disciplinary" is

borrowed from Norman Fairclough (2012). In his explanation:

> What distinguishes trans-disciplinary from other forms of interdisciplinary
> research is that, in bringing disciplines and theories together to address research
> issues, it sees 'dialogue' between them as a source for the theoretical and
> methodological development of each of them. (p.12)

Educational criticism was the overarching research method employed,

specifically, the utilization of description, interpretation, and evaluation, followed by

thematic analysis. However, because the work focuses on language and power, it is also a

critical discourse analysis. And, because I incorporate my own meta-cognitive processes

during the formation of my evaluative and thematic analyses, I additionally relied upon

the methods of self-ethnography, as described by Mats Alvesson (2003).

As further discussed in the following section, the theoretical lenses through which

I primarily peered through were a combination of critical theory and postmodernism,

both of which have roots in the three methodologies I've chosen.

**Self-Ethnography**

When I write, when I conduct research, and when I teach, I am continually involved in self-reflection. Most people are. Some people, however, do so more consciously than others. Writing is linked to my process of meaning-making in ways I hardly understand myself. Constructivist developmental psychologists may have come up with a reason for this type of process of knowledge formation:

> [They] believe that development involves movement through a predictable sequence of 'forms' (frames of reference or meaning systems) culminating in the development of the adult capacity, and in some adult learners, the ability and disposition to engage in the transformative processes of critical self-reflection and reflective judgment through discourse. (Mezirow, 2009, p. 99)

Regardless of the reason, "critical self-reflection and reflective judgment" are a necessary for me as I move through any project. This study required me to place myself into the complexity of contradiction. I needed to examine issues of equality and fairness through the immediate lenses of all participants I interacted with. Each participant had her own views on the subject, and I needed a process for critically examining these varied perspectives and the process by which the "examination" became filtered through my own socialized self. It was not enough to simply describe the differences between these perspectives. I also needed a means to judge and evaluate what methods might be achieving their desired results for the "leveling of the playing field" and what methods might be contributing to further chaos. Therefore, the research methods of self-ethnography was used in conjunction with educational criticism and critical discourse analysis.

In her article, "Writing Sociology," Laurel Richardson (2002) explains that "personal narration, reflexivity, and contextualization . . . are valuable tools" and further

purports that "they demystify authority claims, enlarge disciplinary boundaries, and contribute to the writing of socially useful, culturally critical, publicly available, and vibrant sociology" (p. 415). There are various terms to describe this approach to research. Some scholars have used the term autoethnography (i.e. Richardson, 2002; Ellis & Bochner, 2006). Others prefer the terms autobiographical narrative (i.e. He, 1999) and some simply use the term autobiography (i.e., Harris, 2005). While each term may carry its own slight variation of connotation, they all refer to the act of writing (i.e., Mezirow's identified 'discourse') that places the researcher within the time and place of the research being conducted. As Richardson (2002) posits, "Once the veil of privileged truth is lifted, the opportunities for addressing how we write, who can write, and what we can write about are legion—including the multiple possibilities inherent in alternative representations" (p.415).

Mats Alvesson (2003) uses the term self-ethnography to describe the process by which "the researcher-author describes a cultural setting to which s/he has a 'natural access,'[and] is an active participant, more or less on equal terms with other participants" (p.174). Alvesson uses the term with some reservation for fear that the term will be confused with autoethnography where he contends the researcher her- or himself is the focus. Rather, Alvesson argues, self-ethnography's intention is to study "what goes on around oneself rather than putting oneself and one's experiences in the centre" (p.175). I never intended to make my experience the central theme of the research, so I prefer the term self-ethnography over autoethnography as Alvesson has described it.

**Educational Criticism**

According to Eisner (2005), "The task of the critic is to . . . adumbrate, suggest, imply, connote, render, rather than to attempt to translate. In this task, metaphor and analogy, suggestion and implication are major tools" (Chapter 4, Educational Connoisseurship, para. 10). For Eisner, as for me, it is not enough to simply describe what is occurring, though description is a necessary first step. In his book, *The Educational Imagination,* Eisner (2002) outlines four aspects of educational criticism: description, interpretation, evaluation, and thematics.

At the descriptive stage of the process, Eisner (2002) suggests the critic must make clear to his or her audience the lived nature of the object under study. This, he says:

> [is] to enable the reader to participate vicariously in the auditory and visual qualities of the layered web of life [under observation] . . . it is the artistic reconstruction of events that may be more vividly experienced through that distillation called a work of art . . .. (p. 226-227)

This reliance upon the "artistic reconstruction of events" is what places educational criticism in the category of arts-based research. The participant descriptions and data analysis provided in Chapters Four and Five rely heavily upon this artistic freedom inherent in educational criticism.

Meaning-making is at the heart of the second stage of the process. Here is where Eisner (2002) contends "ideas from the social sciences most frequently come into play" (p. 229). This is why educational criticism works so compatibly with critical discourse analysis. In Eisner's description of this stage, he places emphasis on the use of multiple theories. The critic must be adequately prepared to interpret what he or she observes through multiple lenses. How the critic comes to determine which theories are most

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applicable is dependent upon both the critic's preparation and on the choices he or she

finds "most useful for getting on with the business of education" (Eisner, 2002, p.230).

The point is not to go in with one theory in mind, but rather to live in the space of critical

interpretation and to draw upon as much informed knowledge as he or she can to

adequately make meaning from what is being observed.

Interpretation and evaluation go hand-in-hand. A social scientist might stop at the

level of interpretation, but the educational critic must take that interpretation directly into

the sphere of education, which is not only a product of the social world, but an evolving

process. The process is what drives the educational critic to not only make sense of what

is going on but to determine the value of what is going on: "One must inevitably appraise

the value of a set of circumstances" because the end goal of educational criticism is to

"improve the educational process" (Eisner, 2002, p.231).

The fourth and final stage of the educational criticism process is the synthesis

stage, which Eisner (2002) called thematics. While it is an accepted given that no two

classrooms or educational organizations will operate in the exact same way, nor be

comprised of the exact same compositions of individuals, the act of educational criticism

as a social good has a singular purpose. What point would there be to evaluating the

value of circumstances unless some broad generalizations could be determined and used

as guiding principles about what makes "good schooling"? According to Eisner (2002),

"The identification of themes not only summarizes the essential points of the criticism,

but it also enables one to use the criticism as a way of understanding other educational

situations" (p.233). This last step is also what Eisner (2005) refers to as the "creation of

images that people will find meaningful and from which their fallible and tentative views

of the world can be altered, rejected, or made more secure" (Chapter 7, On the

Differences, para. 18). It is where I attempt to make the given interpretations of equality

"problematic" and step into the role of a "Boundary Breaker." According to Eisner

(2005):

> Two kinds of behavior characteristically displayed by Boundary Breakers—
> insight and imagination—may function in the following ways. Insight may help
> the Boundary Breaker grasp relationships among seemingly discrete events. It
> may also enable him [or her] to recognize incongruities or gaps in accepted
> explanations or descriptions. As he [or she] recognizes these gaps, his [or her]
> imagination may come into play and enable him [or her] to generate images or
> ideas (or both) useful for closing the gaps. (Chapter 1, Boundary Breaking, para.
> 3)

This boundary breaking takes place in Chapter Five. It is the chapter where I risk

meaning in the sake of emancipating meaning. Finding an imaginative way to highlight

the gaps, if not close them, is the ultimate goal of the study.

**Critical Discourse Analysis**

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a necessary complement to educational

criticism in this particular study because it allows for the examination of language and the

implications that language has for the underlying workings of social power structures.

According to Fairclough (1989):

> In seeing language as discourse and as social practice, one is committing oneself
> not just to analyzing texts, nor just to analyzing processes of production and
> interpretation, but to analyzing the relationship between texts, processes, and their
> social conditions both in the immediate conditions of the situational context and
> the more remote conditions of institutional and social structures. (p. 26)

Like educational criticism, it involves three stages which are very similar and enabled me

to utilize a combination of the two methods without the use of additional steps.

The first stage to CDA is description. Again, at this stage I attempted to recreate the visual/auditory images at work in the interactions I observed and in the dialogues I was a part of, but I paid special attention to the way language (verbal, written, and non-verbally communicated language cues) was used to create conditions of equity within, or about, the educational setting.

The second stage, interpretation, enabled me to make meaning out of the instances I chose to describe. In CDA, this step "is concerned with the relationship between text and interaction—with seeing the text as the product of a process of production, and as a resource in the process of interpretation" (Fairclough, 1989, p.26). In other words, seeing the interaction between texts/communicating bodies is also important. For instance, observing a poster in the classroom titled "Ways to Play Fair" and then observing the reinforcement of that language by a teacher may hold significance.

In the final stage of this process, the explanation stage, the critic should be "concerned with the relationship between interaction and social context—with the social determination of the processes of production and interpretation, and their social effects" (Fairclough, 1989, p.26). Therefore, much like the interpretive stage of educational criticism, this stage of CDA is concerned with the social implications of the interactions being analyzed.

There are no absolute generalizations that can be made by any of my interpretations or evaluations. I am fully aware of this and will rely partially on self-ethnographic practices to generate themes. I argue that an upfrontness about my own

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filtering and meaning-making processes will provide general educational maps for the emergence of subsequent potential theories which may prove useful in the critiquing of other educational settings.

## Theoretical/Conceptual Frameworks

In the field of qualitative research, the term postmodernism is often posed as a theoretical/conceptual framework. It marries well with critical theory, more traditionally used in social research, but both postmodernism and critical theory have been coopted by literary criticism and educational research. Each field of study bends the terms slightly, but they also pay some homage to past orientations. Today's qualitative researcher would be hard pressed to find a common definition for either, but that's really the point—the multivariate tensions between meanings emancipate new ways of seeing. They act as vessels through which the force of a breaking with the past becomes necessary. Again, because there is truly no way to put a finger on the meaning of concepts as abstract as postmodernism and critical theory, the best method for opening to the novelty is through the work of deconstruction which is attributed to the work of Jacques Derrida.

### In the Field of Qualitative Research

According to Rossman and Rallis (2012):

A postmodern or critical approach to material culture might construe all products of a society as text. Movies, plays, or advertisements, for example, could form the basis for such analyses. The strategy here is to analyze critically what is portrayed and symbolized in such textual representations and what is absent or silent. . . . Material culture can offer data that contradict words and sights. (p.197)

The text can take many forms, but it is only through the "text" that the meaning emerges. And, because the language of the text has a force all its own, it can "contradict words and sights." In this scenario, the words spoken and the sights taken in present a

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historical/commonly held view of some concept (Rossman and Rallis refer to depictions of women or social awareness of HIV/AIDS in billboards) and the evidence of contradiction present in the data create a tension between the two stories. Thus, an opening fissure full of the force of a new way of seeing is emancipated.

Arts-based research, in particular, promotes an intent to "keep a watchful eye for the ruptures and the breaks and irregularities in existence" (Caputo cited in Barone & Eisner, 2012, p.16). And furthermore:

> This watchfulness implies a willingness to return to the "original difficulty of things" (p.6) by peering beneath the surface of the familiar, the obvious, the orthodox in a  rescrutinizing (re-searching) of the world. It is in adopting this interrogative disposition that arts based research (like much art) promotes a level of dislocation, disturbance, disruptiveness, disequilibrium that renders it sufficiently—even highly—useful, and therefore, in this unusual sense of the word, truthful. (p.16)

The "originary" difficulty rings loudly of Derrida as does the "dislocation" and "disturbance." Again, there is a kind of violent opening between commonly held understandings and the understandings to come that bleed back to an absolute pre-sen[s]e.

**Returning to Deconstruction & Derrida**

For Derrida (1978), the fissure is a Freudian kind of "breaching": ". . . the tracing of a trail, opens up a conducting path, which presupposes a certain violence and a certain resistance to effraction. The path is broken, cracked, *fracta*, breached" (pp. 200-201). The conducting path, according to Derrida (2011), leads us to a "beyond absolute knowledge" by way of tracing older signs (signifiers) of meaning (p. 88). Each time we land upon a sign, it defers to a "memory of an old[er] sign." This he says is "[*t*]*he history of metaphysics . . . the absolute wanting-to-hear-itself speak*" (p.88, emphasis in original). It

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is as though the hunger, the memory, gains a voice. And this voice forces a means for

questioning the unheard of questions:

> It is necessary to hear ["analyzing"] in this way and otherwise—otherwise, that is,
> within the openness of an unheard-of question that opens itself neither to
> knowledge nor onto a non-knowledge as knowledge to come. In the openness of
> this question, *we no longer know.* (p.88, emphasis in original)

This idea of questioning and no longer knowing is essential. Old signs live on as

commonly held meanings in our collective psyches, or as Derrida (2007) later describes

as "received ideas" (p.312). They are no longer questioned. Deconstruction gives

permission, or perhaps even the imperative, to breach a path beyond—as far back as

before the absolute presence of any commonly held belief system, thus opening itself to a

no longer knowing. It is at this point where the formulation of a new (novel)

understanding of a concept can be birthed.

In *Of Grammatology,* Derrida (1976/1974) speaks of the process of de-

construction itself. In this context, he says of Charles S. Peirce, that "Peirce goes very far

in the direction that I have called the de-construction of the transcendental signified"

(p.49) and further speaks about the "powerful, irrepressible desire" (p. 49) to follow the

trail of signification backward to a definitive sign from which the origination of the signs

spring. This is of course impossible because the "system of signs" (p. 49) is indefinite. He

acknowledges that for many, like Husserl, this is an "unacceptable proposition" (p.49)

but insists nonetheless that, "The self-identity of the signified conceals itself unceasingly

and is always on the move" (p.49). Derrida consistently speaks of language and of signs

as an arche-writing and defends this use by saying:

> If I persist in calling that difference writing, it is because, within the work of
> historical repression, writing was, by its situation, destined to signify the most

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> formidable difference. It threatened the desire for the living speech from the closest proximity, it *breached* living speech from within and from the very beginning. And as we shall begin to see, difference cannot be thought without the *trace.* (pp. 56-57, emphasis in original)

What is interesting in the above passage is usage of the terms "historical repression."

Looking at each word independently, we can assume that historical implies what he later describes as an "old history" and that repression implies "limited by frontiers that are hardly visible yet all the more rigorous by that very fact" (p.56). And there we have it. In true deconstruction form, we have circled back to the aporia of questioning the unheard of questions—the commonly held perceptions that "are hardly visible yet all the more rigorous" because they appear so commonsensical.

**In Critical Discourse Analysis**

Repression in a cultural sense relates to issues of power, and in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), language is a social practice, largely defined by the people speaking— or not being given equal opportunity to speak. Coincidentally, as one begins to examine these issues of language and power, the "intertextuality" of multiple speakers and actors begins to unravel:

> An important perspective in CDA is that a text is rarely the work of any one person, but often shows *traces* of different discourses contending and struggling for dominance (Weiss and Wodak, 2003:15). That is, *texts relate to other texts*, and they relate to the social and historical conditions of their production. (Blackledge, 2012, p.617, my emphasis)

Pieces of this passage also sound awfully Derridian. Replace texts with signs, and we'd have signs relate to other signs revealed through the traces of discourses within their phases of inauguration. If we are true to Derrida, we will see these inaugural instances as moving targets. There will never be a point at which we can follow a trace back to 'The' moment of their production. However, as mentioned earlier, CDA does provide us with a

means that deconstruction does not. While deconstruction is intransitive (e.g., the jury rests; the bus halts; it rains—the text deconstructs), CDA is transitive in nature. According to Van Dijk, CDA is "discourse analysis with an attitude" (cited in Blackledge, 2012, p.616). It is a process of analysis centrally concerned with the chasm between discourse and power. It is an application that must take an object and cannot, therefore, be spoken of without the direct object. Therefore, with some exceptions, CDA critically analyzes discourse and not the other way around (a discourse critically analyzed).

> Through this process of discourse analysis, it becomes evident that:
> Discourses may under certain conditions be *operationalized*, 'put into practice' –a
> dialectical process with three aspects: they may be *enacted* as new ways of
> (inter)acting, they may be inculcated as new ways of being (identities), or they
> may be physically *materialized*, e.g. as new ways of organizing space in
> architecture. (Fairclough, 2012, p. 12, emphasis in original)

It is through this understanding of the way discourse can morph into operational, enacted, and/or materialized ways that lends itself well to complement deconstruction because deconstruction does not only follow traces backwards to signs signifying other signs but also opens up the pathway to new unheard of questioning—the space of unknowing . . . and in Derrida's view, an anticipatory coming of what is not yet becoming (e.g. the messianic element).

Loosely described, *post*-modernism has ushered in a skepticism about the formerly held belief that every phenomena has an inherently set structure—even language. Derrida is often connected with the term postmodernism because of his original approach to language as a kind of deconstructing process where every identifying signifier leads one to another sign. Meaning, for Derrida, is never static and graspable.

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Rather, meaning is only revealed through the work of a deconstructed meaning. In this study, I aim to tie Derrida's ideas regarding signs and the process of deconstruction to theories of contemporary critical discourse analysis (CDA). CDA is the transitive action employed—the act of critically analyzing discourse. Deconstruction, then, is free to remain intransitive. It is revealed through the work of deconstruction and needs no object to complete it.

## Research Questions and Study Design

In this study, I plant myself into an early childhood organization operating in central Colorado. The organization primarily serves families in poverty with children between the ages of three and five. I observed and conversed with fourteen staff members working in nine different positions within the organization as well as conducted ongoing conversations and collaborative efforts with the CEO of the organization. In this section, I describe the ways in which I sought to answer my four research questions.

By way of recap, my research questions were as follows:

1. How do theorists and/or practitioners of accountability measures conceive of the idea of fairness and equality?

   After a broad look at education policy literature beginning in the mid-seventies, I began to compare what I'd learned from this literature to what I was hearing from the administrators of the organization. In particular, I was looking for those places that indicated an administrator consciously either embraced or rejected an accountability measure that originated outside of the organization from an external top-down source.

2. How do accountability measures direct the pedagogical approach undertaken within classrooms? All participants volunteered to be part of the study and gave full consent to be interviewed on two separate occasions. In the case of year-round teachers who were currently teaching, they gave consent to a combination of interview/observation. I interviewed all participants about the ways they saw accountability measures take shape in the classrooms. Each interview lasted between 30minutes and an hour and a half. Typically, the second interview with each participant ran longer than the first.

3. What is the educational outcome of the way differing theories of equality sometimes collide (or fail to collide) within classrooms?

In conjunction with ongoing interviews with multiple staff, I also observed two teachers on three, two-hour occasions and shadowed one family advocate as she made her rounds at a facility with five classrooms. Shadowing lasted a total of three hours. In these observations, I was able to compare my observations of potential clashes of theory with what I had heard from participants in their interviews.

In the data analysis process, I analyze the potential implications of my findings. By fully integrating myself into the matrix of the early education organization, I have gained valuable perspective of just how complex these ideologies actually are. The timelessly held beliefs about equality affect every aspect of the learning lives of not only students, but teachers and administrators as well as they strive to do the most good for the greatest number of children in need.

I aspired to make my presence seen as a partnership with the organization and involved participants in as many of the research steps as was feasible without compromising the integrity of the critical analysis. Positioning myself as a collaborator rather than an outsider aided me in approaching the facility as more of a public setting. Spicker (2011) posits that "public actions can be publicly observed" and that "more than not being wrong, it is ethically desirable . . .. Where a function is public, researchers can legitimately put themselves in the place of service users, 'mystery shoppers' or citizens" (p. 124). "Research in a democracy," says Spicker "has an important public function, which is to scrutinize social processes and to bring people to account" (p. 124). While my intentions are not necessarily to "bring people to account," Spicker's intention is justifiable. The organization purposefully seeks out families "in the most need of service," and therefore, is in a constant self-evaluation, re-evaluation process scrutinizing how best to achieve meeting those needs. A collaborative partnership approach helped inform both me as well as the organization and did not disrupt the ongoing operation of the organization.

Scholars of qualitative research argue that in order to ensure credibility and rigor, a researcher must rely on standards of practice and that "these standards of practice for judging the integrity and value of qualitative studies (truth, value, rigor, and usefulness) are important considerations when designing and conducting a study" (Rossman & Rallis, 2012, p. 65). For many, these "standards of practice" rely heavily on formal interview settings. Alvesson (2003) posits, however, that:

> An interview is a social situation and that which is said is far too context-dependent to be seen as a mirror of what goes on outside this specific situation—in the mind of the interviewee or in the organization "out there". Interviewees

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speak in accordance with norms of talk and interaction in a social situation. The research interview is thus better viewed as the scene for a social interaction rather than a simple tool for collection of "data". (p. 169)

Alvesson argues that ethnographies, and especially his concept of self-ethnography, is an advantageous alternative because it allows the researcher to observe "naturally occurring events" which "avoid—or, more usually reduce—the researcher's dependence of the accounts of respondents" (p. 172). Furthermore, Alvesson (1996) encourages researchers to engage within bounded times and spaces, especially those in which one is already familiar, for he contends, "To work with a situation or a process bounded in time and space, and thus possible to grasp, gives the researcher energy and mindpower to illuminate it from different angles" (p.172). Much of my interviews were conducted as conversations over coffee or tea during which I was a participant as much as a researcher.

**Data Collection**

The total data collection period lasted four months. All but two participants were interviewed twice. The first interview was somewhat formal, but all subsequent interviews were structured according to what had been previously discussed. Participants and I typically met at a coffee shop and, even the more formally structured interviews, unfolded like back-and-forth conversations rather than question and answer sessions. I scheduled second interviews no sooner than two weeks after the first in order to give participants time to soak in their follow-up thoughts. I also conducted four observations during that same time period as described below.

**Participants.**

Participants in this study included faculty, staff, and administrators of the organization. I did not conduct any behavioral observations on the children themselves or

seek data from their parents. However, I did observe two classrooms with two different teachers and shadow a family advocate at one facility with multiple classrooms. All of these classrooms served children aging in range from 9mos to 5yrs. I actively interacted with the children during these times while also observing the teachers and family advocate. My focus was on the ways in which individuals employed by the organization conceived of, and acted upon conceptions of, equality.

An initial letter was sent out by the organization's CEO to all faculty and staff describing the nature of the project and requesting interested participants (see Appendix A). I sought 12-15 participants with representative presence across various staff levels of the organization and ended up with fourteen. The target participant sampling of 12-15 enabled me to reach a point of data saturation, especially considering there were multiple points of entry into the data collection process. All participants were asked to sign an informed consent form prior to any data collection, and I've assigned all of the participants pseudonyms to protect their identities as well as changed the name of the organization.

**Initial interviews.**

I conducted semi-formal, recorded interviews (using a Smartpen[5]) with all participants upon our first meeting (see Appendix B). In the initial letter sent out to participants, as well as on the consent form, I asked for between 30-45 minutes of their time. The first few interviews I conducted lasted closer to the thirty minutes. However, as I became more comfortable with conducting the interviews, and I believe, as a result of

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[5] A Smartpen is an electronic device that captures and records for later playback everything you write, hear, or say. This allows you to interact with your participant and feel relaxed that you can always go back and listen to the recording.

being able to scaffold questions upon previously garnered knowledge, the later interviews lasted closer to 45-50 minutes. I intentionally left out all equality-laden language in the initial interviews. I allowed any mention of fairness to emerge of the participants' own accord.

The reasoning behind withholding my own use of equality language was two-fold. The first was the awareness that participants may develop what Alvesson (2003) describes as interviewee assumptions. He posits that:

> Even if the interviewer does not espouse his or her stand on the subject matter or even the research interests—thus deviating from the ideal of "an honest, sound, and reliable" interview expressed in the quote above[6]—a interviewee develops an assumption of what the researcher is up to and this assumption frames the responses. (p.170)

I didn't want my participants to try to give me what I was looking for. On numerous occasions, I heard participants end their conversations with me by saying something very similar to "I hope you got what you were looking for" which reassured me I had probably made the right decision in withholding my intentions.

Secondly, a funny thing occurred in my initial meeting with the organization CEO. As I was explaining to her why I hoped to do my research at the organization, I did in fact reveal to her my ideas about fairness, and her response caught me off guard. She said, "The only four-letter 'F' word I tell my employees not to use with me is the word fair." My interpretation of what she meant by this statement and my evaluation of its significance is given in Chapters Four and Five.

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[6] The quote Alvesson was referring to is a statement by Fontana and Frey (1994) encouraging researchers to hold more authentically "real" conversations with "give and take": "This makes the interview more honest, morally sound and reliable" . . . . (p.371).

**Follow up interviews.**

Each follow up interview was much more natural than the first had been (I also recorded these interviews). I thought the follow up interviews would be shorter than the first given that I'd felt as though each initial interview covered a great deal of ground. What I found and was surprised by was the fact that all participants were a lot more relaxed and enthusiastic during our second meeting. It was evident that most participants had held some conversation with others in the organization about their experience of participation which seemed to fuel the energy of the follow up interview. I always opened with the same question, "Have you given any thought to the things we talked about last time?" and in almost all cases, this was enough to get things rolling. Most participants said they had or shared with me the fact that they'd had some conversation with others about the topics we'd discussed. The follow up interviews resulted in a great deal more humor and a few unexpected tears. It wasn't until this second round of interviews that I realized just how the research process does in fact touch the lives of the participants.

**Observations.**

In my initial planning of the research process, I had thought I would conduct more observations than I would interviews. However, because the data collection period fell primarily between June and July, the year-round teacher participants were already on summer break. I managed to get one year-round Head Start teacher participant, Ms. Tammy. I conducted an initial interview with her prior to observing her classroom.

The following week, I observed Ms. Regina's classroom which was one of the organization's Early Head Start classrooms (Ms. Regina is a year-round EA). I spent two mornings with Ms. Regina and her fellow EA. The lead teacher for this classroom was on

leave, so Ms. Regina assumed the lead role, and a substitute teacher was sent to act as the third required staff member.

My final observation participant was Ms. Stacy, one of the organization's Family Advocates. Her job is to visit each family in her caseload and travel to each school in her roster to interact with the children's families as they drop off and pick up the children. I visited one facility on Ms. Stacy's route which was a partner facility that housed regular preschool, Head Start, and Early Head Start combined classrooms. At this facility, I observed her interactions for a total of three hours. I acted as an adult visitor in these scenarios and freely interacted with the children, jotting down field notes as I went. I did not use a recorder in these scenarios.

**About the organization.**

All participants are currently teachers or staff members of a single organization that is a self-described partnership comprised of three core programs:  the Colorado Preschool Program, Head Start, and Early Head Start. The organization has close to 400 employees and serves close to 2000 children and their families (however, this year the organization suffered from the government sequester and lost approximately 142 Head Start slots). I've chosen to give the organization the pseudonym, the Central Colorado Early Learning Partnership (CCELP).

The organization estimates that close to 13,000 children in their immediate county are living in poverty. In addition to early education, the organization also offers their families health, dental, and family support—all at no cost. However, there is an application process, as they cannot accept all families who are in need of their services.

Most programs are offered to households with limited income and families must submit

financial documentation in the application process. However, legal status of the families

is not a factor in the screening process.

**Data Analysis**

After each interview, I returned to my computer to upload the audio file. Once

uploaded, I sent a copy to my Evernote account and listened to it in its entirety. Evernote

allowed me to at this point jot down field notes and begin to identify preliminary

emergent themes. At this stage of the process, I looked back on Eisner's (1998)

description of thematics wherein he explains:

> The formation of themes within an educational criticism means identifying
> the recurring messages that pervade the situation about which the critic writes.
> Themes are the dominant features of the situation or person, those qualities of
> place, person, or object that define or describe identity. In a sense, a theme is like
> a pervasive quality. Pervasive qualities tend to permeate and unify situations and
> objects. Although a painting usually has only one pervasive quality, classrooms
> and schools may have many. A qualitative study of a classroom, teacher, or
> school can yield multiple themes. These themes are distillations of what has been
> encountered. In a sense, they provide a summary of the essential features. They
> also provide clues or cues to the perceptions of other situations like the situation
> from which the themes were extracted. (p.104)

In particular, I listened carefully for any of the contradictions I'd earlier identified in the

literature: standardization, differentiation, modifications and/or accommodations.

Once all data had been collected, uploaded, and annotated, I looked back at any of

those places where I'd earlier identified potential themes. At this point, I cross-examined

the data with my research questions and began to organize it into categories (which I later

called Domains—see Figure 1) that I thought helped answer my initial three research

questions: 1) How do theorists and/or practitioners of accountability measures conceive

of the idea of fairness and equality? 2) How do accountability measures direct the

Figure 1. Organization of Data into Domains

| Administrative/Research/ Policy Domain | Supervisory Domain |
|---|---|
| Nadine & Sharon, Literature | Jessica & Kathleen |

| Teacher Domain | Observational Domain |
|---|---|
| Carmen, Lucille, Sunny, Annie & Helen | Tammy, Regina, Stacy |

| Support Staff Domain |
|---|
| Amy & Katjanna |
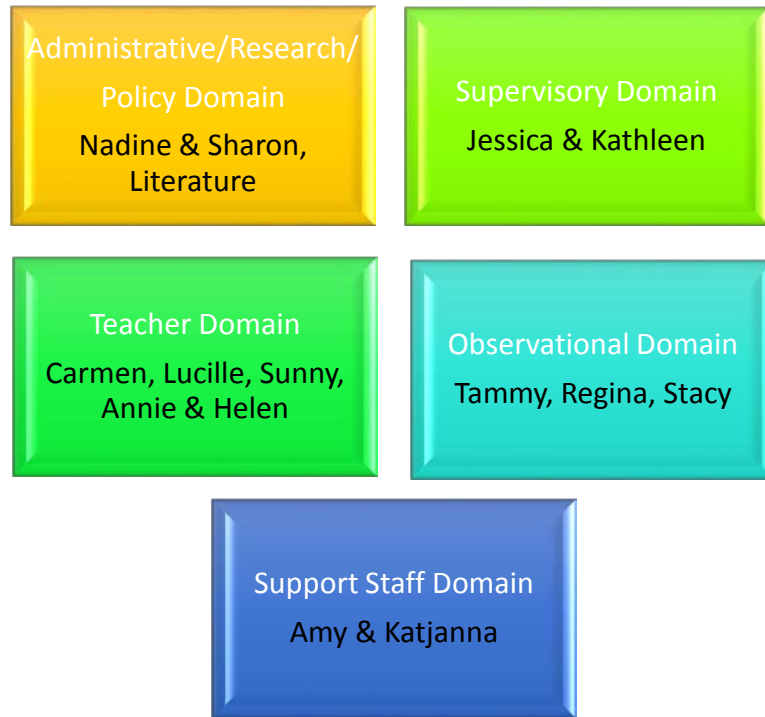
*Figure 1.* Each participant narrative was organized into a Domain.

pedagogical approaches undertaken within the early education organization selected for

this study? and 3) What is the educational outcome of the way differing theories of

equality sometimes collide (or fail to collide) within classrooms? (see Figures 12 & 13).

I discovered one theme that I hadn't anticipated: Individual vs. Collective, and

split my interview data and observational data into two separate domains. Not every

theme was reflected in every Domain; however, I did not toss any themes that only

showed up in one Domain, nor did I toss any that could only answer one question.

Instead, my intention was to a.) collectively answer the first three questions, and b.) to

genuinely tell as complete as possible the storied lives of my participants. In my last step,

I attempted to answer my fourth and final question: What are the potential implications of

contradictory perceptions of equality on the American public education system? This

question aims to generalize the implications of the data.

Figure 2. Organization of Domains According to Research Questions

- RQ1

- RQ2

Administative/
Research/
Policy
Domains

Supervisory &
Teacher

Domains

Observational
& Support Staff

Reflection Upon
All Domains &
Return to
Theoretical

Framework

- RQ3

- RQ4

*Figure 2.* Three domains answering first three questions. Final question is
collective analysis of previous Domains.

Figure 3. Themes  located in each domain.

| Administrative/ Researcher/ Policy Domain | Supervisory Domain | Teacher Domain | Observational Domain |
|---|---|---|---|
| Individual vs. Collective | Differentiation vs. Widely Held Expectations | Individual vs. Collective | Differentiation vs. Widely Held Expectations |
| Poverty and Lack of Education | Importance of Teacher | Poverty and Lack of Education | Language & Citizenship Barriers |
| Differentiation vs. Widely Held Expectations | | Language & Citizenship Barriers | Poverty and Lack of Education |
| Importance of Teacher | | Differentiation vs. Widely Held Expectations | Individual vs. Collective |
| Language & Citizenship Barriers | | Social/Emotional / Behavioral/Special Needs Factor | **Support Staff Domain** |
| Social/Emotional/ Behavioral/Special Needs Factor | | Neglect & Abuse of Those Most Vulnerable | Poverty and Lack of Education |
| | | Importance of Teacher | Importance of Teacher |

*Figure 3.* Five domains with a total of seven unique themes.

## Limitations of the Study

As with any study, there are some obvious limitations to the study. First, I focus my study on one organization, and although there are bound to be some similarities to other Head Start, Colorado Preschool Program, and Early Head Start classrooms in the state or even the country, this study does not seek to make blanket generalizations about

all such organizations. The culture of the organization may be a direct influence on the participants' experiences.

Secondly, all participants are women. I did not intend to seek out only female participants; however, it became obvious rather quickly that CCELP is mostly made up of women. There is only one male classroom teacher (a 10 mo. teacher who was already on vacation when I began data collection) in the entire organization. He never responded to my invitation to participate.

And finally, thirteen of the fourteen participants can be described as White. Although I did not explicitly ask them for their cultural backgrounds or ethnicities, it became an item for some consideration because I began to notice that many of CCELP's educational assistants where dual-language (Spanish/English) speakers, but the majority of lead teachers were not. This led me to begin taking note of outward characteristics of ethnicity thinking that it may have influenced their experiences within the organization. It would be interesting to conduct a similar research study in a location that is comprised of more diversity.

CHAPTER FOUR

DESCRIPTIONS & INTERPRETATIONS OF EQUALITY IN THE LIVES OF

EDUCATORS

———————————

*A woman is like a tea bag—*

*You can't tell how strong she is*

*until you put her in hot water.*

—Eleanor Roosevelt

I have always loved this quote. It used to hang alongside the copy machine in the

English Department of the first university I worked for. I like it because of its ambiguity.

It could mean "hot water" as in trouble, or it could mean put to the test. I think it rings

true either way, but what calls to me with regard to this study is the fact that each of my

fourteen research participants is a woman. Combined, these beautifully strong individuals

have 187 years of experience working in early education, and an inspiring 166 years of

that experience working exclusively for CCELP.

In this chapter, I will be moving as fluidly as possible between techniques of

educational criticism (specifically the arts-based delivery of description and

interpretation), the descriptive and evaluative movements of critical discourse analysis,

and the reflections of a researcher in the process of researching—my self-ethnographic

liberties described in previous chapters. The data is organized into five domains mirroring a top-down hierarchy: a.) administration/researchers/policy domain b.) supervisory domain, c.) teacher domain, d.) observational domain, and e.) support staff.

I met one of my participants, Lucille (10mo teacher), two and a half years ago. I had just made the decision to begin homeschooling my eight year old daughter, Isabella, and was looking for an organization that would allow us to do some service learning as part of our curriculum. I came across the volunteer pages for CCELP and was happy to see they allowed children to volunteer if accompanied by a parent. Most places I looked at required all volunteers to be at least fourteen years of age. We underwent volunteer training and were placed with Lucille as classroom volunteers.

Isabella and I came once a week to read to the children during their circle time and to interact with them during part of their centers time. We came to love the children and to feel a welcomed part of the classroom thanks to Lucille's good nature. She encouraged Isabella to not only read to the children individually in the library center, but to get up the nerve to take on the circle time reading as well. In the beginning, I read to the children or Isabella and I would pair read, but it took until the end of the first year before Isabella found the courage to read aloud on her own to the whole group—and in front of not only me but three other adults: Lucille and her two Educational Assistants (EAs). I felt indebted to Lucille for not only opening her classroom to us, but for becoming another supportive, caring adult in Isabella's life. Once Isabella got up the nerve, she began choosing the books ahead of time at home and practiced reading them aloud so she wouldn't stumble over any words. The following school year, we asked for

Lucille's classroom again, and this extended relationship proved to be the defining reason

I chose CCELP as the research organization.

## Top Down

*How do theorists and/or practitioners of accountability measures conceive of the idea of*

*fairness and equality?*

**Table 1  Organizational Chart of Participants**

| Ms. Nadine Michaels, Chief Executive Officer | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ms. Sharon Milke, Chief Operating Officer | | | | |
| Ms. Jessica, Classroom Supervisor | | Ms. Kathleen, Classroom Supervisor | | |
| Ms. Lucille, Classroom Teacher | Ms. Tammy, Classroom Teacher | Ms. Sunny, Classroom Teacher | Ms. Helen, Classroom Teacher | Ms. Carmen, Classroom Teacher |
| Ms. Regina Educational Assistant | | Ms. Annie, Educational Assistant | Support Staff | |
| | | | Ms. Katjanna, Nurse | |
| | | | Ms. Stacy, Family Advocate | |
| | | | Ms. Amy, Teacher Mentor/Coach | |

Administration is split into two buildings side by side. One houses the offices of the organization's top administrators and one of the Head Start classes; the other houses the support staff such as the nurses and teacher supervisors. I pull into the parking lot feeling slightly nervous. I've met with Ms. Nadine Michaels (CEO) once before when I approached her to ask about conducting the study within the organization—and at that time, I felt as though I'd offended her by mentioning the word "fair." I had a list of questions ready and had dressed the part of a graduate researcher—bold black and white print, my hardbound notebook, a Smartpen and heels.

Figure 4. The Most Vulnerable Families



*Figure 4*. Broken home. Toys strewn. Articles hang on porch rails. Unstable.

The Admin sits directly across from one of the poorest neighborhoods in the city, and I can't help but take a mental picture of the chain link fences holding back the broken plastic yard toys of families presumably making due, attempting to give their children a quality childhood in the midst of their circumstance. I feel energized—hoping research such as this tells more of the story than hits the Section B columns of the daily news feeds.

**Ms. Nadine Michaels, CEO**

A relatively short woman with graying, tightly cropped, hair and black-rimmed glasses, Ms. Michaels could easily be on the cover of a "powerful women over fifty" magazine. She has been with CCELP for 22 years, and became the CEO in 2002. She took the job after having been the interim CEO when the previous CEO died suddenly from an inoperable brain tumor. She said the loss affected her, and the organization as a whole, in unexpected ways:

> One of the ways that [the loss of the previous CEO] has really impacted my
> approach here is that, I try, as much as possible, to make sure that the
> operation of this organization is not dependent upon me or any one person here,
> so we talk a lot about making sure that you have a succession plan, not only
> within your own department, but within, obviously, the organization itself, and
> really understanding that, you know, life has to go on for all of the employees and
> the children and families we serve no matter what happens to any of us, so I'm
> very cognizant of that.

Throughout our time together, Nadine consistently returned to this idea of "the children and families we serve" which says a great deal about her belief in the mission of CCELP as an organization designed to serve the community's needs and not the other way around. I sensed that she expected the same conceptualization of responsibility from all those within the organization, and had little patience for those who did not.

For example, in 2009, CCELP decided to re-structure the leadership model of CCLEP. Prior to that, the organization had a senior management team that consisted of five of the top administrators which led to frustration within the organization because

program directors, in particular, felt they had very little voice in the decision making process. Now that they've moved to a 10-12 member leadership council which includes program directors, responsibility is shared. Nadine explained that the fact that others in the organization were feeling as though they had little control over the decision making process was enough reason to reorganize the operational structure:

> As long as that's their perception, then that's reality. I really felt like there was too much opportunity, although most people avoided it, to take the victim approach. To just say that "That's not really what I wanted," or "I told [the Chief Operating Officer] what I wanted, but she was overruled" . . . . They're now actively participating in the decision making process, and therefore*, must take responsibility for the outcome.*

The reorganization of leadership is now more democratic with many voices at the table being heard from the nursing department to the transportation and IT departments. Nadine points out, however, that there are some drawbacks to this inclusion of multiple voices:

> One of the biggest struggles for me . . . is I work for the Board of Directors and everyone else works for me, either directly or indirectly, and [7]. . . when you have to make really tough decisions—on behalf of the organization, like most recently when we had to decide what we were going to do as a result of sequestration[8], one

---

of the things that I struggle with sometimes . . . I'm ultimately responsible for the staff piece of the organization, so that there are times that I want—it's very hard for me not to be—extremely directive, and just say, you know I've spent the last two weeks lying in bed thinking about this, and this is what we're going to do; versus, I've spent the last two weeks lying in bed thinking about this. I have some ideas, but I bet you've probably been lying in bed thinking about this too, so what are *we* going to do?

This struggle between what needs to be done on behalf of the organization and the wants of the many members of CCELP is even more complex than at first glance. Not only is Nadine responsible for all the staff, but as a non-profit organization, she reports to a Board of Directors made up of community members who have an interest in the organization. Although there is a review process when applying, the Board of Directors may or may not have any direct experience with Head Start or with early childhood education in general. If that doesn't complicate things enough, because CCELP receives federal and state funding sources, she also has to report to a federal regional office as well as adhere to all state policies. To mitigate the burden of having to keep an eye on all facets affecting CCLEP, here again, there is a division of labor. Nadine chooses to focus her attention primarily on the community and surrounding region while her Chief Operating Officer, Ms. Sharon Milke, is involved in all the state and national level board activities.

**Democratic Chief**

Four-letter F-word, fair
Structuring

70

big pictures, so the operation is

not dependent

upon me or any one

person. Children

and families

we serve. The most

vulnerable. We might have two,

three kids in a classroom

whose situations are just that—

situational. But, what

about the rest? Lying

in bed at night,

tough decisions to be

made. What are we

going to do? No victim

approach.

Some may have

a problem—it comes down

to trust. Those who frustrate

me the most,

are those

who can't

put aside their own

differences and focus

on kids. I just

don't

Figure 5. Nadine, Chief Executive Officer



*Figure 5.* Bold—
colors. Vie
for emphasis. Pushed
outer edges.

get that. When you just
can't

do it any more, there needs be
this culture of support. Everyone
paints a picture.

Mine is a bright yellow flower—
sitting atop that
        backdrop of red.


And so, I return to the Eleanor Roosevelt quote. It takes strength to steep successfully in hot water. Nadine wavers and negotiates the weight of individual empowerment against the organizational mission. She actively involves multiple voices and has managed to restructure all facets of the organization from the leadership council to the executive board in order to do just that, involve more voices. This gives her the leverage she needs to be able to say, "We all have a say, and we are, therefore each one of us, ultimately responsible." But this also complicates her commitment to the mission of the organization which is first and foremost in her mind—serving children and families in most need of their services.

### Division of Labor, If You Will

**Ms. Sharon Milke, COO**

CCELP's Chief Operating Officer, Ms. Sharon Milke, handles much of the program side of the operation while Nadine manages the majority of the business aspects. In this capacity, Sharon's primary role at CCELP is to monitor the data which includes

child development outcomes, community engagement analyses, internal self-assessment progress, etc., and to use that data, with the help of the leadership team, to make decisions according to what the data indicates. She is also responsible for keeping herself knowledgeable about the federal Head Start performance standards. She provides direct supervision to the program departments throughout the organization which include Child Development, Health and Nutrition, and Family Services.

Sharon began her career with a Bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education and has worked in both non-profit and for-profit childcare facilities. She has been with CCELP for fifteen years. My first interview with Sharon was my twelfth interview overall. By this time, I had become familiar with the inner workings of the organizational structure, so our conversation tended to lean more toward the decision-making she alluded to. I met her at her office, and right away, I noticed a homey feel. Instead of the large conference table typical of most administrator offices, Sharon has a small cottage-style dinette pushed up against the inner window. She offered me coffee and we sat alongside one another sipping our morning brew as though we were in a café somewhere.

After the pleasantries and a little background history about her personally, I moved us to the decisions I'd heard discussed by teacher participants. Many teachers feel stressed by top down pressure and believe there is a disconnect between what administration thinks is best and what actually transpires in the classroom. Given Sharon's prior experience as an early childhood educator herself, I was interested to hear her perspective. I asked if she ever has an opportunity to visit the classrooms. Her response reflects an acknowledgement that doing so can be invaluable for administrators:

Not as often as I'd like . . . it's . . . it's a double edged sword. This past

fall I actually made a commitment, and I took the Family Services Director and

Health and Nutrition Director with me, and we went every Friday, and we hit a

bunch of classrooms—and then our paying jobs kind of took over and so it fell

off our schedules and we never got back into the routine. So we've re-committed

to doing it again this year.

Sharon said she believes "it's a double-edged sword" because she doesn't "want [their

visits] to be a supervisory thing." In most cases, she believes they were welcomed into

those classrooms, but lack of doing it often can naturally lead to teachers feeling like,

"Uh-oh, now what did I do?"

Sharon's understanding of how her presence might be taken demonstrates a

cognizance of the distance between the teachers and the administrators. However, relying

upon her experience of having been a preschool teacher herself, Sharon tries to help her

teacher-supervisors understand the negotiations that go on each day in their classrooms:

As a former direct teacher, that's—I've had to—you know, give that up,

obviously, and then when I was a center director, I still had this real tight

relationship with families. But since I came to CCELP, I haven't—it's—

there's a physical disconnect as well. But where' I've kinda evolved to is that

my—my passion is, supporting the people who do the work and making sure that

they have the tools they need—and one of those tools . . . is to work within a

framework where you can say, "Yeah—we're not going to get to the lesson

plan today." If you have a child who shows up hungry, you feed 'em. We have

food in the classroom.

What the overall goal for me is, that the kids have a positive experience, and  the teachers, and when I say teachers, I mean everybody in the classroom, understand that they have the flexibility—that they're not gonna be—somebody's not going to come in with a clipboard and a checklist and say, "You know . . . that kid's still sitting at the table eating. What's up with that?" And so, that's sorta where my framework is. From—I'm—far enough removed, but that I can try to influence the people who are supervising those people by talking it through and trying  to make sure that we don't have a disconnect.   And that I'm not sending mixed messages because I'm also saying . . . "You know, childhood outcomes, come on, how we doing, here?" And so . . .  we have to make sure that there's a conversation that can be had.

I was curious to see if that kind of flexibility where teachers can say, "We're not going to get to the lesson plan today" was built into the childhood outcome frameworks themselves. Do clipboards and checklists not exist? Sharon's understanding that life takes precedence is reassuring—but as I spoke with the individual teachers, I heard more of a disconnect than perhaps Sharon realizes. Many of the teachers whom I spoke with thought there was an intense pressure to get paperwork done—and that paperwork is pregnant with checkboxes.

**Teacher Meets Successful Professional**

> Double-edged sword
> the supervisor, former
> direct teacher. No one
>
> is going in,

clipboard in hand—
When children are
hungry, feed 'em—
my passion
is supporting people doing
the work. What's important
   is kids
have a positive
 experience
Mixed messages
I'm also saying—


You know, childhood
outcomes,
come on, how are we

doing here? There
needs a conversation
   had.

Figure 6. Sharon, Chief Operating

Officer



*Figure 6*. Business suits
at dinette. Coffee talk
balance mixed
messages between friends.

**P. a . p. e. r. w. o. r.  k.**

On page *one* of the *Positive Outcomes* document, issued by the Administration for

Children and Families (2010) under the direction of the U.S. Department of Health and

Human Services (HHS), all Head Start programs are clearly informed that:

> Head Start children, 3-5 years old, are expected to progress in all areas of child
> development and early learning outlined by the Framework. Head Start programs
> also are expected to develop and implement a program that ensures such progress
> is made. (p.1)

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The words "expected to" appear in each of the two sentences above. Figures 7,8,9, and 10 provide a brief snapshot of the range of similar imperative language used by HHS. The Framework is comprehensive, with 11 Domains and 37 Domain Elements that each program is "required to choose assessment instruments" (Administration for Children and Families, 2010, p.4) for measuring and reporting data against. Figure 11 illustrates the full Framework as it appears in the Positive Outcomes document (full-size view is also included in Appendix D).

| Figure 7. HS Performance Standards | Figure 8. HS Performance Standards |
|---|---|
| Head Start grantees.<br>*Response:* HHS has the authority to establish requirements for the scope and design of Early Head Start programs under section 645A(b)(12) of the Act and to establish requirements for the time, manner, and content of applications under section 645A(d) of the Act. ACF believes that requiring Early Head Start grantees that are not providing high-quality, comprehensive services to compete for further funding is necessary to assure that all children receive high-quality services under the program.<br><br>*Figure 7.* From page 70013 of the original document. | However, ACF does not believe that any of the systems proposed could be implemented in a fair, consistent and reliable manner within the parameters of the Act. We continue to believe the system for designation renewal proposed in the NPRM, with the adaptations made in this final rule, provides a fair, transparent and evidence-based approach for determining whether Head Start and Early Head Start agencies are delivering high-quality and comprehensive programs that meet the educational, health, nutritional, and social needs of the children and families they serve and meet program and financial management requirements and standards<br><br>*Figure 8.* From page 70013 of the original document. |
| Figure 9. HS Performance Standards | Figure 10. HS Child Development and Early Learning Framework. |
| eighth criterion. Most significantly, with respect to the third criterion at § 1307.3(c), the final rule provides that, in addition to grantees that will be required to compete based on CLASS: Pre-K scores below minimum quality thresholds, those grantees reviewed by ACF in the same year that score in the lowest decile in any of the three domains of the Classroom Assessment Scoring System: Pre-K (CLASS: Pre-K) will also be required to compete. Taken together, these changes ensure rigorous competition in the Head Start program<br><br>*Figure 9.* From page 70011 of the original document. | The early childhood field has changed dramatically. The population of children served by Head Start and other early childhood programs continues to grow more diverse. New research has improved our understanding of school readiness, and the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007 has increased the Framework's role in Head Start programs. In addition, almost every state now has early learning standards. Also, new reporting systems have emerged at the state level and through the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) within the U.S. Department of Education. The Framework is revised in light of these realities.<br><br>*Figure 10.* From Yvette Fuentes's introductory letter. |

Given the fact that, as Nadine (CEO) puts it, "[CCELP] is out in the community, finding *the* most vulnerable children and families—that's [their] *mission . . .*," 37 Domain Elements is a pretty tall order. The elements cover everything from social/emotional behavior to early academic knowledge and skill development (see Figure 10). Given the nature of the documents—performance *standards* and outcome *frameworks*—it might be safe to assume that they are clear and direct in their use of language, but here too there is some ambiguity. CCELP is a federal to local program and reports ther Head Start and Early Head Start performance standards to the state's federal

Figure 11. Childhood Development and Early Learning Framework
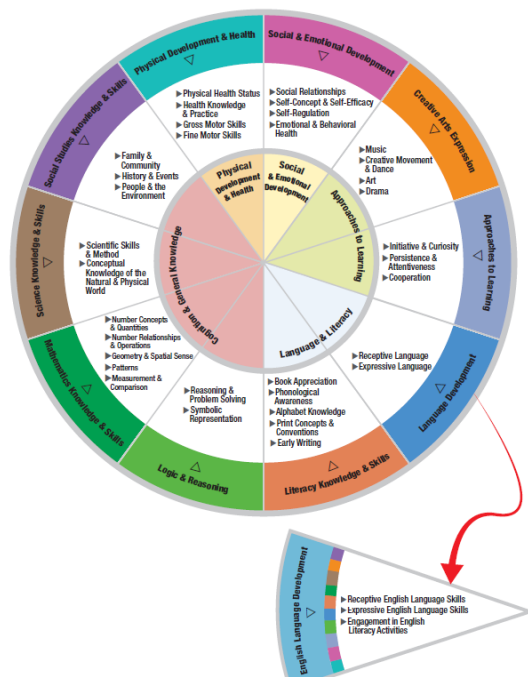


*Figure 11.* Department of Health and Human Services, *The Childhood Development and Early Learning Framework.*

Additionally, the organization also operates under the guidelines of the state's Preschool

Program. CCELP chose to default to the most rigorous of the three—the National Head

Start guidelines. In the 2013 *National Head Start Association Policy Agenda,* the

following acknowledgements are made:

> 1. Physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development occurs at a different pace in each child and from child to child.
> 2. The circumstances into which children are born and their families' capacity and resources for raising them also vary widely. Poverty and its many accompanying risks – including homelessness, special needs, family depression, and exposure to violence – require interventions that may not be needed by all children. Many poor families are employed or in training and need support in order to remain employed. Families' needs and expectations vary widely. (Nat'l. HS Assoc., p.1)

Both the above items include valuable understanding regarding the individual needs of

children. The question remaining is, how is an assessment, designed to report a program's

progress in all areas of the framework, supposed to measure and make allowances for

different paces and different children when the same policy creators are simultaneously

sending the message that, "While Head Start is a locally-designed, community-based

program, it is able to remain a high quality intervention across the nation because of the

rigorous set of performance standards that programs are expected to meet" (NHSA, 2013,

p.6)?

Local programs such as CCELP are "expected to meet" these standards or will

find themselves in jeopardy of having to compete for funding. In every competition, there

are losers. Programs that do not "win" their funding suffer greatly. According to section

§1307.3 of the Head Start Performance Standards (2009), the "Basis for determining

whether a Head Start agency will be subject to an open competition," is as follows. The

agency under consideration must:

> Align with the Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework, State early learning guidelines, and the requirements and expectations of the schools, to the extent that they apply to the ages of children, birth to five, participating in the program and at a minimum address the domains of language and literacy development, cognition and general knowledge, approaches toward learning, physical well-being and motor development, and social and emotional development. (p. 70030)

According to the above language, this alignment is based upon age development assumptions. Although Head Start does not align their framework outcomes to a single specified list of tasks, some child development specialists, such as those working for the National Network for Childcare (2002) mark four year olds as being able to recognize letters, potentially print their own names, count objects, and correctly identify both shapes and colors (n.p.). This ambiguity and tension between rigor and individualized pacing makes the job of evaluators extremely difficult.

**Fieldtrip to the Forest**

I've been a professional educator for fifteen years, but truthfully, although I can't add it to my vitae, I've been one for as long as I can remember. I have a sister five years younger than I, and I vividly recall the little schoolroom I created in our basement for the sole purpose of teaching her and her neighborhood friends. My grandparents indulged me and purchased a classroom desk and an old slate chalkboard when they came across them at an auction. The feel of the chalk as it gave way to the solidity of black coolness was more than a hobby—it was an addiction. I remember the cold touch of metal from the underpart of the desk against my bare, most-of-the time skinned up, knees, and the creak of the wood top when I lifted it to bury my dreams and wishes scribbled onto faded, loose leaf.

I am fortunate in that, during my time as a professional educator, I had the unique opportunity to be my oldest daughter's language arts teacher in both her seventh and eighth grade years. Most people groan when they hear that—"Bet that was awful." But it wasn't, and not just from my viewpoint. It was a valuable time in both our lives. I wanted to give her and her classmates that love of education that I've always carried.

And, when it came time for my youngest daughter to start school, I was as excited as she was. I reveled in the opportunity to, once again, stroll the school supply isles helping her select her special objects—the notebook that screams, "Write in me!" and the lunchbox that says, "Yes, this carefully chosen belonging symbolizes the character of the girl who carries me." That's why I personally found it so devastating when my then first grader said she "didn't really like school—kinda boring." I volunteered in the classroom two days a week and allowed myself to be designated "room parent," suddenly in charge of organizing all class parties. I figured, at least she'd see me there—see my enthusiasm for learning. There wasn't much I could do. She was right in assessing her time there as boring. The majority of her day was spent filling in blanks and waiting on others to fill theirs. The children weren't even allowed to attempt cutting out their own shapes for the few crafts I was witness to—to manage class time more efficiently, the shapes were all cut ahead of time so all the children had to do was glue them together and color. The educator in me just lamented—what are we doing? How did we get here? And this poem was written:

I.
Aspens grew gold, we shouted—beauty!
They shot back—
death. Scoured the ground

81

for corpses, disturbing only

magpies in a private wake,

but where our steps fell louder,

than these *tap-tap* strokes, with  tendency

to bleed, the raucous applause

which follows, far too well

rejoined. A mother with her child,

exercising maxim—explore,

but leave no trace. The forest phantoms

dally, *hushed* this token nod.


II.

Policymakers try out

newly cut stamps. But in a falling-

off-hinges studio, halfway across

town—every town,

an artist molds

his own. Out of clay, he'll carve

the statue of a man. To this the ancient

concept tribute. The only walls that hold,


are those so rudely

hewn from tools less tangent.


III.

I was a girl of the woods.

My forts still hold.


IV.

Schoolrooms in September.

Figure 12. Mother & Child

*Figure 12*. Experience. Nature. Lessons. Over hill strewn needles.

Rubrics, set baselines,

to the victor find

all spoils. Mill levy affluence

our dirty secrets, and in the urban

failures, our hearts not weep.

We are all united,

they platform, a greatest

       race.


Belittle those

below the mark. Take

pensions, bus offspring to districts

unfamiliar. Steal the recess, rob

the lunches. At any lengths—

proficient.  Old oak and maples scream

now silent for getting lost

like Rabbit in thick mist.


V.

Believing in divine, we tarry

on this bark-shed edge of  green

meets end. Toward mountains,

over streams, a lesson there

all strewn. Arithmetic in leaf vines.

A chorus, the wind through hollowed trees.

Write with feathers, bind

with twine, the sprites in playful

       yield.

A mother with her child—

a leaden gift.



VI.

I am full today

with binded prayers

      worth breaking.



**The Work of the Evaluator**

*How do accountability measures direct the pedagogical approach undertaken within*

*classrooms?*

**Ms. Jessica & Ms. Kathleen, Supervisors**

As discussed in the previous section, all HS organizations are "required to choose

assessment instruments" (U.S. Dept. of Health and Human, 2010, p.4) for measuring both

performance standards and childhood outcomes. At the highest level of organizational

assessment, CCELP uses the same monitoring tool to assess overall performance as the

Office of Head Start (OHS), the Classroom Assessment Scoring System, (CLASS: Pre-

K), and have been for the past three years. Sharon (COO) said that while they are not

required to use CLASS, "it does inform practice and professional development." CLASS

is "an observation instrument that assesses the quality of teacher-child interactions in

center-based preschool classrooms" (Office of Head Start, 2013, n.p.). However, this tool

is used to observe the organizational performance as a whole and not used to assess

individual teacher interactions. Therefore, in addition to CLASS, CCELP also utilizes the

Pyramid Plus: The Colorado Center for Social Emotional Competence and Inclusion as

well as the Teaching Strategies GOLD Objectives for Development and Learning: Birth Through Kindergarten. Next year, CCELP will also adopt a new Creative Curriculum which will further align with the GOLD assessment tool.

Supervisors at CCELP typically are assigned between 7-10 classrooms and conduct observations within each twice a month. Two participants in this study, Ms. Jessica and Ms. Kathleen, hold the role of supervisor. Both Jessica as well as Kathleen said they felt that the many objectives teachers were asked to meet were extensive.

> Jessica:   I am all for all of the standards, the education standards.  That is really important, and having a firm foundation for understanding what is developmentally appropriate. Understanding childhood growth and development. That's a main component. You get people who say "Oh, I like to take care of kids," but it's more than taking care of kids . . .. That's why I like the Creative Curriculum—we've got those objectives. So you can formally assess, and it's not just all based on opinion, but it's objective. You need teachers that are willing to [utilize the curriculum and assess according to the guidelines] because it takes a lot of work and time.

For Jessica, the consistency that comes with standardization is reassuring. It helps bring order and objectivity so that, "it's not just based upon a teacher's whim." The Creative Curriculum is a curriculum created by *Teaching Strategies*. The program maps out all activity categories in a project-based fashion and was chosen by CCELP to replace their previous curriculum which was used in conjunction with five to six different curriculums. Kathleen too expressed her concern about the time and work being asked of teachers:

85

Kathleen: Even just fitting it on paper—number one, is one thing. It's like, "All this is supposed to happen in a week?" and then thinking about how that logistically can happen in the classroom . . .. It's pretty crazy making. It's like, "Oh, my goodness, when are they going to get this all done and be able to  meet individual needs of the children in the classroom?" . . .  It's a lot. It's a lot.

"And be able to meet the individual needs of the children." This statement by Kathleen points to a conceptual belief that individual needs are second to, or often in conflict with, the larger demands placed upon teachers. In the role of supervisor, Jessica and Kathleen not only observe and provide one-on-one support to teachers, but they also assist in planning for those individual needs of children and families:

Kathleen: We do these meetings called student/family reviews, and they are about four hours long every six weeks. It's a big chunk of where I spent my time last year. And, we talk about the family needs. This is when the whole team comes and we decide what the appropriate goals are. Sometimes it can be really heavy, the information that's shared. Sometimes I will just feel very drained when I go home, so I've just had to find ways to separate those two—when I'm on and when I'm off . . . but, it's hard because teachers can call us at any time. A lot of times I'm talking to a teacher at 9:30 at night, and then the phone's ringing at 5:30. There's just stuff that has to be dealt with —so it is kind of a great balancing act.

We really are looking at the GOLD assessment tool and we're seeing—the purpose of the meeting is to develop goals for the children to make sure that they're within their widely held expectations, so we look at the report and

anywhere they're not, then we make plans as to how to individualize what we're

doing in the classroom to get them within their widely held expectation—or as

close to as we can.

As evident by the above excerpt of our interview, Kathleen's focus as a supervisor is in

addressing individual needs against "widely held expectations." She feels the burden of

availability and the length of time and information shared during those four hour review

meetings are draining but worth the effort so that individual families and children end up

with clearly established plans for meeting widely held expectations—as closely as is

possible any way.

In my initial interview with Jessica, however, Jessica's focus was on the widely

held expectations more so than the individualized needs of the families and children

themselves. She clearly advocated the need for consistency in the standards so that each

child was assured a quality educational experience while attending Head Start. However,

by my second interview with Jessica, the two supervisors had almost completely changed

their focuses.

I was unable to secure a second interview with Kathleen. She had become very

busy with the rollout of the new curriculum. Rather than simply adopting the curriculum

and asking teachers to work from it to build their lesson plans, Kathleen was given the

task, with the help of a few other colleagues, of creating daily lesson plans for the

teachers to follow. This minute planning struck a chord with Jessica:

Jessica: I believe in the CCELP mission—I love my job as a supervisor—but I

don't—I believe that there needs to be a better curriculum that provides quality,

but I don't agree with the other supervisors—with what they're doing. And I'm

like the only one. Because they're planning everything. Teachers won't have to do

lesson plans next year. Everything is planned out for them—even scripted circles,

and I am so far against that because it doesn't provide any creativity for the

teacher—for what she went to school for. I don't think it's going to meet the

specific needs of children. And the reason they're doing this is because basically

they want quality across every classroom—and I understand that, but it's also a

federal review year, so they want to meet the grant. Understandable, but I don't

agree with writing the teachers' lesson plans. . . . It does not need to be every

teacher doing the exact same thing in an exact way.

I end this excerpt with Jessica on the words "exact same thing in an exact way" which is

the way Jessica interpreted her fellow supervisors' actions to mean that scripting every

teacher's daily lesson plan would provide "quality across every classroom." She admitted

that she was "very frustrated" because, when she says she understands, it can be assumed

that she *does* understand the reasoning behind standardized assessment and holding

teachers to quality objectives. Based upon our initial interview, this standardization, and

what it potentially represents, is a core value for Jessica, but as supervisors began

implementing this standardization, it led to a belief that the way to assure such quality is

to hand teachers pre-scripted lesson plans. Jessica also mentions that she does not believe

that it will allow teachers to exercise the skills they went to school for. She herself holds

a Masters in Instructional Leadership and Academic Curricula with an emphasis on

Emotionally Disturbed Children. She began her teaching career as a Special Education

teacher for kindergarteners in 1994, and she came to CCELP in 2001 as a preschool teacher herself, so she is very familiar with this duality from both a teaching and a supervising perspective.

**At Our Core**

Judging what you don't
believe in. The individual
needs of students,  their families—
met. With quality—A—
sure standards create lessons
planned, and scripted to remove
the whims of teachers. Not just
their opinions, whatever
they want. I just don't believe

in that. Fitting it just on paper—
it's crazy
making. A lot.
It's—A—
lot.
Federal.
        Review.

**Awarding Best**

As I listened to Jessica's and Kathleen's stories, I reflected back on my own teaching career. I too struggled with the idea of individual vs. widely held expectations. In my classroom, I used to hang a carefully hand-painted sign that read: In this classroom FAIR does not mean everyone gets the same, but rather, everyone gets what he or she

needs to learn best. I didn't come up with the phrase. It was one I heard while at a conference on differentiated classroom practices. But I believed in it—wholeheartedly. The problem was, each year, eighth grade teachers were asked to award one student in their discipline the Curriculum Award. It was meant to honor the "best" student in each discipline, but every year it turned into an all-out war amongst faculty because we could never agree upon a common definition of what constituted best.

Case in point: My last year at that school, it was a toss-up between two students. Both of them had earned 'A's. Both of them enjoyed English and writing. One of them was a natural. She consistently put out exemplary work, and she did really enjoy the discipline. However, the second student was not a natural. He had to work extremely hard to achieve similar marks to his counterpart.

I was torn. The naturally-gifted student rarely took risks. If there was choice involved in an assignment, she always chose to complete the task she felt was easiest for her. I wasn't convinced that she had taken full advantage of the opportunity to "learn best" according to her own needs and talents. The not-so-naturally talented student often took risks—sometimes resulting in having to ask for extended time to complete a project, but the end result was hard earned and just as exceptional. Looking strictly at percentages, the natural had a 98% while the not-so-natural had just barely earned a 97%. Who do you reward? The risk-taking hard worker or the play-it-safe natural?

I wanted to reward both of them, but my colleagues argued with me. They said things such as, "You wouldn't lower the basketball net for someone would you?" My response was, "No, but what if he built himself a scaffold in order to reach it—and did?" Then the issue of firefighters came up. One of my colleagues said there are some things

that must happen upon merit alone—like becoming a firefighter. The requirements of the

job demand a certain level of strength and endurance, and no matter how much

enthusiasm and effort someone puts forth in trying to pass that test, the fact remains that

in order to ensure public safety, we have to hold firm to the standards. But this was not an

issue of public safety. This particular year was the worst, but the discussions amongst us

occurred every year.

I think about the speeches President Obama has made to young people regarding

education. On September 14, 2013, he told them:

> But here is what I came to Masterman to tell you: nobody gets to write your
> destiny but you. Your future is in your hands. Your life is what you make of it.
> And nothing – absolutely nothing – is beyond your reach. So long as you're
> willing to dream big. So long as you're willing to work hard. So long as you're
> willing to stay focused on your education. (n.p.)

I want to believe those words as much as President Obama does—and I've heard myself

deliver similar words of encouragement to students and to my own children, but they're

not entirely true, are they? Individual needs are just that—individual. Yes, each one of us

is talented in some way—but not *all* ways. Peter Alheit (2009) explores the danger of this

unchecked belief:

> . . . the impression [is] that we hold our own lives in our own hands . . . this
> impression could be exceptionally problematic, and not only because fate could
> deal us a blow at any time, making us irrecoverably ill or unemployed, or making
> us lose a loved one or all that we possess. The point is rather that our supposed
> autonomy of action and autonomous planning is subordinated to *'processual
> structures'* in our biography that we can influence to only a very marginal extent. .
> . .What is important is the finding that our basic feeling—that we can act
> relatively independently over our own biographies—does not necessarily conflict
> with the fact that the greater part of our biographical activities are either fixed to a
> large degree or require various 'supporters' to initiate them. (p.123. emphasis in
> original)

In other words, Alheit (2009) further explains, while we may be able to choose new paths as they become available to us, "In our biographies, we do not possess all conceivable opportunities, but within the framework of the limits we are structurally set, we still have considerable scope open to us" (p. 125). Would it be valuable to help students understand that they may not be able to do "anything they set their minds to," but rather that within any given structure there are some opportunities that can be taken advantage of? In job scenarios, in athletic endeavors, in relationships—we cannot do and say *anything* we choose, but there are still a myriad of choices available to us within those set structures.

Let's quickly sum up here. Jessica and Kathleen (supervisors) were both confronted with a conflict of core values. Both of them believe that a.) individual needs of children and their families must be attended to, and b.) the widely held expectations of childhood outcomes should be measured by a standard tool that eliminates subjectivity. It was the method of achieving these goals that came into conflict—the *"processural structures"* they each had at their disposal in order to achieve their autonomous planning. Kathleen had at her disposal the opportunity to create lesson plans for teachers believing that if she scripted the intentions of teachers for them, CCELP could better guarantee the positive results they seek. On the other hand, Jessica felt that each individual teacher also has a unique biographicity that needs acknowledgement, and therefore, there should be flexibility for teachers to plan lessons according to both the individual needs of the students within their unique classrooms and to the teacher's unique creative and individual talents as well.

In my own conflict, I couldn't decide if the individual needs and talents of the students ought to be a weighted factor in my evaluation of their merit or if the widely

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held expectation of the award itself as an "English Curriculum Award" should take precedence. Did I believe the sign I hung in my classroom? I was confident the not-so-naturally talented student was the one who had "learned best." It's hard to learn if you're only willing to do what you already know how to do well. I had to simultaneously judge two core values against one another and determine which I believed in more ardently. Did I want to reward the autonomy of a student who chooses to take risks, sometimes resulting in a lower mark, or did I want to reward a high-achieving student who routinely turned in what I believed she saw as the safest way to achieve a high (best) mark? Does a 98% always beat a 97%, hands-down?  What is the definition of *best* in this scenario?

I was not unique in my dilemma. Many teachers find themselves negotiating what best to do in what particular situation—and what they do in situation A may not be what they decide to do in situation B. It comes with the job. The teachers I spoke with and observed in this study were in constant negotiation mode—compounded greatly by the population they serve.

**A Teacher's Call**

**Level Playing Fields**
She readies
the day, centers stocked
and circle time
books chosen. The force—
preschool wills, pre-
tempered with love and time
enough for artful caring.

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They move in her
like the stories her grandmother
told her—gone now.

This moment
a tension, a fissure,
and a trace—a sign bleeding
back red to the absence
of language. How this moment of
recap emancipates, as though
the call to DHS happened
years ago. Hidden,

children in too much need,
and then there are
the parents—the way they curse
circumstance and sober pain
with drink. She hears their mimicked tones
of outrage in offspring,
bandages wounds like care
packages sent home
       raffles never entered.

At night, she closes
her eyes and the breathing
stillness of a tomorrow, gathered—
a tiny respite of chapels
too long abandoned,

Lost and wandering, this,

our common desert. Circling,

she is renewed—

readied eternal for the steady

       gaze greeting,

diminutive eyes lodged

           in diminutive faces,

             they peer.


**Ms. Lucille, 10mo. Classroom Teacher**

Lucille has been an early childhood educator since 1984, and has spent the last seventeen years of that time with CCELP. As a volunteer with CCELP, I've had the privilege of observing her classroom in action. Lucille is the kind of teacher who isn't afraid to sit on the floor with the children. Whenever I followed her lead, my legs would go to sleep, and the involuntary groan would come out of me as I attempted to stand—but Lucille didn't seem phased in the least. She moved around the room as though the navigation was innate. Sometimes she had to be at her computer or calling a parent on the phone. Other times she was sitting at the practically doll-sized furniture directing children at play, "Where do you think this goes? What color is that, Joshua?—Oh, we have to play nice with our friends." At circle time, someone would inevitably end up crying, and she'd have him or her on her lap while also reading to the group—and did I mention, while on the floor? As a volunteer, I never collected formal data, and so I was excited when Lucille volunteered for the study. The first thing I asked her is how she thought the year went:

I think the year went pretty good. We had challenges, obviously, with some of the children. The behaviors and things, and that's what we find is more difficult. The

expectations, and stuff, are fine for the typical—typical, behavior children, but when you have the ones that have the behavior issues—for whatever the reason, if it's not getting attention at home or, you know—that kind of throws in another curve to the day.

Both years I visited Lucille's classroom, I had the opportunity to witness first-hand these "curves to her day." On one occasion, a child purposely hit her with a book. He probably did not intend to actually hurt her, but the blow, even though dealt by a three-year-old, ended with a small cut above the bridge of Lucille's nose. The corner caught her just right. It wasn't the first time she suffered this kind of battle wound, however. Five years ago, she had a child actually break her nose. I asked her how she managed to find the patience to deal with those kinds of behavior issues for the past seventeen years.

It depends on your outlook and your perspective. . . . Someone I worked with at the time [my nose was broken] called that evening. Wanted to make sure I was okay, and I said "I'm fine. It wasn't his fault." And he said, "I knew you would say that." But it really wasn't. He was living in a household—counting himself, it would have been . . . with five other generations of people. Where he had to follow all the rules . . . different generations do things differently. His great-grandpa was like, "Oh—cool. He broke the teacher's nose!" So, that's not his fault. It's the environment he lives in.

Lucille said this perspective comes in part from the home visits all HS teachers conduct. "The home visits are meant to build a relationship with the family" she explained. Some parents are very receptive to the visits while others make it obvious that they consider them an intrusion. She says the home visits give insight into why some of the children

behave the way they do. For those without table manners, for instance, she might gain perspective when she realizes the family doesn't own a kitchen table—they may be eating on the floor or in front of the television. For Lucille, these home visit perspectives help her build individualization into the day:

> What [CCELP is] trying to do [with the curriculum] is they're trying to streamline it so it's easier for us because it does take a lot of time, but my approach is the way it's supposed to be is that you're individualizing. But to come up with thirty-three separate activities every week for each child is a little hard to do, and I don't know if anybody actually can accommodate that. So what I try to do is group them into small group activities. . . . There's nothing wrong with them all experiencing the same things, just at different levels. . . .You have to know your kids and where they're at. Developmentally. Cognitively—and socially.

This ability of Lucille's to individualize for her students has become intuitive. She "just knows" how to accommodate the different needs of the children in her classroom:

> And, I try to . . . I treat everybody the same. All the kids. Whether they're the challenging kids or they're not . . . I try not to have favorites, and I want everyone to be successful. . . . I do. I try to have patience for every one of them.

However, she said the intuition is hard earned and more training, especially for new teachers and the educational assistants, would be helpful—especially when it comes to children with special needs:

> It's unfortunate, that it happens. But some days you're like, "All we do is chase around [a special needs child]." So, was I successful that day? Maybe for [that child] but maybe not for the rest. So when we have the special needs kids that we

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do, sometimes it seems like that's a lot of our focus, is getting them to be

successful, and some of the other kids sort of fall through the cracks,

unfortunately. Because we can have up to five special needs kids in each class.

. . . But they range from basic minor speech articulation to Autism, so there's a

wide range of what those special needs are.

Lucille confided that this struggle often occurs while trying to meet the overall objectives

she's supposed to track for each child. CCELP teachers are required to turn in quarterly

reports on all children within their classrooms—these are the same reports Kathleen

(supervisor) referenced in her interview, the ones that take four hours to review. Lucille

said there are as many as seventy objectives that the teachers are supposed to track. This

record keeping, in addition to the various curriculum requirements can become

overwhelming. Lucille is hopeful that the new curriculum will help alleviate some of the

stress she feels:

We have too many curriculums. We have Fire Safety. We have Safe Touches.

We have the Food Friends. And then on top of that, we have the regular

curriculum—the educational aspect. It would be really nice if it were all

streamlined into one thing.

. . . I feel like it's just too overwhelming—for the kids. And you don't get that

time to teach. Some days that's how I feel . . .because I'm handling kitchen

things, and I'm handling transportation issues, and I'm handling parent issues.

. . . We have too many roles—the nurse. It's all part of our day. Some days it

would be nice just to—*teach*.

In this study, I tried to focus only on what Lucille told me directly and not rely too heavily on what I previously knew about her as a teacher. Focusing just on the language used in the interview process, Lucille yearns for a more unified approach to the curriculum and performance standards she's supposed to keep at the forefront. At the same time, Lucille believes "how it's supposed to be" is that teachers should be individualizing their approaches to children's needs, at least for the smallest groups possible.

I, therefore, interpret her statement that she tries to treat every child the same to mean she attempts to treat them the same by knowing who they each are individually and by attempting to meet their individual needs with that knowledge in mind. This is what causes her to feel as though having to default focus to the one child with the *most* needs robs the other children in her care of that same level of attention, resulting in them, in her words, "falling between the cracks."

Nadine and Sharon (CEO & COO) are both cognizant of the many stress factors present upon teachers. They both mentioned the support network available to teachers to help alleviate some of these demand:

> Nadine: We try as much as possible to create a culture of support for one another. . . . I think it's an incredibly difficult job. . . . We really try to wrap a whole team around children and families. You've got a teacher. You've got two [Educational Assistants (EAs)] .You have a [Family Advocate]. You have a nurse. You have a Behavioral Health person. You have a Transportation Tech. You have Special Needs Therapists. You have all of these people that are wrapping themselves around these children and families. So, if you as a teacher, take it all on your

shoulders, then you're going to be much more susceptible to burnout . . . but if

you're able to see yourself as one very important part of a team, then you feel

confident that when you just can't do it anymore, then you can talk to your EA

and say, I'm just really struggling right now.

Most of the teachers I interviewed cited the support staff as invaluable to the work that

they do, though many of them mentioned that there just isn't enough support staff

individuals. Much like Kathleen and Jessica (supervisors), each support staff member has

a caseload of children who are spread out across multiple facilities, which means the

teacher will not always have a behavioral health person or Special Needs Therapist at her

disposal. This leaves the lead teacher primarily in charge of all that does and does not get

accomplished in her classroom. This push/pull negotiation between individual needs and

global needs turned out to be the most significant theme that emerged.

**Ms. Carmen, 10mo. Classroom Teacher**

Carmen was the only self-identified Latina in the study. According to Sharon

(COO), the lack of qualified Spanish speaking teachers in CCELP is a significant issue:

The vast majority of our teachers are Caucasian[9]. . . . but we typically mirror the

children, and our minority [population is] . . . still very small[10]. . . . That's not the

typical data in a Head Start program. We're still probably 70% Caucasian. . . .but

we struggle mightily to get bilingual staff. . . . What we wanna do is have people

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[9] Because this is a direct quote, I chose to include the word Caucasian, but it is not a term I endorse to mean White or European.

[10] According to the 2012 US Census data, the county where CCELP resides, reports a White alone percentage standing at 84.1%. The highest minoritized population is 15.6% Hispanic or Latino.

in the classroom, somebody on the teaching team . . . that speaks each child's

home language—which would be English or Spanish in most cases. It's difficult.

It's incredibly difficult.

Carmen has worked for CCELP for sixteen years in nine different schools. She worked

her way up from Classroom Aide and was, at that time, primarily responsible for cleaning

the classroom. The job paid between $6.00 and $7.00 per hour. This last year,

Carmen worked at a site that was considered to have some of the lowest income families

being served:

I have never, in the sixteen years I've been with CCELP, been around children

and families that are in *so* much need. This is a group that needs to be in Head

Start, that needs that beginning at the age of three. First because you have to

conquer a lot of Spanish. At first it wasn't that high, but then towards the middle

of the year, it was maybe 75% of the kids spoke Spanish—or the parents just

spoke Spanish. So first you have to conquer the language and then move them

over to English, and you need a good year to give them that foundation, and then

move them on to the curriculum.

Carmen's ability to speak with children and families in their native tongue makes her

invaluable to the organization. She shared a story with me of a time when she was

working at a different CCELP facility. A little boy, Santino, who spoke only Spanish,

was moved into her classroom from a different school. They moved him, she said,

primarily because he was hitting and biting other children:

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So they brought him over to me, and so the kids said, "He's hitting and biting us."

So I sat the kids in circle time, and all my kids spoke English except for him. And

I read a story in Spanish, and so the kids were looking at me, and looking around.

They said, "Ms. Carmen, you're not reading in English." I said, "I'm reading in

Spanish." Well—the little boy's name was Santino—he was like, focused—like,

"Wow," you know. And I said, "How did you guys feel?" and so they told me,

"We felt lost—we didn't know what you were saying." And I said, "Well, that's

how Tino feels every day." After that, the little boy stopped hitting and biting

them because they started playing more with him and trying to understand his

language. So what I do is, I do my curriculum according to what the children need

in the classroom. It's not always the same every year which is why I love my job.

Not every day is the same with the kids.

Carmen helped her students find compassion for Santino by taking time out of the usual

routine to read a story in Spanish. For most of the children, the story was lost on them,

but the lesson still carried. Carmen feels confident there is room in the curriculum to

attend to these spur of the moment needs. According to the Pyramid Plus Model that

CCELP uses in all their classrooms, all HS teachers are supposed to design their classes

in a way that fosters inclusion:

> The Colorado Center for Social Emotional Competence and Inclusion
> endorses the joint position of the Division for Early Childhood (EC) and the
> National Association for Education of Young Children (NAEY) national
> definition of inclusion as "the values, policies, and practices that support the right
> of every infant and young child and his or her family, regardless of ability, to
> participate in a broad range of activities and contexts as full members of families,
> communities, and society."(n.d.)

This occurrence with Santino happened more than a year ago while Carmen was working in a different school, but he is not unique in his struggle. This year, Carmen said her home visits with families were a reality check for her. Many of her families were facing not only language barriers, but poverty, substance abuse, immigration, and prejudice challenges as well. She confided that, although she doesn't consider herself financially wealthy, she lives in a nice home with multiple bedrooms. Her daughter and granddaughter live with her, and she sees how fortunate her own grandchild is compared to the living conditions of some of her students:

> I would go into these apartments. They're in these one bedroom apartments with four or five kids, and one bedroom—one bed, and the living room—some living rooms just have chairs, folding chairs, so they could sit, and some have their dining table in their living room to have enough room to eat. . . . Some were two families in one apartment in one, two bedroom apartment, and I'm telling you, the apartments are like—probably from here to that pole which includes the kitchen, the living room, and the bedrooms. It was just a rude awakening to see how they live. Some of these fathers work under the table, so they're paying them five dollars an hour, so that's why they live like that—but they save money. Like recently, I had a parent tell me . . . they had to get $5,000 together to send to the brother to have him cross the border.

All of the families she worked with this prior year had one or more undocumented adults in the home. CCELP's primary mission is to care for the children—most of whom are born here in the US. The challenges these families face are largely out of the control of the teachers. The only thing the teachers can control is the learning environment while

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the children are within their care. Sometimes, the family circumstances necessarily affect

the learning environment. Carmen's toughest professional challenge occurred a few years

ago. The mother of one of her students was a drug addict and in and out of jail. The father

was trying to raise the kids on his own. When the mother came home from a short term in

jail, she and the father began fighting—resulting in the father beating the mother pretty

badly. The father left town, and the children were placed in foster care. Carmen found out

the foster home the children had been placed in was only ten blocks from the school, so

she took it upon herself to try and plead on her student's behalf so he could return to

school—so he would have some stability in the midst of all the chaos. The foster family

relented and allowed him to return to her class. One day, when it was time to get on the

bus at the end of the day, the boy pleaded with her:

> He was hiding under the table. I said, "You need to get on the bus and go home."
>
> And he said, "No, I don't want to," and he was crying so hard. I said, "Get on the
>
> bus. You can come back to school tomorrow." I picked him up, and he said,
>
> "Please don't Ms. Carmen, don't. Don't put me on the bus. They're not nice." I
>
> said, "Well, think. You have your brothers. You have your sister, you know. Your
>
> baby brother." The little [baby] boy was like only a couple months old. And I
>
> said, "So, you need to get on." And he said, "Ms. Carmen, please take me home
>
> with you. Please, go pick up my brothers and my sisters. I promise you. I promise
>
> you, I'll get up and feed my baby brother. You don't have to get up. It won't be a
>
> lot of work, I'll help you." He was only three years old. And I thought, "Oh my
>
> God. " That was the roughest situation I've been in, and I've reported parents to

[the Department of Human Services (DHS)] and everything, but at that point, I

thought, "Oh, my God. What do I do with this little boy?"

Mother a drug addict—in and out of jail. Father a wife-beater who abandoned them. The

children, now in foster care, changing schools. The one thing the boy had was a caring

adult in his life—Ms. Carmen, but she felt helpless. She knew his situation. She

advocated for him, but there was only so much she could do. Carmen told me she's seen

many kids over the years with many needs, but that she realizes "you can only change so

much." She says she stays because "I believe in [CCELP's] mission." For Carmen, that

mission is helping children, wherever they are, with whatever means at her disposal:

> I like to incorporate science, so I do a lot of science. The math—the games I do, I
>
> do them on my own. Behavioral, I create as I go with that child depending on
>
> what his behavioral needs are. You have to. I mean, you can't—every single
>
> person is a different person. They're not all the same, so you can't use—you can
>
> use a guideline, but you're going to have to sway from it for that child.

Carmen feels she does all she can to help each child who comes to her classroom, but she

knows being a Latina helps her build connections with families who might otherwise be

distrustful and put up barriers to CCELP's assistance. She says she understands what it is

like for some of these families:

> They connect with me because they know my background [is Latino] . . . and
>
> create a stronger bond with me. . . . My ex-husband was military, so that's how
>
> we ended up here. I never in my life experienced—well, I'm from California,
>
> which we lived like five minutes from the border, so everything we did was
>
> across the border. And coming here—we  lived in Germany, and then we came

here—coming here, I . . .ah . . . *the prejudice*. I thought, "Oh, my God." I

remember the first time . . . I was working in a laundromat and the lady told me,

"What are you?" and I said, "Mexican." And so, there was a Latina there, and she

said, "Don't ever say you're a Mexican . . . either you're Black or you're White."

Whether it's fear of deportation or fear of being looked down upon because of the

language barrier—or because of their own prior history with experiences of prejudice, the

families Carmen builds connections with because of this privilege are grateful to her.

She told me many stories during the two times we met about the kindness shown to her in

return for her compassion. I drove home after our initial meeting without a radio on to fill

the silence. Windows open. Heat from the sun. I drove—and I thought. And I fought the

urge to cry. I wanted to cry for Santino and the unnamed boy holding onto a table leg for

security. I wanted to cry for Carmen and the god she kept calling upon. And truthfully, I

wanted to cry for the lost child in me.

**Rear-View Mirror**

My life is full—busy and full. I'm a graduate student completing a dissertation. I

work fulltime one city away from where I live. I'm a mother and a wife. In the evenings,

there's dinner to be made and soccer practice or music lessons to drive a little one to. I

spend my days between the cursors of six or more simultaneously open windows—

available to all family members at the click of a mouse, writing my biggest project yet,

and checking off the work-week inbox of to-do activities.

Most days, I have precious little time as it is—and certainly even less time for

looking back, but the more I sat with these ladies' stories, the more I felt myself glancing

sideways—jumping at the mirage reflecting a different time. A different life.

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At the age of two, my family moved from Pueblo, Colorado to Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin to be near my mother's family. My dad got a job at the local shipyard as a welder. Mom found a job waitressing. At least for a short sliver of time, we could have been considered a comfortably middle-class family, but there was a monster lurking in our midst. By the time I was ten or eleven, I knew it by name, and by the time I was fourteen, we were living like the families Carmen described—four of us in a one bedroom home. My sister and I shared a bed pushed to one side of the living room. I can vividly recall the warm blush of blood rising up my neck and pulsating around my ears every time it was time to go grocery shopping, and I had to stand next to my mother as she ripped, one-by-one, the food stamps granting us our daily bread.

My parents came together after surviving their own separately devastating childhoods, but the one thing I have that they didn't is an education. Without a post-secondary education, it's almost impossible to escape the holds of poverty, prejudice, violence, and substance abuse.

Like the boy hiding under the table telling Carmen he'd feed the baby, I always felt protective of my younger sister. I'm sure many people would question Carmen's story—that a boy of three could have that kind of sense of responsibility, and perhaps she didn't recall the exact exchange of words, but I know too that children forced to do—do. Any documentary about childhood poverty will showcase scenes of remarkable young children cooking, cleaning, caring for siblings. I was no different. Both my parents struggled with alcohol and occasional drug addiction.

One night, friends of my parents had a backyard barbeque. The kids played. The adults played. The children became sleepy. The grownups became belligerent. Suddenly,

my dad is calling to us to get in the car. I know two things—he's angry, and he's drunk. I try to tell him it's not safe to drive which only makes him angrier. As unreasonable as he is, my mother is worse. Her voice is louder than all the rest.

Now we're driving home. It's dark, and the signs are flying by us. There are no seat belts to buckle ourselves in with. I just know we're going to crash—so I tell my younger sister to get way down behind the seats—right on the floor. I lay my body over hers and begin . . . "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us . . .".

**Ms. Sunny, 10mo. Teacher**

"You have to love your job—because you won't get rich." Three minutes after meeting her, this is what Sunny said about her experience at CCELP. Sunny has been with the organization for 21 years. She started as a volunteer in her son's classroom, then began subbing, and eventually earned her Associate's and became a fulltime teacher. When she says she loves her job, you believe her. Sunny's optimism is infectious. I asked her what it was that helped her see things the way she does:

What I love is getting these little children that want to learn so much—and I want them to learn . . . *everything.* The reward is when you have a child that comes in that can't speak or has no self-esteem and feels bad about themselves, and you help them become—you know, be able to speak and communicate—stand up for their rights. Watching them learn is what's so rewarding. And you know what? My kids feel safe there and secure. And knowing that they love to come. They're not, "I don't want to go to school." They can hardly wait, and the parents are like, *huh*? Every day of the week [they] ask, "Are we going to Ms. Sunny's class? Ms.

Sunny's class?" Plus watching my parents grow. A lot of my parents have become

like part of the teaching staff.

Like many of the teachers I spoke with, and the countless others I have known throughout

my life, the term 'my' is a term of endearment for Sunny. *My* kids. *My* parents. It's a term

of care and also of responsibility. When a child becomes *your* child, you take on a caring

and protective role over him or her. In this excerpt, Sunny also uses the phrase "stand up

for their rights." Assumptions are built into the phrase—first, that all people, even the

very young, have such a thing as "rights." And secondly, that they are worth standing up

for. This is why teaching in general can be a double-edged sword. Like Carmen (teacher),

Sunny has dealt with her own share of *rough challenges*:

> Oh—when you see abuse, neglect. The children tell you what their dad has done
>
> to them or somebody in their family life. That sticks with you—because you want
>
> to protect them. And, you give them the words to . . . help them . . . through that.
>
> Just being there listening to them, and helping them know that they're safe there.
>
> But, it's that part—and not knowing what's gonna happen to them once they
>
> leave my classroom. That's what sticks with you.

For Sunny, it's the not knowing that is the most difficult. As a Mandatory Reporting

agency, all CCELP staff are required by law to report suspicions of neglect or abuse. It is

often difficult to distinguish between poverty and neglect. CCELP staff are trained and

retrained on how to recognize and distinguish the many layers of complexity they

encounter, but at the end of the day, they are encouraged to err on the side of caution.

Every teacher I spoke with has had to call DHS at least once during their careers. Once

the call is made, however, and made out of pure love and care for the child in question—

the outcome is often having to live with the not knowing:

> Recently, I had one little boy who was telling me—his mom had left him, okay?
>
> Right around Christmas time. And his dad's a military daddy. And, we were
>
> doing the Touch program—Safe Touches. And we were talking, and he was
>
> telling me his dad kicks him and beats him 'til he's down, and then kicks him in
>
> his—balls. His words, not mine. And I . . . pulled the child aside, and I . . .
>
> talked to him, and he repeated it again and again. And this child—I know he's
>
> telling the truth. So I called DHS, and when I called back, the guy was never in.
>
> I'd leave my name and my message, and he'd never call me back. To say how it's
>
> going. And I had to leave that child—at the end of the year. . . . I just pray.

When Sunny said part of what she loves about her job is that her kids feel safe and secure

in her classroom, it seemed rather random, that that would be one of the things she loved,

but listening to how much she cares and worries about those children it began to come

together. Giving children "the words" and the courage to "stand up for their rights" takes

on a whole new level of meaning. Sunny worries about those who can't communicate

their abuse—especially those with special needs.

In addition to the Framework Outcomes already mentioned, special needs

considerations emerged as another important theme running throughout the context of the

teacher narratives. CCELP attempts to limit the amount of students in each class with

Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) to five. However, Sunny explained, a couple of

years ago, the social landscape surrounding those five looked very different than it does

today:

They're just getting more severe. They're just getting more severe—every year it gets worse. And I mean—I don't mean by speech and motor, I mean by . . . violent behaviors to other children. You know, [if it's toward] me? I don't care, but you don't hurt my other kids. And I see *a lot* of that lately in the last few years. It's increasing. And I know they're learning some these behaviors from home. And here you go again, they can't communicate. And it's usually the ones that cannot communicate.

Her concern in this excerpt is that the children may be witnessing or experiencing violence at home, but without the self-esteem or the language to communicate that, it results in mimicked behavior which sometimes intensifies the needs in the classroom as a whole:

I had one of my little guys transferred—he was Autistic—from my classroom to another classroom because he was not benefitting because of another child that I had that had such behavioral issues. It was like they fed off each other. And neither one was progressing where they should have been because they would look—find each other, and then literally go at it. So, the one that was Autistic, he went on to a classroom that specializes in that which was *wonderful.* And now he's using two-word sentences. And he's grown *so much,* and I'm *so* glad. I pushed the mommy. She didn't want me to—she wanted [him to stay with] me because I'd already had her one daughter, and she made so much progress, but I said, "This is going to benefit *this child.* He's going to get things that I could not give him."

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Sunny believes relying on the support staff Nadine (CEO) mentions is vital in these circumstances. She praised the expertise and the support from her supervisor and the Special Needs Therapist. And yet, even with all these caring adults wrapping themselves around their children and families, the pressure on teachers to meet the required demands of the job are still ever pressing:

> Deadlines . . . getting everybody involved . . . getting the paperwork back from the parents. . . . We're doing School Readiness—that has to be signed. Body Safety has to be signed. . . . Finding—the time—to do [the GOLD assessment observations], and now [administration] is saying we can do it during class time, but you want to interact with your kids. It's just—so—time—consuming . . . .
> And it's like they question you on everything:
>
> > "Why did you mark this child here?"
> >
> > "Because that's where that child's at—you know, maybe they regressed. They might have been sick." You know?
> >
> > "Well, they were at this point last time."
> >
> > "Well, you know what? They're not at that point anymore. Something might have happened in their home-life."
> >
> > And we see the difference—if the father leaves, being deployed or whatever? We see those children go backwards for a while—regress. A lot of things can make a difference. It's just—the paperwork is unbelievable.

Teachers keep records of each child's social/emotional/physical/cognitive progress through the methods previously mentioned—Pyramid Plus and Teaching Strategies GOLD. The Pyramid Plus Model is designed with the purpose of inclusion of all children

regardless of ability or behavior challenges in mind. The goals advocate for "high fidelity intervention" practices that result in enhanced social, emotional and behavioral competency of the children "rather than remed[iation of] children, families, and personnel" (The Colorado Center, n.d., p.6). Theories and practices used in combination rely heavily upon "evidence based practices" that lead to "tiered approaches that promote outcomes for all children" (The Colorado Center, n.d., p.7, underlines in original).

Outcomes for *all* children. High fidelity. Enhanced competency. Inclusion. Every one of these words and phrases carry claims of value and of fact messages. The values are that delivery of desired outcomes for all children and delivery of promises are desirable. The factual claims are that there are practices that have been proven to deliver such promises. But there are unstated warrants here too upon which these claims can be made—namely, that fairness and equality are unstated rights that all people are entitled to, and therefore, need no definition or support. Consider the following two statements taken from Pyramid Plus's Policy Brief:

> Early childhood inclusion embodies the values, policies, and practices that support the right of every infant and young child and his or her family, regardless of ability, to participate in a broad range of activities and contexts as full members of families, communities, and society. (DEC/NAEYC cited in Gupta, 2011, p.1).

> Those children who are labeled as engaging in severe challenging behaviors often find themselves subsequently labeled as the "most troubling" children by both primary caregivers and service providers. (Vihn, 2011, p.1).

The first statement clearly states "right of every infant and young child and his or her family"—it's a given right. Rights are understood as givens needing no further explanation. In the second statement the term 'labeled' is stated twice and the words 'most troubling' receive quotation marks—it would be difficult to argue that a child

being "labeled" doesn't carry a negative connotation or that the quotation marks surrounding "most troubling" automatically cause one to think "not right/not fair—i.e., not good.

The second primary model of record keeping used by CCELP is the Teaching Strategies GOLD Assessment. The argument for its use contains the following language:

> Having a process in place for ongoing assessment is essential, as it enables teachers to gather information about each child in order to plan instruction and ensure that every child is making progress. The Creative Curriculum® for Preschool has 38 objectives for children's development and learning that serve as a guide for making the assessment process systematic and meaningful. Each objective contains a color-coded progression of development and learning, which includes indicators and examples based on widely held expectations for children from birth through kindergarten. (Teaching Strategies, 2012, p. 1)

Multiple language indicators in the above passage point to similar common sense triggers as those found in the Pyramid Plus Model. Teachers are told that "ongoing assessment is essential." Again, the reasoning offered is that it "enables teachers to gain information about *each* child . . . to ensure that *every child* is making progress." *Each,* therefore, equals *every.* Teachers are offered 38 objectives—color coded—and reminded once again, that these objectives are accepted by "widely held expectations for children." This last phrase, "widely held expectations" is an appeal to ethos. Teachers do not have to question the objectives being handed to them because they are already proven, evidence-based.

According to Sunny, "the paperwork is unbelievable," and yet, all of the teachers I spoke to strive to meet those conveniently color-coded objectives because they "love their jobs." They love their children. But Lucille, with her broken nose, wishes some days

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she could "just teach." And Carmen calls upon god when she has a child who pleads with her to take him home rather than force him to return to a foster home where they're "not nice."

**Ms. Annie, Year-Round Education Assistant**

Ms. Annie was one of only two participants less than thirty. Young. Beautiful. Compassionate. Ms. Annie has a Bachelor of Science degree in Early Childhood Education. She began her career at various other early childhood facilities, and has been able to use this prior experience to contrast against her experience at CCELP. Annie began as an EA substitute. This opportunity gave her a glimpse into the lives of other teachers. Occasionally, she tagged along on home visits and confirmed the sentiment Lucille (teacher) had shared: "Home visits really motivate compassion." As insightful as they are, however, Annie also felt they were "emotionally draining." Some parents really open up to the teachers on these visits, communicating the financial and/or personal struggles they are facing. Annie said she not only found compassion for the children and families but for the teachers who deal with these interactions on a regular basis: "When you see the environments—I just have so much respect for some of these teachers. You see the environments these kids are living in, and it's hard. Sometimes you think, 'Should I call someone?'—it's emotionally draining." Nadine (CEO) and Sharon (COO) said this ambiguity is something teachers learn to negotiate better after continuous training on how to recognize abuse and/or neglect and distinguish it from circumstances of poverty. Annie spoke of one child who was suffering from severe tooth decay. He needed dental care, but the parents were afraid of anesthesia—"It was almost like neglect, but really it's just that they don't know; they aren't aware."

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Annie is currently a year-round EA in a Stepping Stones classroom. Stepping Stones classrooms are classrooms with fewer students (between six and eight), all of whom are designated as having Significant Support Needs (SSN). Significant support needs can range anywhere from physical needs to behavioral. Again, like the others I spoke with, Annie too openly stated she "loves where [she's] at," and that "it is an honor to work at CCELP." Looking back at her subbing experience, she said she feels bad for those classes with seventeen students: "There are a lot of kids in the larger classes who really need to be in the Stepping Stones classroom—even for a short time." According to Nadine (CEO):

> The origins of the Stepping Stones classrooms came about, about 3 ½ years ago. We had an opportunity through the American Recovery Act funding for Head Start to apply for some additional slots. And one of the things we decided to do was—we were having more and more kiddos with really significant challenging behaviors in our classrooms, and the feeling out of Child Development was that, in order for those children to be successful—as well as to reduce our teacher turnover, that we needed to set up an opportunity for those kiddos to receive additional support outside of a traditional Head Start classroom. The base funding for that program comes from Head Start. The staff-to-child ratio is quite high in the classroom, so it's an extremely expensive model, so we have been very fortunate to have received grants from some foundations who have also supported the classroom.

Nadine (CEO) said that, with regard to who gets placed in the Stepping Stones classroom, children are primarily referred in by teachers in the traditional classrooms. Students

severely withdrawn or severely aggressive are good candidates. CCELP typically does not put children who are on Individual Education Plans (IEPs) in them because those children are already receiving additional support through other means. Nadine (CEO) feels the program has been successful in transitioning severe support needs children back into a mainstream environment:

It's been very successful—the outcomes have been amazing. We've had a lot of support. We have a behavioral health person on staff who does the play therapy for those families. There's connections to community providers for family therapy if that's needed. We've very successfully transitioned kiddos into kindergarten or back into a typical preschool classroom. We've had some that have struggled with that transition—but we make sure we work with the receiving school district and the receiving Kindergarten teacher to know what the triggers are for this kiddo and the strategies that work with the child, and obviously, parents are a huge piece of this. Without alignment between home and preschool there is very little possibility of success—but, if it's perfectly aligned, we have a great— great track record.

Annie sees these amazing transitions first-hand. She believes the individual attention teachers are able to give their students in these classrooms, in addition to all the extra staff support, truly make a difference in the lives of children, and for Annie, being a part of that life-changing is a kind of spiritual journey.

I gave each participant in the study an opportunity to present their feelings and understandings regarding their work in the organization in an alternative way. As

evidenced by the way I've chosen to present material myself, I believe sometimes we can say it best by not directly having to put it into straightforward prose. As Eisner (1998) explains:

> Each type of representation emphasizes and makes accessible particular aspects of content. What we can convey through pictures or diagrams is often difficult or impossible to convey in words, and vice versa. What can be said
> through poetry cannot be said in prose (Langer, 1942; Goodman, 1976; Arnheim 1986). (p.179)

Most of my participants felt they were too unartistic to create something on their own, and chose rather to describe the way they would present it if they had the artistic ability to do so. These visual metaphors helped me greatly in understanding their stories, but Annie was different. She is the only participant to take me up on the offer and actually create. She created a short video using the web-based Animoto service. The service allows individuals to upload photos and short video clips and then write phrases that will appear over the spliced together visuals. Instrumental music is added, and the service creates the transitions for the creator. The result was breathtaking. I wish the research platform was a wiki, and I could embed the video directly in. Instead, I've tried to capture the essence of what she put together with the following vignette. All capitalized words are those written exactly as they appear in Annie's video:

> Big cityscape. Taxis to the left, inching their way along the right. Rows of yellow,
>
> black, and white, moving people from where they were to where they're going,
>
> and between them a horse-drawn carriage. Man in top-hat, he moves forward with
>
> the motion, holding the reigns of a bygone past. I AM INSPIRED BY THE
>
> INDIVIDUALS WHO CARE FOR THE NEEDY. Movement and blur. A camera
>
> shot no longer focused. RELIGION THAT GOD OUR FATHER ACCEPTS AS

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PURE AND FAULTLESS IS THIS: Skyscrapers with pointed aerial tops.

Billboard with the face of a nameless curly-haired child, wide brown-eyed child.

Dirt marked cheek in faded tank. A man in a park below, sets up easel. Sketches

this eye of sorrow. . . . TO LOOK AFTER ORPHANS AND WIDOWS IN

THEIR DISTRESS . . . People caught up in the race against time. Down a

staircase. Flashing by subway children. Mothers in guilt-filled embraces. Fire

trucks and flashing sirens, bicycle wheels turning, and more taxis. All

movement. All rush. PROVERBS 31: 8-9 "SPEAK UP FOR THOSE WHO

CANNOT SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES . . . FOR THE RIGHTS OF ALL

WHO ARE DESTITUTE. SPEAK UP AND JUDGE FAIRLY . . . The calm

of water found within the midst of iron, rust, and steel cables. A bridge issuing in

sunlight. . . . DEFEND THE RIGHTS OF THE POOR AND NEEDY." The artist

in the outdoor studio picks up pace. Inspired. New canvas scene. Children happy.

Cutting ribbon alongside those taller. Suits in power to drape them safe within the

schoolhome boundary of hope in a future. HELPING CHILDREN GROW AND

LEARN IN A SAFE ENVIRONMENT. Birds flying. Toothless faces hanging

out the window of a bus transporting. Smiling. Waving. Warm in hats and

hoodies.   PROVINDING FOR BASIC NEEDS. A child eating. A child brushing.

Toothbrush protruding from healthy white gratitude. Billboards replaced.

GIVING HOPE AND ENCOURAGEMENT TO OUR FUTURE LEADERS.

Play. Planting flowers. Laughter. "ONLY IN HEAVEN WILL WE . . . SEE

HOW MUCH WE OWE TO THE POOR FOR HELPING US TO LOVE GOD

BETTER . . . BECAUSE OF THEM" –MOTHER THERESA. Green lawn, and

the camera rising. Sky through a golden glow of afternoon light.

Looking just at the text Annie chose for the video, her spiritual beliefs are very much tied

to her understanding of equality and fairness. "Speak up for those who cannot speak for

themselves" is reminiscent of Sunny's (teacher) convictions. Couple this message with

"for the rights of all" and "judge fairly." According to this use of language, the rights of

all include basic needs such as food, health, hygiene, and safety as well as the right to an

education. The message is supported by the contrast of visual imagery she chose—

images of destitution and unfairness/inequality are depicted in street and subway scenes.

The faces of the young are transformed into smiling ones when placed against the

backdrop of schooling symbolism: buses, planting a school garden, eating a school lunch

or brushing teeth behind a classroom table. In this respect, schooling becomes more than

the transference of cognitive knowledge. None of the imagery and none of the text used

in the video refers to ABCs and 123s. There were no pictures of textbooks, worksheets,

or rows of children raising their hands to answer a question. That doesn't mean she

doesn't believe helping children ready themselves for school isn't necessary— she said

she strongly believes that "if we skip the academics and the kids who already have

emotional behaviors fall behind, and their self-esteem is lower," then those children will

ultimately suffer more significantly. However, in light of all that her kids, in particular,

have going on, she said that the social/emotional/individualized needs take precedence,

and a set-in-stone curriculum could interfere with a teacher's ability to help her students:

> When you get past your first year of teaching, you should learn how to really
>
> build your curriculum around your students, and when you're handed a

curriculum—it's nice to have, but I believe, in our class especially . . . if a kid's

interested in cars, and I want to use cars to get our GOLD things done, or

whatever that interest is, but the curriculum doesn't leave any flexibility open for

that, it [would] be frustrating. . . . My first year teaching I really needed a lot of

help, and I needed a curriculum.

In this passage, Annie is reconciling within herself the individual vs. standard approach

to curricula. She realizes that new teachers are in a "learn by fire" mode, and a pre-

planned curriculum can provide some much needed stability. However, her values are

more reflective of the individualization (differentiated) pedagogical approach.

**Ms. Helen, 10mo. Teacher**

Ms. Helen shares a great deal in common with Sunny (teacher). Like Sunny, she

too first came to CCELP as a parent. She took her first paid position as a Classroom

Aide, and then worked her way up, all the while increasing her own education. Ms. Helen

has a Bachelor of Arts degree in Early Childhood Education and has been with CCELP

for 20 years now. What's unique about Helen's progression through the various stages of

education and job placement is that she has traveled within a cohort of about five, which

she believes was truly invaluable. They encouraged one another, relied on one another,

and the acquisition of the B.A. is fairly recent. Nadine (CEO) said that once teachers

obtain a bachelor's, it's difficult to keep them with the organization for very long because

they come to realize they could be paid better and receive better benefits if they

transitioned over into a school district. Helen, however, has no intention of leaving:

To be able to work with the children, I think, that's all of our favorite [aspect of

the job]—paperwork is not our favorite. . . . I know a lot of the girls say, "You

know, we'd probably get paid better if we go to the district. We'd get better

benefits." . . . And, I don't know, it's just something special.

She loves working with the children and believes the mission is worth supporting.

However, twice within the first ten minutes, the word "paperwork" was mentioned. When

I asked Ms. Helen what the most difficult part of the job was, she replied:

> I would say, part of the hardest part of the job is—sometimes I don't feel like I get
>
> to give all my attention to the children because we are so overwhelmed with
>
> paperwork. I would say to my girls, "We can do this—we can do this," and they
>
> would  get frustrated because it seems like every department in the organization is
>
> pushing stuff down on the teachers. "You guys are there all the time—you need
>
> to do this" and they don't realize what they're taking away from the classroom as
>
> a whole. I work down in an area that is rough—really rough, and each year, I have
>
> no less than twelve IEPs in the two classrooms together. Between behaviors—and
>
> Autism—and speech—and motor. There's a lot of work there—and it's hard
>
> work.

When Helen says she'd tell her girls, she means her EAs, and the two classrooms

together are the morning Head Start classroom and the afternoon Colorado Preschool

Program. Most of the facilities are organized along this same composition—morning HS

and afternoon CPP. The classrooms typically do not have more than 17 students in each,

and although CCELP attempts to restrict the number of IEPs in each to no more than five,

sometimes the home district of the children's residencies and the teacher's experience

will allow for a little wiggle room. Helen relies partly on her personal experience as a

mother and a sister of special needs individuals, but she thinks more training—especially for new teachers is needed:

> I don't think in our training we were given enough education on that piece. You know, they cover a lot of things, and they tell you how they want to meet those goals for those little guys, but when talking to some of the new people—they're so overwhelmed—they're given—you, know, we get—In twenty years I've been here, I've had three little ones who have really stood out for me—and they were awful, and the first one was a behavior. And before I got him, he had been in four different classrooms. The teachers were all afraid of him. The first thing I said to myself is, "He's only four years old! No four year old is going to make me afraid!" You know, I raised boys—and . . I would, I went home crying every night for two years, wondering, "What in the world can I do different to help this baby?" And I would try everything. . . . Two and a half years—I can remember like it was yesterday—something finally clicked with that little guy. We sat down in the middle of the floor, and he and I cried together because he said, "Ms. Helen? I don't know why I'm doing this." And it's just because he was so angry, and he didn't have the words.  When he'd get angry, I'd help give him the words, and I'd move him where we needed to move to keep everybody safe. It took two and a half years with that little guy, and that same year, I had five behaviors. And my staff *were* afraid of him. . . . If you set the expectation for those children. And you show them consistency, follow through, and that they're still loved no matter if they're naughty—they'll do almost anything for you.

"What in in the world can I do different to help this baby?" asked Helen. She wasn't crying, "Oh, woe is me—why did I get stuck with this kid?" It's difficult for me to imagine that kind of dedication. It's the stuff of movies. Had I had just one participant who said she loved her job, and then followed it with a heart-wrenching depiction of struggle, I might question the validity of the memory, but I had fourteen participants in this study. All of them used words of endearment. Nadine used the word *kiddos*; Carmen said *my kids*; Helen said *little guys* and *baby. . . .* Almost everyone stated she loved her job, and if she didn't directly say it, she alluded to it. They love it because they "believe in the mission." It's a mission for them to help the "most vulnerable children and families." And why? because they believe it helps give children a much needed positive start before entering their subsequent educational settings.

In the example of a child with challenging behavior Helen provided, she said it took two and a half years for "something to click." It's difficult to measure something that spans two and a half years. It's quite possible that, under the weight of all the paperwork that is submitted, these exceptionally inspiring stories might not get communicated. Helen believes that, despite how much she, and the other teachers she knows who work equally hard, try to give themselves to the demands of the job, they end up suffering more for their efforts: "The more IEPs we get handed down to us, the harder it is. I feel—I feel like—there's a couple of us that end up getting all these IEPs." She says that, in comparison, some of the other facilities might have two IEPs in a class when she has twelve. "They say, you know—they know they can send these people to you, and you can handle the parents as well as the children," and as much as that is a compliment to her, she admits, "It does get overwhelming." Helen explained that teachers interact

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with at least six different departments in addition to the parents, and every department has its own demands. The nursing department might be asking for immunization and physical examination records, for instance, so the teacher becomes the primary point of contact with parents in securing those documents:

> They want the children to do a reading program, so the teachers are the ones that have to make sure the calendars go in the box, and hassling the parents at the door every day, "Did you bring your calendar, so we can get a free book?"

Parents also have their own set of demands, asking teachers to make certain this or that gets put into or taken out of the backpack. If a parent of a special needs child applies for Social Security, that's a seven page document the teacher has to fill out on their behalf. "It really gets overwhelming and frustrating." Teachers are paid on salary rather than hourly, so Helen often feels like sometimes it's a 24/7 job:

> In order to get all of our observations up and onto the Teaching Strategies, there's times when I'm going home, my kids are going, "Mom, we're gonna go do this, come with us."
>
> "I can't. I gotta go do this." I feel like I have no family time. I get up at six o'clock on the weekends when my kids are sleeping and sit in front of the computer—for six hours, so that when they get up maybe I can spend a few hours with them. It's overwhelming.

On the latest Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS), which ranks on a 7-point scale, the average CLASS scores for Head Start (this is Head Start in general—not CCELP specifically) the results were as follows:

In FY 2012, the average grantee-level scores received by Head Start programs during CLASS™ reviews were 5.90 in Emotional Support, 5.45 in Classroom Organization, and 2.98 in Instructional Support. Previous large-scale studies of CLASS™ have shown that the average preschool classroom scores are higher in the domains of Emotional Support and Classroom Organization than in the domain of Instructional Support. (Use of CLASS Scoring, p.6)

Grantees of Head Start funding, remember, run the risk of having to compete for remaining funds if they cannot demonstrate high performance. Scores that fall between 3-5 are considered to "show a mix of effective interactions with periods when interactions are not effective or absent." Against these standards, Helen might have been given a score between 3-5 because, for two and a half years, her interactions with one particular child could not demonstrate observable "effectiveness."

Many factors potentially affect what is or isn't observed on these occasional reviews. During this study, I too observed teachers, and I too am drawing conclusions based upon what I saw or did not see while on these visits. What we all must keep in mind, however, is that these observations are only snapshots in a full spectrum of activities that occur over the course of an academic year. Challenging behaviors, or parental demands, or paperwork deadlines—or just fatigue or illness can all leave their mark. Despite this understanding, observation remains one of the most effective means for validating theories. According to Eisner (1998): "In general, the richest vein of information is struck through direct observation of school and classroom life. What people do and say, and how they do and say it, are prime candidates for attention" (p.182).

## Observable Outcomes

*What is the educational outcome of the way differing theories of equality*

*sometimes collide (or fail to collide) within classrooms?*

### Ms. Tammy, Year-Round Teacher

I arrive a few minutes earlier than planned. The children are still eating their morning breakfast. In Head Start classrooms, children are offered both a breakfast and a lunch. This morning, they are eating hard boiled eggs with wheat tortillas and drinking water. The room smells like eggs and children. Ms. Tammy motions me in, and I find a seat near her. She is sitting with a small group of students around a table that comes to her knees.

Ms. Tammy is my other "under thirty" participant. Her style of dress speaks loudly of her youthful approach with the children. There's an air of play negotiating against a layer of toughness. Her hair is parted down the middle, and each side is pinned up with chopsticks. Her black shimmery top signals a femininity that rubs up against her black studded belt and heavy denim capris. I look at her and think, "I bet the kids just love her."

I count fifteen kids, nine of whom are visibly dark-skinned/dark-eyed. Tammy is easily half the age of her two EAs. One little girl at the table tells Ms. Tammy: "My papí has a phone case like Ms. Amanda's." Tammy acknowledges her and then reminds her to finish eating. I hear the names of the children, Lila, Maria, Kayla, Mia, Natalia, Marcus, Roscoe . . .. The teachers respond to all the random thoughts being offered around their tables, "Really? What color was it? Do you remember?" But the children are also being offered lessons:

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You still need to take a bite. When I asked you if you wanted it, you said yes.

It's not fair that I have friends who are asking for more, and they can't have

one when you have a second one now and aren't eating it.

Ten minutes into the observation, the word fair is used. The message is, if you ask for

something, you cannot waste it—especially when others may have wanted it too. It's "not

fair" that everyone did not have an equal opportunity to have an equal share.

Both EAs are speaking to some of the children in a mixture of English and

Spanish. As the children finish, they stand up, in efficient factory line style, push in their

chairs, dump the remaining water out of their cups and throw away the paper plates and

cups.  Mia is called back to the table because she has left a napkin and pieces of tortilla

behind. She finishes cleaning and is given positive affirmation, "Thank you, Mia."

Today there is also a community volunteer in the room. She is sitting on the

center rug with those who have finished eating and need to wait for their friends before

circle time can begin. "Thank you, Samantha. This is the letter 'Q.' Quarter-Q."

Mr. Willis, the Transportation Tech appears at the door. He jokes with Ms. Tammy,

greets some of the children by name and leaves. There are just a few children left at the

tables now. One boy clears his spot, climbs the step-stool to wash his hands and reaches

for the faucet. He stops—looks back at Ms. Tammy and changes his mind. He grabs a

towel from the dispenser next to him and uses it to shut off the water.

It's clear the boy has learned a routine. He may not fully understand the reasoning

behind the established routine, but he demonstrates full cognizance of the expectations of

behavior, and his glance toward Ms. Tammy indicates he does not want to earn her

disapproval or correction.

Once all children have completed the cleaning/washing routine, it is finally time for circle. Ms. Tammy tells the children that today she brought a story from home. She sits in a full-size rocking chair. To get everyone's attention she asks, "If you can hear me, touch your head." The children raise their hands. The songs begin . . . "The more we get together, together . . . the happier will be. There's Mari, and Kali, and Natalie, and Marcus. ." . An aide from an adjoining classroom pokes her head in and asks if Anthony is here today. "No—" Tammy responds, "He's not here. I'll need to call his grandparents again. I spoke with them yesterday . . . " Back to circle time—now it is time for the story. Tammy reads with expression and the children shout out at the proper cues, "NO! It's a bunny!" A boy sits in one of the aide's laps. She rubs his back as he listens. Another boy is up against the wall, and he traces the pattern. He does not appear to be as engaged as the other children. "A Moose! That's silly! Where is he? Why can't he decide what he wants to be?" Ms. Tammy takes the volley. She solicits the engagement of one of her aides, "Ms. Amanda, do you know how to make a moose call?" The story turns out to be a little long for a few of the children. They begin turning their bodies sideways and making facial expressions to one another. Tammy quickly summarizes—another lesson. This time it's about being yourself and not wanting to be like everyone else.

It's time now for the children to spread out and choose an activity center. Tammy informs them that there are new toys in the housekeeping area, but that not everyone can go there at once. They will have to take turns. To decide who gets to choose their activity first, she tells them that whoever is sitting nicely will get to come up and choose a card from her hand. The cards have letters on them. When they choose the card, they have to match the card to the letter on the wall. She tells them the sound the letter makes, and

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asks them to think of something that begins with the same sound. This is a great cognitive

activity. However, with fifteen children, it really tries the patience of those who aren't

called on right away—especially when children struggle to either find the match or come

up with a similar sound. Meanwhile, those left still sitting are watching their peers

already at play—watching them get to the new toys in housekeeping first. Ms. Amanda

begins taking a waiting list of students who would also like to play in the area. She

assures them that, after the timer goes off, it will be their turns next. Disappointed faces

scan the room for their second-best choice. Some choose the play dough table. The table

is set up with the ingredients for making play dough, so the children can witness the

process as it takes place. As soon as Ms. Tammy is finished calling nicely sitting children

to come get a card, she will join this table and begin mixing the ingredients. I wait with

this table of children, and they ask me my name. One girl pets my hair and offers a

compliment, "I like your hair."

"Thank you," I return. "I really like your shoes—those are cool."

"My mom bought them."

Two of the girls converse quietly in Spanish. I can't tell if they are twins or not,

but they are dressed similarly. Ms. Tammy joins us, and she walks the children through

each stage of the process. "What did I do to make the water hot?" She lets them choose a

color, and it is unanimously pink. "Should we put some glitter in?" Oh yes—there are

many wide eyes and dimpled cheeks smiling. After it is mixed, Tammy cautions them,

"It's still hot, so we have to wait a minute." She separates the dough into smaller pieces

to speed the process. Each child is handed a ration. The housekeeping timer goes off, and

the children look at each other. Some of them were on the list. They just began playing

with the dough . . . now they have to decide whether to give up their spot in the housekeeping center or give up playing with the dough.

<center>* * *</center>

In my initial interview with Tammy prior to the observation, she said that one of the difficulties she deals with is that "some parents don't see Head Start as a school, even though at Head Start I do a lot more academics than I ever did at daycare—which I like." Tammy has thirteen years of teaching experience. She began working as an assistant in a daycare while still going to college. She is one three-credit hour course shy from a Bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education. She completed the rest of her undergrad classes in California and then moved to Colorado which has caused her difficulty in finding a comparable 3-credit class to the one she is still missing. Tammy's conviction in the academic side of the job is evident in her pedagogy. Children in her classroom match letters and sounds. They observe the science behind making play dough.

There are strong but unspoken messages about fairness being delivered as well. It's fair to take turns and good behavior results in the reward of being placed at the front of the line. The results of taking turns, however, also result in some people having to wait patiently for their turns—even if they too are following the rules. Someone has to be last. It's simply the nature of taking turns. When academic value comes up against the issue of general fairness, academics take precedence for Tammy. On the other hand, when the issue of fairness is not contrasted with an academic value, Tammy defaults to equality equals fair, such in the case of the unbitten egg.

Tammy has a total of thirty children split into two classes. She sees each group twice a week, and says, "There's a passion there for me." She really loves watching the

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kids learn, and her belief that a teacher can give them things that they might not get otherwise at home is what really inspires her personally:

> You could be having the worst day, and you come in, and you smile because they say the funniest things. Every day is good. It's just sometimes—there's tense moments, but it trumps everything else. I mean, I don't know. I don't know how to explain it. . . . Introducing something new that I know the kids have never seen, that's always so much fun because it's like awakening your own appreciation for the smallest things—like bringing in a pumpkin and just letting them go at it. Carving it out—cleaning all the yucky stuff out. I mean, just seeing their expressions, and—they don't always get that opportunity, and if I can give them something that they aren't going to get normally, then that's exciting. And it's the simple things with them too that makes them so happy. Today we were outside, and I just took a bucket of water and paintbrushes, and I told them they could paint the blue parts of the building because if you get it wet, it turns a darker blue—and they were just so excited.

I saw a glimpse of that excitement at the play dough station. Thinking back to when my own daughter was in preschool, I remember her choosing the play dough station too—but her play dough was pre-made. It's efficient, and if your values lean more toward everyone getting the same experience at the same time, you might choose this route. Not all the children in Tammy's room had to the opportunity to watch the magic that turns flour into dough—at least, not this time. For those who did, it was an awe moment—especially when they got to add something most adults at home might avoid because of

the added mess—glitter! Some parents might also frown upon letting a child paint the walls, even with water, because it might encourage them to use real paint next time. And carving pumpkins at school?! Are you kidding me? I don't know even many teachers who would bite that bullet.

**Ms. Regina, Early Head Start Education Assistant**

The lead teacher of the second classroom I observed was out sick. There was a substitute and an EA present. The EA, Regina, volunteered to let me come and observe even though the lead teacher was out. This classroom was an Early Head Start classroom, and it had children ranging in age from 4 months to three years. The four month old, Ezra, sits quietly in a play jumper at first—dark skinned with curly dark hair and big beautiful eyes. I try to stay professional, but do I ever want to hold him! Regina glances at the clock and tells the children they are waiting on two more friends. When the other two arrive, the class total is six. Two others are going to be absent today. It's time to begin circle time. The sub grabs Ezra. Regina gathers the older children and sits in one of the child chairs. She begins by saying, "Let's count how many friends are here today." Each time she names a child and counts, she adds a felt monkey to a felt board. One . . two . . . two girls and two boys are looking up intently, three of the four counting along. Regina struggles to sign as well as sing while holding up the small board. One boy, Josiah, is covering his eyes. Regina tries to engage him, "Josiah, how many monkeys do I have?" He shakes his head and buries it in crossed arms and tucked up legs. Once all monkeys are on the board, it's time for them to fall off and bump their heads. Each child gets to remove a felt monkey. Josiah refuses.

The next song is the Alligator Song, and Josiah can't help but look up. Each time the alligator chomps another monkey, he smiles and returns to burying his head. After the monkeys are gone, Regina asks them why they think the alligator got so angry. "'Cause it not nice to tease," shouts out one little girl. "That's right, it's not nice to tease, is it?" confirms Regina. It is now time for snack, and each child lines up to wash his or her hands. The Behavior Specialist arrives, and she offers her assistance with Ezra, feeding him in the rocker.

The children sit and eat quietly at their tables. Today's breakfast is Cheerios and milk. Some of the kids finish early and ask for seconds. Josiah asks for thirds. One girl says she is finished and is excused. She finds the block letters and begins arranging them into different patterns on the floor. More signing is going on, and I realize it is directed toward one child in particular, Aliyah. I ask if she has speech difficulty or is deaf. She is deaf. The classroom used to have a sign language interpreter for her, but that person left. This is now the second week without an interpreter. The EA and substitute do their best. Regina took some classes and says she knows enough to get by. Josiah is still at the table with the substitute. The sub asks Regina if she should give him more cereal—"He's asking for more, but this is like his fourth helping." Regina says that as long as he's eating, go ahead and let him eat. The rest of the children are now all at centers. They play with blocks, and dress up, and make-believe kitchen. One boy finds the corner of the room with a kid-length mirror and he entertains his own reflection.

Aliyah finds Ezra and lays down next him now that he is on the floor for his "tummy time." Regina places a stuffed roll beneath his arms to help support him and props a play mirror up in front of him. Aliyah peers in too. I haven't seen her sign

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anything back to the teachers, but she does appear to watch their hands and mouths as they address her.

Josiah is finally finished eating, and his mood has taken a 360. He dashes across the room to join the others and is asked to go back and walk. The Behavior Specialist talks with Regina. She's just recently conducted a home visit with Josiah's parents. She tells Regina, "They liked the Love and Logic tips that I gave them—the kids are pretty much everywhere—jumping on couches, off tables . . .".

I sit near the kitchen area, and a girl named Suri begins bringing me things to look at. I name them for her, and she attempts to repeat them, but it is difficult to understand her. Each time she repeats a word, she takes the object away and returns with a new one. I spot a second child inching his way toward me as well. Each time I turn and smile at him, he walks away. Before long, it is time for me to wrap up for the day, but I will return the next. Tomorrow's group will be different because the children come on alternate days.

* * *

Today's group is dramatically different from the first. The lead teacher is still out. I have fewer opportunities to write notes because the children easily accept me as another adult to engage with in the room. One boy, the age of two, begins crying as soon as his mother leaves. He has thick glasses with a strap holding them in place. Each time he rubs his eyes, the glasses get in his way, and they get pushed up against his forehead. One girl complains, "He's too loud." Regina asks him why she thinks he's too loud:

"Cuz he cwying."

"Sometimes we're sad. Sometimes we cry."

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"Sometimes I scream."

"Why do you scream?"

"Cuz—cuz—they take my dollies."

"Should we ask Matthew why he's sad?" (Sahra shakes her head yes.)

"Matthew, why are you crying?"

"I'm sad!"

Regina asks him why, but he doesn't answer, and it is time to circle up. It is the same songs as yesterday, but there is a great deal more enthusiasm. Like yesterday, there are only six children in attendance. When Regina gets to the book, the children are in the mood to share: "I was angry once. I yelled at my sister, Julie."

"I didn't know you had a sister named Julie," says Regina. The girl nods.

"But she's really dead."

This group wants more singing, so Regina asks them which song. They can't decide between Twinkle-Twinkle and the Itsy Bitsy Spider, so Regina tells them they'll sing both, but that then they really need to go wash their hands for snack. Today, all children take seconds and a few take thirds.

Once at centers, I am suddenly the most popular attraction. Most of them bring me objects, and I feign awe. We play for a minute or two, and then they wander off, but one girl is glued to my side. She calls me, "Mamá," and the sub asks me if I speak Spanish. Regina informs me that Selena doesn't speak to anyone because she only knows Spanish and none of the teachers know it very well. She says she really hasn't seen Selena engage with anyone.

Two incidents stuck out in my mind as I drew a close to my time at this facility. The first was Josiah. When he first came in that day, he was not a happy camper. He wanted to be, and under other circumstances, he perhaps loved the Alligator Song, but he was torn. He wanted to be both grumpy and happy. He ate not one, not two, not three—but four helpings of Cheerios. He was at the table eating while the others were already playing, which means Regina had to choose between his physical needs and his cognitive needs. She chose physical. It reminded me of what Sharon (COO) had said, "If a kid's hungry— feed him." Josiah had less time that day to engage in creative play. He didn't play with block letters like the little girl who finished first did, but his basic needs were met. Regina negotiated this individualized need against the widely held expectations of creative play.

The second thing that struck me about my observations over the two days was that language needs do not seem to hold the same weight as behavioral needs in this particular classroom, but in this case, it's really beyond the teachers' control. Both the substitute as well as Regina attempted to meet the students' needs—signing and using their limited Spanish vocabulary. Aliyah chose the company of Ezra, a four-month-old infant, and Selena chose mine. Both children appeared to yearn for safe-zone interactions rather than engage in the larger group activities. Are these examples, examples of equality?

**Ms. Stacy, Family Advocate**

My final observation occurred at a Head Start/Early Head Start/daycare facility where I shadowed not a teacher but rather, Family Advocate, Ms. Stacy. She has four day care centers encompassing eleven classrooms. Her family case load equals 94 children. Her job is to try and engage parents and caregivers as they come in to drop-off and pick

up their children and provide them with whatever support she can. She offers them information about additional resources available to them, and she is also required to conduct home visits with all of her families. Ms. Stacy said that better than 70% of her families can already advocate for themselves, "They may not have money in their lives. They may be kind of powerless right now, but they do know how take care of themselves. They do know where to go to get things, and they do have a plan for tomorrow." It is the remaining 30% that requires her greatest attention.

Ms. Stacy worries about the children in her case load. She says that one challenge she faces is getting parents:

> . . . to look at their child's needs. They think, "They'll grow out of it." Well, some things they won't grow out of. Some things we really need to have assessed. I just tell parents, "You know, having them assessed doesn't mean anything. It just means that, if they need help, we can get it now while they're three. If you wait until they're five, and they're in school, then they get put into more of a box, but now we're going to get them some help and maybe they'll never need that in school. Maybe we can get things turned around early because the earlier you do it—"

Stacy cut herself off, believing she may have been talking too much, but her passion as an advocate came pouring out of her. Throughout our time together, I noticed her tear up and heard her throat catch. She too, cares deeply.

Few of her parents willingly engaged with her. They didn't walk into the facility greeting her with, "Hey, Ms. Stacy—how goes it?" One of her families included a father who had gained custody of his child. He had a previous child from another relationship as

well who is older. Stacy has been desperately trying to set up the required home visit with the father. He wasn't on time to drop-off the little one. "I never know when they'll come in. It largely depends on their schedule," she explained.

In the meantime, we visited classrooms, and I got my daily child-fix. One child played with my hair—pulling it back into a ponytail and releasing it. Pulling it into a pony, and releasing. Next we visited a classroom that was having a visit from "Dinosaur School," an outside organization there to provide the children with emotional guidance.

Before too long, the father Stacy had been hoping to catch arrived. The gentleman's oldest daughter, a girl of probably seven or eight, was carrying, Leia, the two year old in Stacy's caseload. Everyone greeted Leia—the three front staff workers, Tracy: "Hi Leia—. How's Leia, today? There she is, Hello Miss Leia—" Each time someone greeted Leia, the older sister would readjust and scoot her sister higher up on her hip. It looked as though Leia was getting a little too big for her sibling, but the sister didn't seem to mind. She encouraged Leia "Say, hi, Leia." I asked the older daughter what her name was, and she smiled wider, again adjusting Leia, "Tamara."

"Tamara?" I said, "That's a pretty name. Looks like Leia's a lucky girl—to have such a good big sister." The missing teeth smile on her face beamed back.

"She is," said the father.
Stacy tried to engage the father, "I was hoping to catch you—I'd like to set up a date for a home visit."

"I been talking to the girls down there—when I pick her up—asking them how things are going."

He said this as he turned his back and walked away from Stacy. By girls, he meant the teachers. He led his daughters to the classroom. It was obvious he had no intention of setting up a home visit.

* * *

Stacy believes her role is to form alliances with the families, and that, as a matter of justice, those without power must be offered support. Additionally, the children of those in turmoil require the assistance offered by the organization. In everyone's efforts to go out of their way to wrap support around Leia, however, Tamara, the child who was too old to be under that protective wing of CCELP was overlooked. It seemed very strange to me that no one was talking to the older sister. Thinking about that day, as we traveled from room to room, Stacy pointed out each of her children for me. Her terms of endearment were *little gals* or *little boys*. "That's one of my little gals—I had his older brother, but he's not one of my little boys." The children in her caseload of 94 were mixed in with non-Head Start children. The facility was an Early Head Start/Head Start/daycare facility. Some families just needed or wanted daycare. Stacy knew the names and family situations of her assigned caseload, but unless the other children engaged with her, she focused on her own. It's hard enough to remember the names, family member names, and living situations of 94 children, but I thought about the system of fairness in the level of support society as a whole offers children. The older sister, Tamara, was in the same family environment as Leia—doesn't she too deserve support? Perhaps she's someone else's caseload—or perhaps, if the father receives support, all of his children will benefit.

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**Helping Those Who Help**

I wrapped up my data collection by interviewing a couple of the other support staff members—one of the nurses and a Teacher Coach/Mentor. These ladies are no less important to the mission of the organization.

**Ms. Amy, Teacher Mentor Coach/Mentor**

"I actually enjoy all of my job." Ms. Amy has been with CCELP for 19 years. She's unique in that, she began as a part-time bus driver for the organization. She decided to go to school and earned her associates in Early Childhood Education, became a teacher, and went on to earn her bachelor's as well. She taught for fourteen years, and has been a Coach/Mentor for the last three. She said, "My whole goal is to see them successful—because a successful teacher makes a successful child."

I asked Amy what she believed was the strongest stress factor for teachers. She paused. Sighed, and began:

> There's not enough time to do what's required, you know, there just really isn't.
> It seems to be more behaviors are coming into the classroom, so they need to
> work on the social/emotional development before they can—you have to
> build the foundation, and that's the core. Having an EA that's not interested in
> doing their job—I think having somebody that's treating it more like a paycheck
> than a career.

Amy's role is to support the teachers. Sometimes that means assisting them in figuring out how to handle a stressful or difficult situation. She told me about one time that stood out in her mind:

I had to go into one classroom because the teacher wasn't quite sure—the

parents were special needs, and the child, although she's typical, she's being

raised by special needs parents, so she has these special needs behaviors.

[The teacher] was wondering how she could incorporate the teaching of

the parent along with the child. That was something even as basic as hygiene for

the parents—just basic hygiene. The way we got around it is, we made baskets.

We picked two parents, and we made baskets. This one particular set of parents

got a spa basket, and it had all that kinda stuff in it. The other one was a movie

basket, but this was a spa basket, and [they] were thrilled.

A typical child being raised by special needs parents—parents who need to be educated

in basic hygiene. I peered into her future. I saw a greasy-haired child wearing pajama

pants to school—three days in a row. The other children avoid her. Say she smells. She

plays on the playground alone. Drawing in the sand. Venturing onto the swings next to

the other children. She scans the grounds looking for her father who should have been

here by now. She sees the parents standing in groups. Making play dates. The children

run up, pound on their mothers' legs, and the parents look down. Tossle hair, nod their

heads. And the children run off excitedly.

Amy feels like she is part of a bigger picture. She said she's never seen an

organization work so hard to keep its people happy. Bottom line for Amy, teaching is not

for the weak-hearted:

It's not easy to be a Head Start teacher because there *are* a lot of qualifications

that you have to have. And there *are* a lot of regulations. And there *are* a lot of—

the *Framework*, and the *standards*, and the *curricula*—Oh, my Lord. You gotta

be tough. You have to be tough, and you have to be organized, and you have to

know what you're doing.

. . . It would be nice if they had less on their plates where they could do more

with the kids, but I don't honestly know how we can do that—you know? I mean,

this is coming down from the Feds—I don't know.

Amy's belief that a successful teacher equals a successful child is in line with almost

every voice I heard. Children and families are the mission, and in Amy's view, everyone

plays a part in that mission. She understands the weight the teachers are under to meet the

many demands, but she feels as though they are powerless to change things—so rather

than fight to change it, you have to support the people who do the work, as Sharon

(COO) said.

**Ms. Katjanna, Nurse**

Ms. Katjanna has been with the organization for four years. She has a strong

Swedish accent, so it was somewhat difficult to capture her exact words, but her

convictions came through. Katjanna's primary role is to support the health needs of the

children. Nurses monitor the required health records—immunizations and physicals.

They conduct on-site visits to each of their assigned classrooms once a month. For

children with care plans, the nurses track and monitor their care. Nurses also go on home

visits.

If a teacher has a question about possible abuse, the nurses can go to the site and

examine the child. Each nurse is assigned between 11 and 15 classrooms. Katjanna said

she too has had to make a DHS call:

It was after a home visit where it was a very unsafe environment. And it was a special needs child. She didn't have what she needed, so I made the call, but usually, it is the teacher who makes the call.

Katjanna has been asked to come out to look at bruises, and in one case, a severe burn. While these occasions are difficult, she said that isn't the norm. That she sees many good families. Her favorite part of the job is communicating with the parents:

Since we have people—we have the family advocates. We have the nurses. We have the teachers. We have the therapists, and those who need physical therapy, occupational therapy, and speech in the classroom too. So, it's more like this multi—how do I say, multi—? Where we don't not only focus on that—like with the learning, in the classroom but all the other things too because they need good health. And they need to be able to speak—and they need to be able to—all those things too to be able to learn, so we take care of those things too. *And* the family—they have to have a good family life to be able to learn. And of course, when you have the population where they're—many are below the poverty level—and so we have—we work with a population that it's not always so easy for them to have a good home life because of all those different factors. But some still do—I mean, it's—you can see that even the people—I mean, we, because we don't want to judge them because of that, because that's not—I mean, yeah, it is harder when you are living with less means than others, but that doesn't always necessarily mean they can't take care of the child, not at all. I see many that they are really, really good families, and they're trying to working really hard with what they have.

Katjanna sees the inequalities the families are faced with, but she cautions that this doesn't mean that society should judge them because there are many good families working really hard with what they have. For many, they simply "have less means than others," which makes it harder to have a good home life. Without health, speech, emotional/social needs being met first, the children cannot learn. Head Start organizations like CCELP are charged with a heavy task. They're trying to do what Amy (Family Advocate) argues—"that if they get help now," we might prevent them from the closely boundaried box that awaits them.

**Summary**

Those in charge of helping children and families in the most need have a difficult task indeed. My attempt in this chapter was not to "report" all information shared with me from participants, but rather, to highlight some of the most salient issues so that, collectively, the stories and images might give readers a broader view of all that is involved in the day-to-day work of educating and providing support to the families of CCELP. Data was organized into five domains according to the hierarchical scheme of CCELP itself beginning with interviews of administrative and artifact reviews of pertinent research and policies affecting the organization b.) interviews with supervisory staff, c.) interviews with teaching staff, d.) perceived observational outcomes, and e.) interviews with support staff. In the following chapter, I will provide more detailed examination of the themes that emerged from this data.

CHAPTER FIVE

SOMETIMES—I'D JUST LIKE TO TEACH

*What are the potential implications of contradictory perceptions of equality*

*on the American public education system?*

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> *No man can reveal to you aught but that*
> *which already lies half asleep in the dawn-*
> *ing of your knowledge.*
> *The teacher who walks in the shadow of*
> *the temple, among his followers, gives not*
> *Of his wisdom but rather of his faith and*
> *his lovingness.*
> *If he is indeed wise he does not bid you*
> *enter the house of his wisdom, but rather*
> *leads you to the threshold of your own*
> *mind.*
>
> —Kahlil Gibran

Life is full of good intentions. I recently spoke with a woman who is a Leader of

Programs and Activities for a large independent/charter school association. We took a

class together on assessment policy, and I told her my belief that policymakers and public

education administrators create and enforce policies with good intentions in mind—She

told me I give people more credit than is due. I thought back on this statement multiple

times throughout this study, and in the end, I hold firmer to my conviction. There is

nothing malicious about a policy that says "education for all" or "the most vulnerable

citizens need our support." One reason equality policy is so difficult to implement is that

core values ultimately come up against one another—individual freedoms vs. societal

good. United States, in particular, has struggled greatly with this opposition because

democracy as a whole is meant to preserve large-scale freedom by protecting the

individual rights of its citizens. In fact, according to David Harvey (2005), for "anyone

who values the ability to make decisions for themselves," the "political ideals of human

dignity and individual freedom [are] fundamental [and] the 'central values of

civilization'" (p.5). Harvey, explaining the "founding figures of neoliberal thought," says

further that:

> For any way of thought to become dominant, a conceptual apparatus has to be
> advanced that appeals to our intuitions and instincts, to our values and our desires,
> as well as to the possibilities inherent in the social world we inhabit. If successful,
> this conceptual apparatus becomes so embedded in common sense as to be taken
> for granted and not open to question. (p.5)

Freedoms such as that of speech, religion, and personal choice are deeply ingrained and

preserved tenants of democracy. Many believe the only way to guarantee the most

freedom for the majority of a citizenry is to protect individual choice. Individual choice is

equated with human dignity, and this dignity is "threatened not only by fascism,

dictatorships, and communism, but by all forms of state intervention that [substitute]

collective judgments for those of individuals free to choose" (p.5). It is my conviction

that the only way to move beyond this duality of individual vs. collective is to break it.

In Chapters 1 and 2, I provide the rationale for this breaking—we are already at a

breaking point, but rather than see the two sides as colliding, we tend to ignore the

unfavorable consequences of our good intentions. It would be wonderful to live in a

society where race no longer mattered—but the consequence to the belief in a post-racial

society is a colorblind society, one that refuses to see the consequences of racial

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inequality in contemporary United States. And just like it would be wonderful to live in a post-racial society, it would be similarly wonderful to live in a society where there was no longer an achievement gap, one where economic stratification didn't impact educational access, and one where full inclusion really did result in level playing fields. None of these circumstances are yet realities—and we most likely will not see them become realities in our lifetimes.

This study's significance lies in its attempt to enable those directly involved in the work of providing early education and support to the most vulnerable US children and families to look its Prometheus in the eye. United States prides itself on its ability to operate and/or fight for the ideals of a free and just society. However, the limitations of this study prevent it from fully exploring the way these ideas extend into the realm of US society as a whole. Rather, the aims of this study are to provide one small vantage point from which to re-examine the way equality-laden language directly affects the teaching and learning that occurs in a contemporary American public education system. The Central Colorado Early Learning Partnership (CCELP), a single member organization of that larger system, provides a viable ledge from which to access that vantage point. The study was organized around four questions: 1) How do theorists and/or practitioners of accountability measures conceive of the idea of fairness and equality? 2) How do accountability measures direct the pedagogical approaches undertaken within the early education organization selected for this study? 3) What is the educational outcome of the way differing theories of equality sometimes collide (or fail to collide) within classrooms? and 4) What are the potential implications of contradictory perceptions of equality on the American public education system?

Relying on the methodologies of educational criticism, self-ethnography, and critical discourse analysis, I attempted to paint a mental picture of the complex landscape surrounding early childcare education. The first task of the educational critic is to prove oneself a connoisseur, for as Eisner (1998) states, "One can be a great connoisseur without being a critic, but one cannot be a critic of any kind without some level of connoisseurship" (p.86). With the help of self-ethnography, I hope to have convinced my audience of my authority to judge the educational canvas. I rely heavily upon my personal experience, as well as my interpretive and linguistic learning in order to build that trust. The next task is to move myself into the realm of critic:

> The task of the critic is to perform a mysterious feat well: to transform the qualities of a painting, play, novel, poem, classroom or school, or act of teaching and learning into a public form that illuminates, interprets, and appraises the qualities that have been experienced. . . . every act of criticism is a reconstruction. The reconstruction takes the form of an argued narrative, supported by evidence that is never incontestable; there will *always* be alternative interpretations of the "same" play, as the history of criticism so eloquently attests. (Eisner, 1998, p.86, italics in original)

This act of criticism is no small task, but Eisner gives the critic the freedom to bring her connoisseurship to the table. It is *her* illumination, interpretation, and appraisal. Her reconstruction may not be incontestable—there may be alternative interpretations and conclusions to draw from the material, but it is the work of the critic to identify the "recurring messages that pervade the situation about which the critic writes," and by doing so, one can use the particulars "to provide guidelines for the future. . . . The point of learning a lesson is that it is intended to influence our understanding or behavior; it has some instrumental utility" (Eisner, 1998, p. 104).

While numerous other studies of educational connoisseurship and criticism have

succeeded in doing the important work of illuminating the varied, and often complex,

dimensions of schooling (Uhrmacher, 1991; Moroye, 2007; Conrad, 2011), this study

focused on the messages, directly stated and alluded to, about a single concept—that of

equality and its many synonyms. This is where critical discourse analysis (CDA) came in.

The intent of CDA is to critically examine the way:

> . . . our social practices in general and our use of language in particular are
> bound up with causes and effects which we may not be at all be aware of under
> normal conditions. The normal opacity of these practices to those involved in
> them—the invisibility of their ideological assumptions, and of the power
> relationships which underlie these practices—helps to sustain these power
> relations. (Fairclough, 1996, p.54)

In order to uncover the uses of language within which ideological assumptions may be

entwined, it was necessary to collect data that centered heavily upon discourse. I

attempted to gather enough verbal accounts as to consider the thematic phase saturated.

Although saturation is a term ordinarily used within the context of grounded theory

analysis, I felt it was important to push my data collection to reach a similar plateau

wherein, I continually looked "for instances that represented the [themes][11] and to

continue looking (and interviewing) until the new information obtained [did] not further

provide insight into the [theme]" (Creswell, 2007, p. 160). I interviewed fourteen

participants in total, all employees of CCELP. Two of them were administrators; two

middle-management; five were lead teachers; two educational assistants; and three were

support staff. Twelve of the fourteen participants were interviewed twice for a total of

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[11] The word 'theme' is replacing the word 'category' in the original quote to stay consistent with the
terminology of educational criticism.

approximately 31 full hours of data collection over a four month period. The only interviews that were not recorded were those conducted during simultaneous observations.

## Thematics and Response to Research Questions

My intention in chapter four was to richly describe and provide preliminary interpretations of the teaching and learning dimensions present within CCELP.  In order to choose which parts of the texts to illuminate, I relied upon my first three research questions:  1) How do theorists and/or practitioners of accountability measures conceive of the idea of fairness and equality? 2) How do accountability measures direct the pedagogical approaches undertaken within the early education organization selected for this study? and 3) What is the educational outcome of the way differing theories of equality sometimes collide (or fail to collide) within classrooms?

In the remainder of this chapter, I will more deeply evaluate the instances of contradiction present within the accounts earlier provided and move into direct analysis of the final research question: 4) What are the potential implications of contradictory perceptions of equality on the American public education system? Not all five domains touched upon all emergent themes. However, collectively, a holistic view emerges.

## 1.   How do theorists and/or practitioners of accountability measures conceive of the idea of fairness and equality?

### The Administrative/Research/Policy Domain

A theorist, in my mind, is anyone who generates theory in an attempt to direct the praxis for others to follow. Practitioners of accountability measures are those persons who, although they may not have directly created the theory, believe in, and attempt to

dictate, those praxis recommendations. In the context of this study, theorists are those who write and publish the policy and research documents CCELP uses as guidelines, and Nadine and Sharon, the organization's two top administrators, serve as the practitioners. I begin my examination with Nadine (CEO).

**Individual vs. Collective.**

One of the first stories Nadine shared with me was the story of how she came into the position of CEO. When the previous CEO unexpectedly passed away, Nadine said she wanted "to make sure that the operation of this organization is not dependent upon me or any one person here." Nadine set about to restructure the organizational chart beginning with the leadership team and extending all the way to the Board of Directors. The inclusion of multiple voices in the decision making process felt more democratic to Nadine because more voices were taking part in the decision-making process, and "therefore must take responsibility for the outcome." John Locke (1963), one of the first writers of what we now view as "classical liberalism," said:

> Men being, as has been said, by nature all free, equal, and independent,
> no one can be put out of this estate, and subjected to the political power
> of another, without his own consent, which is done by agreeing with other men
> to join and unite into a community for their comfortable, safe, and peaceable
> living one amongst another, in a secure enjoyment of their properties, and a
> greater security against any that are not of it. (p.178  )

According to Locke, once people[12] consent to join one another in a community, the collective enjoys "safe and peaceable living" within that community structure. The individuals themselves remain, by their very nature, free, equal, and independent and

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[12] I've substituted the word 'men' for people. Locke may have had in mind the exclusion of women (or some classes of men), but for the purposes of the argument, I am looking at Locke's words as they apply to contemporary thoughts of inclusion.

cannot be subjected to the political power of others except by agreement. This element of agreement amongst diverse, independent voices is what Nadine describes as occasionally difficult—when "important decisions have to be made." Nadine's core value leans toward democratic decision making processes, yet the external structure of the organization is not one of equals always sitting together peaceably at the table. Nadine bears the most significant weight of the organization. She is the Chief Executive Officer. She reports to an outside democratic body, the Board of Directors, but every other staff person in the organization either, directly or indirectly, works for her. Therefore, Nadine's core belief in equals joining together to make important decision making runs against the physical structure of her position as CEO.  However, this belief of Nadine's in the democratic process becomes an important determinant in the way others within the organization also make decisions.

### Poverty and Lack of Education.

Some decisions are easier to come to collectively than others. The ones that prove more difficult are those when a second core value of Nadine's is also at stake—the core value of the mission to provide for the most vulnerable children and families. Nadine's repeated conviction in the mission reveals a second component to democracy as we have come to know it in the U.S.—the belief that part of the responsibility of those in positions of more power than others is to provide for those with less power.

As detailed by Harvey (2005), President Roosevelt (1933-1945) believed that Americans:

> . . . "must forswear that conception of the acquisition of wealth which,
> through excessive profits, creates undue private power." Necessitous men are not

free men. Everywhere, [Roosevelt] argued, social justice had become a definite
goal rather than a distant ideal. The primary obligation of the state and its civil
society was to use its powers and allocate its resources to eradicate poverty
and hunger and to assure security of livelihood, security against major hazards
and vicissitudes of life, and the security of decent homes. (p.183)

As the CEO of an early childhood education center that operates a Head Start/Early Head

Start program, Nadine must be the voice of this "primary obligation of the state and its

civil society." During Lyndon B. Johnson's presidency (1963-1969), a declaration of

War on Poverty was issued. Head Start emerged out of that War:

Part of the government's thinking on poverty was influenced by new
research on the effects of poverty, as well as on the impacts of education.
This research indicated an obligation to help disadvantaged groups,
compensating for inequality in social or economic conditions. Head Start
was designed to help break the cycle of poverty, providing preschool
children of low-income families with a comprehensive program to meet their
emotional, social, health, nutritional and psychological needs. (OHS, "History,"
n.d., n.p.)

According to this literature, compensation for inequality becomes the obligation of the

state. This is the mission of Head Start—to "break the cycle of poverty" by providing

preschool children of low income families with a comprehensive program to meet almost

all the children's immediate needs.

When Sharon (COO) says, "If a child is hungry, feed him," she means it. The

recognition by administration that the children and families they serve are among some of

the most disadvantaged in society allows others in the organization to follow suit. This

thinking is further backed by the literature CCELP uses as its foundational guidelines:

The circumstances into which children are born and their families' capacity
and resources for raising them also vary widely. Poverty and its many
accompanying risks—including homelessness, special needs, family depression,
and exposure to violence—require interventions that may not be needed by all
children. (NHSA Policy Agenda, 2013, p.1)

According to the above passage from the National Head Start Association's current Policy Agenda (2013), interventions used to equalize the risks associated with poverty "may not be needed by all children." To intervene is to come between, to interrupt, or even to interfere by an exertion of force in the trajectory of a process or the actions of others. This language is simultaneously a conflict of individual vs. collective. Society, as we have already established, is a collective of equally free individuals who willingly consent to act as a group. Intervention, however, is a stated requirement when there are disadvantaged individuals within the collective population. Power to intervene in the lives of the disadvantaged becomes a justifiable obligation. And yet, preservation and understanding of the individual is also apparent in this passage because NHSA gives organizations the ability to differentiate according to children's individual needs. And this differentiation is what causes CCELP the most difficulty when negotiating equality measures within their organization as a whole.

### Differentiation vs. Widely Held Expectations.

In Sharon's narrative, she reveals a struggle between some of her own core values—differentiation of needs and that of widely held expectations. Looking at her language pattern itself illuminates this struggle: " . . . understand that they have the flexibility—that they're not gonna be—somebody's not going to come in with a clipboard and a checklist . . .." Each dash indicates a pause and doubling back in the delivery of what she wanted to say, and how she wanted to say it. Immediately following this statement, Sharon hears the potential conflict herself and admits, "And that I'm not sending mixed messages . . . because I'm also saying . . . 'You know, childhood outcomes, come on, how are we doing here?'"

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It is not surprising that potential mixed messages are transmitted down to teachers because it is also apparent in the literature. Again returning to the NHSA Policy Agenda, it is stated therein that "Physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development occurs at a different pace in each child and from child to child" (p.1). The NHSA acknowledges the different developments within children, and yet it is said to be able to "remain a high quality intervention across the nation because of the rigorous set of performance standards that programs are expected to meet" (p.6). Those program standards include Framework outcomes in the "domains of language and literacy development, cognition and general knowledge, approaches toward learning, physical well-being and motor development, and social and emotional development" (OHS, Head Start Performance Standards, 2013, p.70030). This negotiation between the two messages is a negotiation of equality and accountability measures. The recognition that each child learns and develops at his or her own pace is a belief in the equality of individuals. NHSA is preserving the rights of individual children in this regard. Simultaneously, however, NHSA expects HS teachers to collectively move their children through all designated domains of the Framework because, research indicates, " . . . children in Head Start show clear gains in skills like vocabulary, spelling, letter naming, color identification and other precursors of academic performance during and immediately following their enrollment in the program . . ." (Rich, 2012, n.p.). Providing preschool children with school readiness is a much stated requisite for equality in society as a whole. Schools "serve to reduce disparities in skills between advantaged and disadvantaged students," and thus are often argued to be "the Great Equalizer" (Downey, von Hippel & Broh, 2004, p.613). Therefore, kindergarten readiness becomes an essential first step toward mitigating

inequality. In fact, posit Downey, von Hippel, and Broh (2004), schools have such a significant impact on children that they can "reduce socioeconomic inequality" (p.614). The teacher is said to be the most significant factor to this equalizing equation.

**The Importance of the Teacher.**

> *We know that from the moment our children step into a classroom, the single most important factor in determining their achievement is not the color of their skin or where they come from; it's not who their parents are or how much money they have. It's who their teacher is.*
> —Barack Obama

"It's not who their parents are or how much money they have. It's who their teacher is." Each president throughout his time in office has added to the United States' collective understanding of equality in this nation. President Obama reformed much of President Bush's No Child Left Behind Act, but his own Blueprint for Reform sends a clear message about the role the teacher plays in the attempt to provide "equity and opportunity for all students": "One study found that a single good teacher can increase the lifetime earnings of a classroom by $250,000—single teacher. A great teacher can help a young person escape poverty, allow them to dream beyond their circumstances" (Obama, "Remarks," 2012, n.p.). A single teacher has the power to help a young person escape poverty? This is quite the important task, but this is the message every teacher in the United States is hearing. They come to believe deeply in it, and those who are in charge of supervising that task know too just what is as stake, so administrators such as Nadine and Sharon, do what they can to "support the people who do the work and make sure they have the tools they need." However, administrators may have contradictory approaches toward that support. For Sharon, relying in large part on her prior experience

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as that one doing the work, one of the most salient tools includes the flexibility to make decisions on behalf of the immediate needs of the children. For Nadine, the tools are having multiple support staff a phone call away.

Nadine tries to wrap children and families with a group of individuals—family advocates, behavioral specialists, special needs therapists, educational assistants, teachers, etc. She believes it is a team effort and, despite what others may believe about the teacher being the single most important figure, "if you as a teacher, take it all on your shoulders, then you're going to be much more susceptible to burnout . . . but if you're willing to see yourself as one very important part of a team . . .." Seen here, Nadine's core value of democratic process is also evident in her approach to supporting teachers while Sharon's core value of preservation of individual freedom is entwined with her approach.

**Language/Citizenship Barriers.**

Despite acknowledging the lack of multilingual teachers is an issue, Sharon qualified by saying CCELP "typically mirrors the children."  Because 70% of the child population is White, it's not a pressing issue. And while CCELP would like to have someone in each classroom that speaks each child's home language, it isn't something that stand out as its own core value for them. It is entwined within the larger context of support needs because the majority of their population is White, English-speaking.

The acknowledgement that they'd like someone on the teaching staff to speak each child's home language is an acknowledgement of individual needs, but in this case, the collective need supersedes—majority does not need a bi-/multilingual teaching staff, so it is not at the forefront of their list of support tools. This message is also carried to

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teachers, and for the one teacher for whom ethnicity was at the forefront of her experience both personally and professionally, the message deeply impacted her view of administration's values.

**Social/Emotional/Behavioral/Special Needs Factor.**

The Stepping Stones classroom is an attempt to provide children with severe social, emotional, or behavioral needs the extra support they need by placing them in a smaller classroom with more specialized staff. Nadine said they typically do not move students who already have an IEP because those students are "already receiving additional support." Despite reporting that they saw "amazing outcomes," Nadine said they are in the process of reducing the number of Stepping Stones classrooms rather than adding more. Two values collide in this scenario—and one is a significant but not yet talked about one—money.

Nadine said the Stepping Stones model is "an extremely expensive model." Fewer students, more staff—and more specially trained staff. Funding for Head Start comes primarily from the federal government. It can be supplemented by outside funding sources, and the Stepping Stones classroom in particular is one example of a program within CCELP that has received outside grant support, but the sustainability of such highly concentrated specialization is too difficult to maintain for long periods of time. Although it would be nice to believe governmental intentions about caring for the most vulnerable citizens is purely altruistic, the values of capitalism are deeply interwoven within the fabric of our blanket ideals about freedom:

> . . . costs to benefit analyses have been conducted on high quality intervention
> programs (e.g., Abecedarian project, High/Scope Perry Preschool program,
> Chicago Parent Center Program, Regional Intervention Program) for young

children (i.e., 3-5 year olds). It has been found that overall program benefits exceed the costs associated. (Vinh, 2011, p.2)

Caring for citizens who cannot care for themselves is a hard-won argument without the support of financial benefits. According to Noddings (2013), "Some . . . argue for a general academic curriculum that will prepare all students for college; their argument is primarily economic—that preparation for college will give all students an equal opportunity for economic success" (Equality, para. 2). "One study found that a single good teacher can increase the lifetime earnings of a classroom by $250,000—single teacher" (Obama, "Remarks," 2012, n.p.) claims President Obama. Lifetime earning increases of individual children equate to societal savings:

- One billion dollars spent annually to incarcerate youth, and
- 500 billion spent annually to repair and replace property destroyed by youth.
. . . The benefits of funding high quality early childcare programs would save the government future expenses on special education services, welfare services, and justice systems. (Vinh, 2011, p.2)

In the deference to financial gains, there is a resonance of individual vs. collective—or rather, help the collective by helping the individuals. It benefits all of society to minimize the reliance of government assistance. Specialized programming attempts to prevent future expenditures that research indicates occurs when children in severe need do not get the support they need as children. However, there is another core conflict present in this scenario: inclusion vs. specialization.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires full inclusion unless it can be proven that severe circumstances prevent the ability of school staff to adequately accommodate a child with special needs. This policy is backed by a great deal of research:

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> To date, there is no evidence to indicate specialized classrooms and settings for young children with disabilities are superior to inclusive settings, meaning specialized classrooms do not provide more developmental benefits when compared with high-quality, inclusive classrooms. . . . The evidence does suggest that inclusion "produces the desired outcomes <u>only</u> when young children with disabilities are included at least several days per week into the social and instructional environment with typically developing peers" (Strain, 1990, p.4). (Gupta, 2011, p.1, underline in original)

Although many teachers spoke about the difficulties they face when caring for severe support needs children, the Stepping Stones classroom is a last resort. In order to fully maintain the integrity of the IDEA Act, all schools must strive toward inclusion. Nadine specified that children on IEPs are not typically moved to the Stepping Stones classrooms—therefore children with documented disabilities remain in inclusive classrooms, and the Stepping Stones classroom is reserved for high emotional, social, behavioral needs children who have not been identified as having a disability requiring an IEP. An IEP, remember, is an *individualized* education plan. The goal is to treat the individual need within the inclusive classroom environment alongside their typically developing peers.

<p style="text-align:center">* * *</p>

Administrators, researchers, and policymakers do not all conceive of fairness and equality in the same way. However, fairness and equality measures are deeply embedded in the American idea of democracy. So while administrators, researchers, and policymakers may not agree conceptually on which practices will most likely achieve the democratic ideal, they rely heavily upon the theoretical value embedded within that ideal, and often use it to coerce the action of others. Administrators, in particular, also find themselves in conflict with these ideals when fiscal restrictions prevent them from

exercising full practice of them. Decisions have to be made on behalf of the entire organization, and when this occurs, the reliance on capitalistic forms of democracy surface.

## 2. How do accountability measures direct the pedagogical approaches undertaken within the early education organization selected for this study?

### Supervisory Domain

I interviewed two supervisors for this study. Jessica was interviewed twice, and Kathleen was interviewed once. Their jobs require them to assess teachers and offer guidance and support where needed. They also attend meetings to review the progress of each of the children within their assigned classrooms. Because of the nature of their jobs, only two of the themes appeared in the supervisory domain.

#### Differentiation vs. Widely Held Expectations.

The most vexing equality conflict present for Jessica was the conflict over differentiation vs. widely held expectations. Jessica felt strongly that the presence of Framework and Performance Outcomes held teachers accountable for delivering quality care and instruction to children. She values early childcare education as a field and wants those who come to the career to realize it's about more than "taking care of kids." The assessment tools bring objectivity so that "it's not just based on opinion."

Kathleen expressed a focus on individualization for children who are not meeting the widely held expectations. For Kathleen, it's a process of going from general to specific. Because she believes in the fluidity of this process, she was able to embrace the task of creating daily lesson plans that would assist instructors in the initial delivery of the widely held expectations. Supervisors will presumably have an easier time assessing

instruction because the lesson plans are being developed with the assessment in mind. Any student not performing within the widely held expectations will then still receive individuated goals for shoring up those shortcomings.

Jessica's conflict originates from core values about the art of teaching vs. the administrative process. While she was divided about the lack of individualized instruction students will receive as a result of pre-designed lesson plans, she was more troubled about the robbing of this flexibility for teachers themselves.

**The Importance of the Teacher.**

Kathleen's primary concern for teachers is the amount of work they are being asked to do within the time they are asked to do it. This may contribute to her willingness to assist teachers in doing some of the upfront work of planning. "Even just fitting it on paper," she stated was a task, but "then thinking about how that logistically can happen in the classroom. . . . It's pretty crazy making." She was concerned that there just isn't enough time to get all of the paperwork completed and still "be able to meet individual needs of the children." Kathleen corroborated her account of the extended hours teachers put in by expressing her own difficulty in balancing work and home-life: " . . . teachers can call us at any time. A lot of times I'm talking to a teacher at 9:30 at night, and then the phone's ringing at 5:30."

Jessica, on the other hand, was more conflicted over preserving the inherent value she holds in high regard about the field of teaching in general. She has a Master's degree in Early Childhood Education and expressed frustration over the opinion from others that it's "just about taking care of kids." When it came to the creation of pre-designed lesson plans with pre-scripted circle times, Jessica had to negotiate two core values housed

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under one category—the art of teaching. Teaching, for Jessica, is something not just anyone who cares about kids can do, but rather, is a field where quality and accountability matters. Formal assessments bring objectivity to the table, and yet, when the attempt to meet the stated objectives led colleagues to pre-scripting the teacher's role as a teacher, Jessica found herself questioning:

> I am so far against that because it doesn't provide any creativity for the teacher—for what she went to school for. I don't think it's going to meet the specific needs of children. And the reason they're doing this is because basically they want quality across every classroom—and I understand that . . . . It does not need to be every teacher doing the exact same thing in the exact same way.

This conversation brought Jessica to tears. She paused, apologized, and buried her face in her arms. This was an almost insurmountable impasse for Jessica—and it may be a catalyst for resigning her position with the organization, but it's not an easy decision because she also "believes in the CCELP mission" and "loves her job as a supervisor." The themes of differentiation vs. widely held expectations and teacher importance are both equality laden themes. The ever present question of how do we meet the needs of the many while addressing the needs of the individual is deeply embedded in this discussion. Both individualization (differentiation) and widely held expectations (standardization) are attempts at social justice. Every teacher doing the exact same thing in the exact same way insures that standards determined to be in the best interest of children will be met. The easy answer to the question, "How can we assure every child receives a quality education?" is to create a standard and then ask teachers to deliver. On

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the other hand, what if not all students are in need of the exact same things delivered to

them in the exact same way? Do we ignore individual needs? The easy answer to this one

is to say, "We won't worry about that up front—let's make the standard, tell teachers

how to deliver it, *and then*, if children aren't falling within the widely held expectations,

we can go back and create some individualized plans."

So? Which is it? Which approach results in the greatest good for the greatest

number of children? The real answer is—it depends on who you talk to. If you were

talking to E.D. Hirsch (2006), he might tell you that:

> *Tragic* is not too strong a word. Reading ability correlates with almost everything
> that a democratic education aims to provide, including the ability to be an
> informed citizen who can actively participate in the self-government of a
> democracy. What gives the reading gap between demographic groups a special
> poignancy is the dramatic failure of our schools to live up to the basic ideal
> of a democratic education, which as Thomas Jefferson conceived it, is
> the ideal of offering all children the opportunity to succeed, regardless of
> who their parents happen to be. (p.3)

This passage is pregnant with equality-laden imagery. Democracy/democratic is stated

twice—all children the opportunity to succeed—active participation of an informed

citizenry. According to Hirsch (2006), standardized testing that examines all children

based upon the same set of benchmarks, like that created out of No Child Left Behind, "is

a praiseworthy inducement to fairness and accountability" (p.91).

Not all agree, however. If you were talking to Nel Noddings (2005), she might tell

you she questions "the morality of forcing material on people. I would first have to be

convinced that there is something wrong with their own interests or that the material

under consideration is so vital that everyone must know it" (p.61). It is no wonder that it

ultimately comes down to the individual teacher to negotiate the day-to-day balance between individualized attention and instruction and the stated widely held expectations of Framework and Performance Outcomes.

**Teacher Domain**

The Teacher Domain and the following Observational Domain both include data collected from conversations with teachers. However, in the Teacher Domain I include both lead teachers and one Educational Assistant. Because I observed one lead teacher, one EA, and shadowed one Family Advocate, I created a separate domain for the observational data and used it to answer my third research question.

The Teacher Domain is the most packed with data collected from five participants who touched on many common themes, some of which have already been introduced in the previous two domains.

### Individual vs. Collective.

Much like their CEO, teachers often struggle with individual vs. collective conflicts. Teachers are considered supervisors to their Educational Assistants. In addition, the support staff who visit the classroom to assist them all have a say in the individualized planning for students. Sometimes, this amounts to too many cooks in the kitchen. This conflict showed up in both Sunny's and Helen's narratives. Sunny said one of the difficult aspects of the job is "getting everybody involved." The involvement of many voices is a democratic approach, but according to Helen, "it seems like every department in the organization is pushing stuff down on the teachers." Many voices results in more work for the classroom teaching staff, and as lead teachers, it becomes their job to get their EA's to also meet these demands: "I would say to my girls, 'We can

do this—we can do this' and they would get frustrated" said Helen. It's difficult to enact

a democratic process within the confines of a hierarchical structure. The teachers have

the most direct contact with the children and families that reflect CCELP's mission, and

yet within the hierarchy, they are on the bottom. This is true of most schools. According

to Coyle (1997):

> Few actually teach; the majority spend their days . . . addressing student
> disciplinary problems and daily building routines. Their major contact with
> the classroom teacher and student consists of processing cut slips. If class
> sizes increase, if students have varying learning styles and critical emotional
> or academic needs, if there are insufficient or outdated texts, administrators have
> little hands-on connection with that reality. Their work remains quite separate
> from the work of the classroom. (p. 236)

Coyle is speaking about K-12 schools in general. Although preschool programs such as

CCELP are designed slightly differently, the separation between administration and

classrooms is still felt—and teachers feel on the bottom of the hierarchical structure.

Their support staff is willing and able to assist them, but the democratic ideal of having

so many voices involved in the decision making process of caring for children results in

delegation of work rather than collective and collaborative work from all those involved.

Each level appears to have its own stressors, but that stress remains trapped and specific

to the level within the structure. The ideal of democratic decision making conflicts with

the physical structure of the organizational model. Administrators are often aware of this

separation. Sharon said visiting the classrooms are "a double-edged sword" because

visiting classrooms given her station as the organization's Chief Operating Officer,

causes teachers react to her presence as a "supervisory thing."

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**Poverty and Lack of Education.**

> For both these leaders, the vision of a just and peaceful planet rested on universal access to basic necessities. FDR and MLK recognized that when people go hungry, when they don't have a decent place to live, when they can't get access to transportation or medical attention—much less an education or vocation—they are not truly free. (Smiley, 2013, p.6)

I chose to open with this passage by Smiley because it captures the essence of the disparity we face in the United States when trying to create a free and just society with obvious inequalities in our midst. Many policymakers believe in schools as "The Great Equalizers," and although it is possible to come from poverty and grow up to succeed, choosing to ignore the way poverty impacts children is not helping us get any closer to the desired outcomes.  In fact, argues Ladd (2012), current policy initiatives:

> . . . are misguided because they either deny or set to the side a basic body of evidence documenting that students from disadvantaged households on average perform less well in school than those from advantaged households. . . . Moreover, such policies have the potential to do serious harm.
> Addressing the educational challenges faced by children from disadvantaged families will require a broader and bolder approach to education policy than the recent efforts to reform schools. (p.204)

President Obama said in his remarks on NCLB says that, "It's not who their parents are or how much money they have. It's who their teacher is." As optimistic as that statement is, it does what Ladd cautions—"such policies have the potential to do serious harm." They deny or ignore the harsh realities of children living in poverty. Carmen vividly sketches this reality for us:

> I have never, in the sixteen years I've been with CCELP, been around
>
> children and families that are in *so* much need. . . . I would go into these
>
> apartments. They're in these one bedroom apartments with four or five kids,
>
> and one bedroom—one bed, and the living  room—some living rooms just

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have chairs, folding chairs, so they could sit, and some have their dining table

in their living room to have enough room to eat. . . . Some were two families

in one apartment in one, two bedroom apartment, and I'm telling you, the

apartments are like—probably from here to that pole which includes the

kitchen, the living room, and bedrooms. It was just a rude awakening to see

how they live.

Carmen's granddaughter enjoys a playroom all to herself. My own daughter and I have

read together every night since she was able to sit still. She currently takes piano, violin,

and private math lessons. Ten out of the twelve months of the year, she participates in a

city choir.  During the autumn and spring seasons, she also plays soccer—and during the

winter, basketball. Each of these opportunities provides her with experiences that enrich

her living and learning conditions. Every one of them except reading requires a fee, and

because I work a traditional 8-5 job behind a desk, I also have the emotional and physical

opportunity to end each evening in a shared reading activity. According to Carmen's

account, many of the families she works with are comprised of homes with parents

earning five dollars an hour under the table—their jobs are far from 8-5, and they

certainly aren't sitting behind a desk. These are labor intensive positions with long and

irregular hours, and so even when they are off, these parents are emotionally, physically,

and intellectually spent. Add to that the fact that many of them are also second-language

learners with little education, and the opportunities for the home enrichment shrink

dramatically.  If you place one of Carmen's students in a classroom next to my daughter

or someone with a home-life similar to hers, there's obvious inequality. And this

inequality necessarily impacts the educational outcomes.

**Language/Citizenship Barriers.**

Most of Carmen's students were dual language learners. As an organization,

CCELP recognizes the need to acquire more bi-/multilingual teaching staff, but the

specific language/citizenship barriers faced by migrant families was assumed under the

larger umbrella of poverty. This lack of attention to the specialized needs of this portion

of CCELP's family population is problematic. It does not mirror the general message of

social justice the organization sends. Children who are asked to learn in an environment

where their home language is not acknowledged are being sent a message about fairness

and equality.  When an element is absent or shunned from the learning environment it can

be said to cast a negative shadow. According to Uhrmacher (1997), "curricula have

shadows because any chosen  curriculum privileges a certain way of knowing and being

and at least by implication often castigates other ways of knowing and being" (p.320).

Spanish-speakers, in particular, are asked to stand in this shade of gray. As of

2009, "more than thirty percent of the children in Head Start speak a home language

other than English" (Office of HS, 2009, p.1), and 26% of that population is Spanish-

speaking:

> *The Head Start Child Outcomes Framework* (2000) offers a guide for the ongoing
> assessment of the progress and accomplishments of children and includes
> Congressionally-mandated indicators for English-language learners to
> demonstrate progress in listening to and understanding English as well as
> progress in speaking English. *The Improving Head Start for Readiness Act
> 2007* also requires that programs support a child's progress across other domains
> of learning and development, including progress made through the use of
> culturally and linguistically appropriate instructional services. (p.1)

Dual-language learners are continually being asked to "progress across other domains of

learning and development" alongside and comparably to their English-only speaking

peers. Congress has mandated that children in Head Start "demonstrate progress in listening to and understanding English as well as progress in speaking English."

According to Nieto (1999), the United States rationalizes the push for English-only as "necessary for political and social cohesion and for academic success (Crawford, 1992)" (p.60). The assumptions being made that lead to congressionally-mandated policies concerning dual-language learning is that the acquisition of fluency in English will dismantle the barriers toward academic success. However, Nieto (1999) posits that "schools create and perpetuate inequality through policies and practices, including the pressure to assimilate" (p.63).

**Differentiation vs. Widely Held Expectations.**

Lucille: My approach is the way it's supposed to be is that you're individualizing. But to come up with thirty-three separate activities every week for each child is a little hard to do, and I don't know if anybody actually can accommodate that.

Carmen: I create as I go with that child depending on what his behavioral needs are. You have to. I mean, you can't—every single person is a different person. They're not all the same, so you can't use— you can use a guideline, but you're going to have to sway from it for that child.

Sunny: This is going to benefit *this child*. He's going to get things that I could not give him.

Annie: When you're handed a curriculum, it's nice to have, but I believe, in our class especially . . . if a kid's interested in cars, and I want to

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> use cars to get our GOLD things done, or whatever that interest is,
>
> but the curriculum doesn't leave any flexibility open for that, it
>
> [would] be frustrating.

Most of the participants in this study had something to say concerning differentiated instruction vs. widely held expectations. According to HS federal mandates, teachers should assist their students in achieving "progress within each [Framework] domain element, recognizing that the rate of progress and the form it takes will vary depending on factors that affect individual children" (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010, p.3). The equality messages inherent in this statement are that "progress in each domain" is a desired outcome for providing equality to all children. At the same time, "recognizing rate of progress and forms it takes vary among individual children." With this statement, we return to the original idea of democracy as the preservation of individual rights to achieve social justice. Perhaps there is no contradiction between the two—perhaps individualization and differentiation is simply the means to achieving the Framework goals of the collective. Tomlinson (2000) describes the way these two approaches to teaching rub against one another in the minds of teachers:

> Teachers feel as though they are torn in opposing directions: They are
> admonished to attend to student differences, but they must ensure that
> every student becomes competent in the same subject matter and can demonstrate
> the competencies on an assessment that is differentiated neither in form nor in
> time constraints. (p.7)

Tomilson validates the perceived dichotomy between standardization and differentiated instruction, but she believes:

> There is no contradiction between effective standards-based instruction and
> differentiation. Curriculum tells us what to teach: Differentiation tells us how.
> Thus, if we elect to teach a standards-based curriculum, differentiation simply

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suggests ways in which we can make that curriculum work best for varied
learners. In other words, differentiation can show us how to teach
the same standard to a range of learners by employing a variety of teaching and
learning modes. (p.9)

For Tomilson, differentiation is a pedagogical approach and standards are the end goal.

Teachers can use what they know about individual learners to create curriculum based on

varied needs, but the standard is the guide. This makes perfect logical sense—except

when it comes time to assess whether or not a school is providing all students with a

quality education. As described in Chapter 2, like other forms of high stakes testing,

Head Start organizations are required to compete for funding if they cannot demonstrate

alignment with the Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework.

According to Popham (2001) there are "suitable roles for standardized achievement tests,

but these roles do not include evaluating the instructional quality of (1) individual

teachers or (2) the entire educational staff of a school" (p.39). He explains further that:

> The really troubling element of labeling schools as "inferior" is that in many
> instances those labels are just plain wrong. The staff of a "failing" school may
> actually have been doing a superlative instructional job, but their efforts did not
> get reflected by students' scores on the wrong high-stakes achievement test. (p.
> 18)

Head Start Performance standards are not assessing the individual progress of students

according to the Framework Domains, but organizations as a whole are losing their

funding when they are assessed as underperforming. These performance ratings do

include the delivery of standardized areas of instruction including "language and literacy

development, cognition and general knowledge, approaches toward learning, physical

well-being and motor development, and social and emotional development" (HS

Performance Standards, 2010, 700030). What is continually left out of this discussion,

however, is the inherent differences in children themselves. Noddings (2013) makes the

clear statement:

> Children are not equal in their capacity for academic learning, and a universal, academic curriculum may well aggravate academic differences. A richer, more varied curriculum might help students find out what they are suited to do and also to do and also to respect the wonderful differences in talent that they should be encouraged to see in their classmates. Even within a particular course, there should be a balance between common learning and individualized units and topics that provide students with opportunities to exercise their special talents and interests on related work. (Equality, para. 18)

It is no more wrong to recognize cognitive and interest differences in people as it is to

recognize their unique ethnic and cultural differences. Just like color blindness and color

muteness, this failure to recognize individuals for their individual and unique differences

only results in the further victimization of those the current system of blanket fairness is

attempting to provide for.

**Social/Emotional/Behavioral/Special Needs Factor.**

Russian Psychologist, Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky was one of the first

researchers to conduct in-depth analyses of special needs children. Ironically, he is used

both to defend the belief in specialized education and full inclusion of children with

disabilities. According to Kozulin and Gindis (2007), the:

> . . . obvious contradiction in Vygotsky's position reflects the inherent controversy over the very notion of inclusion: how to address special need in general school environments; how to integrate specialized and generalized teaching methodologies; and how to escape separation in a "closed society" and attend to exceptional individual demands at the same time (see Kauffman & Hallahan, 1995). (p.351)

All teacher participants in this study confided a struggle to meet the individual demands of children with special needs—especially those children with exceptionally challenging behavior. According to the least restrictive environment (LRE) provision in IDEA:

> Special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only if the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily. (34 CRF § 300.114 (a)(2)(ii)

The teaching staff in this study demonstrated a genuine attempt to attend to each of their children's needs, but the result was Lucille feeling as though she spent too many days attending to just the one child with the most severe needs. Sunny said every year, violent behavioral needs children are increasing in severity. This violence resulted in her having to choose between attending to the boy with Autism's needs or the one with violent behavioral needs because their proximity to one another would result in them "literally going at one another." Helen told the story of the severe behavioral needs child she had for two consecutive years who had been transferred four times before he came to her. Through love and perseverance, she felt as though she saw a breakthrough in him, but the more successful she is with children and families with severe support needs, the heavier the load she receives. Over the last few years she's had as many as six children in her classroom at any given time with IEPs. This may not have been what Vygotsky had in mind. According to Kozulin and Gindis (2007) in Vygotsky's later works, he argued that:

> Special education should be provided in a specially designed setting where the entire staff is able to exclusively serve the individual needs of a child with a disability. It should be a special system that employs its own specific methodologies because students with disabilities require modified and alternative methods of teaching. (p.351)

CCELP's potential solution to the difficulties teachers face when attempting to reach students with severe needs is to place them in the Stepping Stones classroom where they receive intensive remediation in hopes that doing so will result in successful transitioning either back into the regular preschool classroom or into kindergarten. In this setting they have specialized staff working collaboratively alongside the teaching staff. As discussed previously, the two things preventing the increased use of this model is its expense and its conflict with the ideas of inclusion.

However, when it comes to the special needs of gifted and talented students, the preferred method of instruction is not inclusion, but rather specialized differentiation programs: "gifted students need to work together in flexibly grouped settings to maximize all aspects of their talent development process. Just as gifted students have special needs, they also have special responsibilities to each other and their world" (Klimis & VanTassel-Baska, 2013, p.173). This was the argument made behind the development of self-contained middle schools for the gifted in Florida. Entire schools are dedicated to meeting high-end needs of specially gifted children. Societal value conflicts concerning equality result in these two varied approaches.

### Neglect & Abuse of Those Most Vulnerable.

> *The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is the government's principal agency for protecting the health of all Americans and providing essential human services, especially for those who are least able to help themselves.*
>
> —U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

One of the most difficult aspects to this study for me as a researcher was hearing about the abuse and extreme poverty the CCELP staff deals with on a regular basis. As a

free, democratic nation, we believe in the obligation we have to our fellow citizens—

"especially [to] those who are least able to help themselves." Every participant had a hard

story to tell—Carmen's boy in foster care who begged her to take him home with her;

Sunny's little one whose father was kicking him in the groin; Annie's account of the boy

with a mouthful of painful cavities; Katjanna's retelling of bruises and burns. Inherent in

the work they do to educate children is the difficult task of making decisions on behalf of

their children.

A nation that believes in equality and human dignity of all people necessarily

assumes the obligation to assist those who are powerless to help themselves. This

obligation supersedes the desire to get the children kindergarten ready. Teachers who are

put in this position make the call to DHS knowing that it may result in the removal of the

child from his or her home—and therefore, removal from their own care as their

classroom teacher. A child who comes in hungry will be fed—even if it means missing

the daily lesson. For some staff, such as Annie, this obligation is affirmed by religious

conviction.

Equality conflicts between academic instruction and health and safety have a clear

winner—health and safety. For those instances where it isn't clear whether neglect or

abuse is taking place, a teacher such as Sunny, might still trade a lesson in counting for a

lesson in standing up for your own rights and learning to communicate your own needs.

**The Importance of the Teacher.**

> *I work in an area that is rough—really rough, and each year,*
> *I have no less than twelve IEPs in the two classrooms together.*
> *Between behaviors—and Autism—and speech—and motor.*
> *There's a lot of work there—and it's hard work.*

—Helen

US Secretary, Arne Duncan (2009), says this about teachers:

> [Thomas] Jefferson reminds us that ordinary people can do extraordinary things. They can help bridge the gap between the world as it is—and the world as it should be.
>
> And so it is that great teachers do extraordinary things—I believe they are absolutely the unsung heroes of our society. There is a reason why so many people remember a favorite teacher, even decades later. A great teacher can change the course of a student's life. They light a lifelong curiosity, a desire to explore, and a hunger for knowledge. It's no surprise that studies repeatedly document that the single biggest influence on student achievement is the quality of the teacher standing in the front of the classroom—not socioeconomic status, not family background, but the quality of the teacher at the head of the class. (n.p.)

This continued belief that socioeconomic status and family background pales in comparison to the quality of a teacher when it comes to children's later success in life is among the most dangerous being held. It was Horace Mann who is credited with the originating idea that education is "the great equalizer," but that idea was made in the context of access to education. It is absolutely true that education, especially post-secondary education, provides people with access to a better quality of living. That idea, however, should not be applied to ideas concerning student performance. The teacher cannot solely eradicate the effects of poverty, neglect, abuse, or special needs. And each of these social factors does put teachers in equity conflicts. This is not to diminish the beauty of a teacher who loves her job and strives to do it well.

* * *

According to the data collected in this study, accountability measures direct the pedagogical approaches undertaken within CCELP's classrooms only to the extent that genuine attempts are made to follow Performance Standards and help children meet the Childhood Framework Outcomes. However, when those accountability measures are challenged by the day-to-day demands of the children's immediate needs, the accountability measures no longer direct the pedagogy. Teachers are daily put into instances of negotiation, and this causes each of them a great deal of stress, but they rely upon their core values about equality in general when making these decisions. If the conflict involves the question of health and safety, the default is to first care for the child's emotional, behavioral, and physical needs before his or her cognitive needs.

**3. What is the educational outcome of the way differing theories of equality sometimes collide (or fail to collide) within classrooms?**

**Observational Domain**

In this study, I had the opportunity to observe two teachers over three days and shadow one family advocate as she visited multiple classrooms at one center in her assigned caseload. In this Domain, I identify four areas where equality values appeared in conflict with one another.

**Differentiation vs. Widely Held Expectations.**

In Ms. Tammy's classroom, it was evident that widely held expectations directed the non-health and safety norms of the classroom. Differentiation for individual interest or ability was not observed. However, small group differentiation was still offered as a value message to children within the classroom. Groups of children were asked to wait

patiently for their turn at identifying letters while others were engaged in centers activities. Some children watched play dough being made while others got "first dibs" on the new toys in the housekeeping center. Each of these instances is a reflection of differentiation within small groups of children.

However, to some evaluators, Tammy's pedagogical approach may have been rated low due to "inefficiency of time management." In some ways, Tammy's approach resulted in unfair treatment of individual students—if individual needs had been held higher than the widely held expectations. The children at the play dough table spent the majority of their time waiting. They waited for Ms. Tammy to finish with the other children's attempts to match letters; then they waited for the play dough to be made; then they waited for it to cool; when they finally began playing with it, the timer went off and some of them then had to give up their time at the play dough table to switch to the housekeeping center. These curricula choices by Tammy carried with them a shadow.

**Language/Citizenship Barriers.**

In Tammy's classroom, while waiting for the play dough magic to begin, two of the girls at the table were speaking Spanish. Ms Tammy's EAs spoke Spanish and were able to communicate with the children. The opposite was true in Ms. Regina's classroom. In Ms. Regina's classroom, one child was deaf, and the teachers struggled to communicate with her using their limited knowledge of sign language. In addition, one Spanish speaking child attached herself to me and began addressing me with Mamá. These two incidents are evidence of the failure of equality theories' to collide. Language barriers in this particular classroom are not held as core values of equity. This failure of collision was also evident in the narrative with Sharon and may be symptomatic of a

larger attitude within CCELP concerning language needs and was corroborated by Carmen's attitude toward the organization's treatment of the Spanish speaking population. The educational outcome of this failure of CCELP's to address language barriers is that some students do not receive the same quality education as those capable of speaking/hearing the English spoken by teachers and the children's peers.

### Poverty and Lack of Education.

While visiting Regina's classroom I observed hungry children—hungry children whose mood changed dramatically pre-/post- eating. The equality theory concerning the right of every child to have their basic needs met collided with the educational framework outcomes. According to Sharon, CCELP's philosophy gives teachers the flexibility to postpone the lesson in this situation. When it was a matter of treating hunger vs. participation in centers, Regina deferred to meeting the hungry child's basic needs. This was a single observation, but it can be assumed that this situation is not entirely unique for the teachers.

### Individual vs. Collective.

In my time with Stacy, I found myself in my own confrontation with equality theory. In her interaction with the father who was avoiding her home visit, Stacy's adherence to the collective mission of delivering support to Head Start children took precedence. There was no collision of equality theories except for the one I myself felt. I was not obligated to the collective, so my belief in the rights of individual children to be seen and heard took precedence and directed my own actions. The older sister did not belong to Stacy's caseload, and therefore no obligation was felt by Stacy to acknowledge her. However, the failure to recognize the older sister may have impacted the father's

feelings toward Stacy, and therefore, there could be an educational outcome impacted by the failure of collision. This is only an assumption, however, and was not directly observed.

**Support Staff Domain**

Although Stacy, as a Family Advocate, is also considered support staff, I chose to move the data collected from my time with her into the Observational Domain because of the opportunity I had to observe her as she interacted with families. This left me with two support staff—Katjanna, a CCELP Nurse, and Amy, a Teacher Mentor/Coach. In this Domain, I identify two themes related to the educational outcomes of the way equality theories collide or fail to collide within classrooms.

### Poverty and Lack of Education.

Katjanna displayed the most poignant description of equality collision in her account of poverty. "*And* the family—they have to have a good family life to be able to learn" she explains. She recognizes her own inherent conflicts with this statement, fearing that there may be a hint of negative judgment to it. For families living below the poverty level, "it's not always so easy for them to have a good home life," and Katjanna sees this quality of living as having a direct impact on the educational outcomes of children. As Americans dedicated to valuing the rights of all, we frown upon the negative judgment of those with less means than others. On the other hand, as previously examined, we also believe there is an obligation as a society to care for those with less. This is a collision of equality theories because the belief in equals among equals would not leave room for one

class to either judge or assume the power over another class. On the other hand, judgment is necessary when determining whether a group of people are "unable to help themselves," and therefore in need of assistance.

**The Importance of the Teacher.**

Amy said it best when she said:

It's not easy to be a Head Start teacher because there *are* a lot of qualifications that you have to have. And there *are* a lot of regulations. And there *are* a lot of— the *Framework*, and *the standards*, and the *curricula*—Oh, my Lord. You gotta be tough. You have to be tough, and you have to be organized, and you have to know what you're doing.

As a researcher, I walk away from this study humbled by the work of these caring women. They are not adequately compensated for the work they do. In fact, because the majority of the funding for Head Start comes from federal funds, regulations about spending are attached to those funds. Head Start teachers do not receive raises. The only times these teachers see a pay raise is if there is a federally-mandated cost of living increase (last one happened three years ago according to Helen and Lucille) or if the teachers obtain a higher level of education.

Unfortunately, because of the fiscal restrictions placed upon the organization, increased level of education often results in the loss of good teachers because CCELP cannot compete with district pay scales. Does this have an impact on the educational outcomes of children?—possibly. It can only be speculated that more qualified teachers would positively impact the educational outcomes for children, but in this study, I was

fortunate to secure the voluntary participation of teachers who had a long history of

dedication to, and love of, their jobs, despite the difficulties they continue to face while

negotiating the many demands being made of them.

* * *

The educational outcomes for students when equality theories collide or fail to

collide are observable. Although my focus in this study was on the conceptualization and

discourse surrounding equality, I was able to directly observe the way educator

conceptualizations of equality affected the pedagogical/interpersonal decisions made

while interacting with children and families. A second study could be conducted with

lengthier observational time to uncover more of this complexity.

**4. What are the potential implications of contradictory perceptions of equality on**

**the American public education system?**

As Davies (1999) posits:

> . . . this is perhaps the nature of the beast: democracy is not a single definable
> entity but the broad term for a set of political processes towards the end of justice,
> prosperity and peace. The role of education within these processes is similarly—
> and by definition—diverse and contested. (p.128)

Democracy is waterlogged with abundantly varied conceptualizations about equity, and

schools are where the contradiction of these concepts rise to the surface. According to

Eisner (1998 ), the educational researcher's responsibility is not to come up with

prescriptions for practitioners, but rather to problematize issues in a way that encourages

further reflection and debate. I haven't conceived of the solutions to all the problems

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facing educators—but what I do know is that the system of education is burdened greatly by these contradictions, and our failure to look at the consequences for teaching and learning is misguided at best and unjust at its worst.

This study examines the destructive power of equality myths. Nowhere in our lived experience is equality, as we hope to conceive of it as a nation devoted to social justice theory, materialized. Breaking it down to its simplest form, the word equal means "same." Equivalent fractions are differing representations of the *same* quantity. Using a homey American anecdote, you might have two siblings arguing over the last warm, chocolaty cookie. Mom proposes a fair solution: "One of you slices; the other gets to choose her half." Cultural narratives explaining the concept of fairness are inextricably tied to equality where differences are delivered in a way that somehow makes them the same. But let's reexamine the previous two examples: in the first example, the equivalent fractions equal the same quantities, but it does not make them the same.

When my daughter was first learning fractions, I bought fraction blocks to help her visualize the concept. One whole red block was lined up next to two smaller pink blocks that when stacked, measured the same height and area. Not only were the equivalencies different in color, but the stacked halves contained a fissure. Stacking them did not really transform them into one solid block—the crease dividing them was still visible, and when pressure was applied, they broke apart—unlike the one solid red block. They were not the same. They simply *represented* the concept of equal quantities.

In the second example, the result of two halves of a cookie may result in both children receiving equally moist mouthfuls, but there is the issue of deciding who gets to

slice and who gets to choose. How will this decision be made? Rock, paper, scissors? Someone is still bound to be the one with the power of making those halves equivalent. The fair solution contains power struggle which never ends in equality.

One last illustration—in athletic competitions all kinds of provisions are made in an attempt to make the competition fair. In a soccer game, captains line up next to a referee. The referee tosses a coin, and the person who wins the coin toss gets to choose whether or not their team wants first kick-off or gets to choose which side of the field to start on. These provisions make the game fair, but they do not guarantee the same conditions. If first kick-off and first field direction did not have the potential for unequal advantage, there wouldn't be a need for the coin toss. Players negotiate these differences. If the sun is in an unfavorable position, if the wind is blowing in one direction, if teams are stronger offensively than they are defensively . . . all these differences remain differences, but they are differences we accept as part of the game.

There simply is no such thing as a level playing field. That does not mean our efforts to control for differences that cause unfair disadvantage are not commendable and worth further examination. But we must see the inherent differences as differences. Just as colorblindness can invalidate the cultural identities of the individuals it intends to offer social justice, ignorance of the social, economic, behavioral, cognitive impacts on the ideal of a democratic, egalitarian system of education does more harm than good. One of the most salient citations regarding this intentional misdirection is found in Noddings' (2013) latest work:

> If democracy means to try to make all children equal or all men equal, it
> means to fight nature, and in that fight democracy is sure to be defeated.

there is no such thing among men as equality of nature, of capacity for training, or of intellectual power. (Eliot cited in Noddings, Chapter 3, Equality and Anti-Intellectualism, para. 5)

In referring to the above quote, Noddings (2013) stresses that "not recognizing this truth about human beings actually puts our democracy at risk" and says further that, "Forcing all students into a common curriculum at the high school level might indeed put our democracy at risk" (Chapter 3, "Equality and Anti-Intellectualism, paras. 5-6). Children, families, and teachers are all victims of this unintentional harm. Children and families living in poverty, especially those without citizenship or post-secondary educations, are powerless in this scenario. The only victims who have access to the power of changing the current situation are teachers.

## Call to Action

Critical theorists, Antonia Darder and Luis Mirón (2006) have harsh words for the present state of education. In their own call to action, they state an imperative for "critical pedagogical ideas and practices in the interest of democratic schooling" emphasizing that these efforts "must be central . . . to confront the powerlessness and uncertainty that is so much the reality in many public schools today"(pp. 11-12). They too attempt to paint a portraiture of teaching and learning conditions in contemporary American schools:

> Classroom teachers laboring in precarious conditions characterized by intense concentrations of poverty with inadequate preparation to meet the needs of their students find themselves in the most unenviable position. These teachers are besieged daily by the demands of the state to raise student achievement, while they struggle with the social and material realities of widespread inequality. (p.12)

The question must be posed—why? Why are teachers willing to "labor in precarious conditions?" Why put yourself in an unenviable position where you will be "besieged

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daily by the demands of the state?" Who in their right mind signs up for this kind of a life? Well, me for one. All seven teacher participants in this study: Carmen, Lucille, Sunny, Annie, Helen, Tammy, Regina. . . .My own daughter. Despite watching me struggle to meet the demands of the job and care for the children who entered my life one year at a time, my oldest daughter has decided to join the ranks.

I care deeply about the field of education. I believe myself to be an educational connoisseur, and I want to see the field make positive changes. More than that, I want to see teachers regain their rights to exercise professional judgment without fear of retribution from those who sit in business suits far removed from the realities of the classroom.

One of the first actions we should take is to consider Michael Apple's (2009) argument that gender classifications have implications on this discussion. I found it rather interesting at first that everyone I met at CCELP (with the exception of the transportation technicians) was female, but I really didn't ponder this as a factor contributing to the contradictions of equality. Apple (2009) expounds upon the folly of this oversight:

> Yet teachers are not only classed actors. They are gendered actors as well—
> something that is too often neglected by investigators. This is a significant
> omission. A striking conclusion is evident from the analyses of proletarianization.
> In every occupational category, women are more apt to be proletarianized than
> men. This could be because of sexist practices of recruitment and promotion,
> the general tendency to care less about the conditions under which women labor,
> the way capital has historically colonized patriarchal relations, the historical
> relation between teaching and domesticity, and so on. Whatever the reason, it is
> clear that a given position may be more or less proletarianized depending on its
> relationship to the sexual division of labor. (p.200)

Apple is correct—the issue of gender is a significant omission. Preschool teachers can be classed even further down than elementary teachers. Although the top two positions in

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CCELP are also held by women, the nature of the work of caring for the most vulnerable

children and families in society can easily be labeled as a domestic instinct toward care.

Nel Noddings (2005) confirms this belief when she challenges society to envision a more

caring approach to schooling:

> The new education I envision puts a very high valuation on the traditional
> occupations of women. Care for children, the aged, and the ill must be shared by
> all capable adults, not just women, and everyone should understand that these
> activities bring special joys as well as burdens. (p.51 )

Joy as well as burden is what enables teachers to push on in the face of obstacles.

Everyone I spoke to in this study—not one exception—said she loved her job. These

women came to and have stayed in their positions for decades in some cases. Decades.

Their commitment is admirable, and yet they get "questioned on everything."

Policymakers call for more accountability giving the impression that the profession is in

need of more accountability—even despite mounting research suggesting the approach

and the concepts generating them are flawed:

> Standardised tests are used for what policy makers call 'accountability', that is,
> they are used to hold schools and teachers accountable for the achievement of all
> students, rich and poor alike. . . . The view of learning and assessment on which
> this whole agenda is based is a profoundly impoverished one. Worse, the agenda
> implies that if rich and poor children are simply exposed to the same texts and
> facts in school, they will all 'pass the test' and problems of equity will thereby be
> taken care of.  (Gee, 2003, p.27)

Again, I pose the question why? Or better yet, how? How is it that many fine minds have

researched and written about the flawed assumptions of accountability and equity, yet it

continues to not just continue, but intensify? Each year, states are proposing more severe

consequences for failure of schools to meet accountability standards imposed. How/why

does this continue to happen in the face of persuasive evidence suggesting the negative

impact on education? The answer lies in the language being used.

## Core Deconstruction: Conclusion

At the risk of invalidating the entire study by referencing a *Star Trek* metaphor,

the allusion is too appropriate to neglect. In the series, space travel is made possible

because of a warp core engine. The warp core generates energy through the annihilation

of two contradictory elements—matter and antimatter. Returning now to my theoretical

and conceptual frameworks of postmodernism and critical theory. According to the

general guidelines of each framework, tensions between meanings, whether located

within the contexts of culture or language, have the potential to emancipate new ways of

seeing—if we are willing to recognize, acknowledge, the way they collide. The collision

creates a conduit through which the force of a breaking with the past becomes necessary.

Or, in Trekian terms, potential is created when the opposition of two extremes is forced

to the point of breaking. This is how I understand deconstruction.

Much like Uhrmacher's Shadow Curriculum, the potential lies not in overlooking,

remaining ignorant to the negative, but rather by facing it full on to reveal its unforeseen

potential. Deconstruction takes it even further. Deconstruction follows the trail of signs

where one conceptual symbol defers to another until there is an impassable edge—its

aporia. When this happens, the impassable edge makes possible the generation of the

beginning and the potential for newly realized understanding—even if the concepts

themselves (or the words we use) are not new, it is the possibility of divergent thinking

that is emancipated. Perhaps one of the most obscure passages in Derrida's (1978) essay, "Force and Signification" attempts to give words to this string from one-to-the-other-to the-aporia-to-the-new-and-to-the-start:

> It will be necessary to descend, to work, to bend, in order to engrave and carry the new Tables to the valleys, in order to read them and have them read. Writing is the outlet as the descent of meaning outside itself within itself: metaphor-for-others-aimed-at-others-here-and-now, metaphor as the possibility of others here-and-now, metaphor as metaphysics in which Being must hide itself if the other is to appear. Excavation within the other toward the other in which the same seeks its vein and the true gold of its phenomenon. (p.29)

It's impossible to attempt to fully understand that passage—and even more impossible to attempt to explain it, but there are essential concepts trapped within the abundance:

1) To descent, to work, to bend so we can seek to more genuinely gain equitable conditions for the field of teaching & learning. We must see the consequences of our policies and be willing to descent, to work, to bend, and to correct our mistakes.

2) Writing is essential. Researchers must continue the work. Researchers should not be content to just report—we are in positions of power. More researchers should take on the task of becoming change agents.

3) The use of metaphor is a powerful tool not to be overlooked. Multiple forms of representation present multiple vantage points. We must look beyond the boundaries of traditionally held ideas about what counts as research.

4) We must emancipate new meaning, allow it to emerge, by having the courage to break with the old perceptions of core values. There is no level playing field, and there will likely not be such a thing in our lifetime. Therefore, we

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must be willing to break our current perceptions of equality to make the way for new meaning. Until then, we must accept that equality decisions are the result of internal negotiations of value. We therefore must return power to individual teachers and help teacher supervisors/administrators recognize the merits of negotiation.

My aim in this study was to facilitate the boundary breaking of that which I hold most dear. I can only hope that my individual insight may help others:

> . . . grasp relationships among seemingly discrete events. It may also enable him [or her] to recognize incongruities or gaps in accepted explanations or descriptions. As he [or she] recognizes these gaps, his [or her] imagination may come into play and enable him [or her] to generate images or ideas (or both) useful for closing the gaps. (Eisner, 2005, Chapter 1, "Types of Creativity")

The children, families, and teachers described in this study, and in the countless contexts not studied, deserve our courage. Educational researchers have an important part to play—even if at the end of it all, their interpretations are contested. To recognize the gaps and incongruities in accepted explanations is no small task. Divergent thinking that taps into the imagination holds a potential that has not yet come to pass. No one study has the potential to change the trajectory of something so large and complex as education and schooling. But I am convinced that equality, as it is currently tossed around in educational discourse, is a myth, and its power is destructive. The power behind the perpetuation of this myth has serious implications for the American public education system.

In this study, I attempted to take the signifiers back as far as I was able to. Moving from the specifics to the general, I also attempted to identify what we might describe as universal in the conceptualization of equality schooling (the core

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phenomenon). To this I say the universal is the intention. The aim of equality in schooling is to provide for all citizens in a way most or all can agree is fair.

Is it possible to isolate and identify pressures that directly influence the day-to-day actions of educators while they seek to adhere to the phenomenon? (causal conditions). Yes, it is possible to see where these pressures emerge, but it is not yet apparent how we must proceed.

What conscious strategies are undertaken in this process by educators and/or administrators? (strategies). Unfortunately, we circle back to where we began—we see that individual perceptions of the core phenomenon affect the strategies undertaken. However, most of the participants in this study did appear to have a common default—when health and safety was at stake.

And what effect does the phenomenon have on American students in public education? (consequences). The consequences are great. Some students are not allowed to pursue their individual interests and have their individual needs truly met by the systems currently in place. Matters of individual vs. collective and differentiation vs. widely held expectations are continually vying for power in our educational system. These contradictory pressures are further aggravated by social factors of poverty, citizenship, language barriers, and lack of education. Until we come to better negotiate who has the power to make decisions in the interest of the children in our schools, there will always be winners and losers. What we have to ask ourselves, as a society, is do we believe children should suffer the consequences of this kind of Race to the Top?

The women of CCELP taught me a great deal, but the most significant impression I walk away with is inspiration to continue to exercise my own power as a researcher and contribute my voice to the ongoing discussion.

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APPENDIX A

Letter of Invitation to Participate in CPCD Collaborative Research

Dear _____ (teacher, staff, administrator):

I have been an active volunteer for CPCD for the last two years. Concurrently, I have also been studying toward completion of a doctoral degree in education from the University of Denver. As part of my doctoral dissertation research, I will be expanding my role from just a volunteer to a collaborative researcher and have chosen CPCD as my research site. My intent is to document and describe the multiple demands on early education facilitators, and to help inform the organization with possible insights into understanding, and potentially minimizing, educator burnout.

I am hoping to get as many voices involved as I can from various departments in the organization. Diversity of perspectives and insights is what I am seeking so I can better understand the way the many facilitators of early education perceive and handle the goals and philosophies  put in their charge. I would love to work with you, and I hope you will consider this research opportunity. Participation in the process will not be labor-intensive. I am primarily interested in setting up a couple of informal interviews and if possible, some observation time as you go about managing your role in the organization. I would also love to familiarize myself with any products you have created to better serve your own needs either in the classroom or with individual students.

I look forward to hearing from you and greatly appreciate your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jenn Gutiérrez
jenn.gutierr@gmail.com
719.594.6225

APPENDIX B
**Consent to Participate in Research**
**Purpose and Background**

   The purpose of this study is to uncover potential competing demands placed on educators, and in particular, early education facilitators at CPCD. As part of this study, the researcher seeks permission to interview, observe, and examine artifacts (i.e., documents created for the use of meeting goals, posters, or any activities designed to meet the needs of individual students, etc.). The researcher is seeking participation from various personnel throughout the organization including teachers, support staff, and administrators. Participation in this study will occur over an eight to ten week period sometime between February, 2013 and December, 2013.

   The researcher conducting the study is a doctoral candidate in the Curriculum & Instruction Program at the University of Denver. She is a two-year veteran volunteer for CPCD, so she is familiar with the organization's mission. She has fifteen years of teaching experience at both the college and middle school levels. This research project is part of her doctoral dissertation.

   If after participating in the study, you have and concerns or complaints about the way you were treated, you may contact Paul Olk, Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at 303-871-453, or you may email du-irb@du.edu , Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208-2121.

**Consent and Procedures**

   With my consent, I will be agreeing to be interviewed  and/or observed at agreed upon times. I understand that I will be asked for at least two interviews, each lasting no more than 45 minutes. Additional interviews may be granted upon my approval. I expect all information I provide will be handled with confidentiality unless otherwise noted by me. My name will not be revealed in any written documents or in oral presentations of the research findings without my explicit written authorization. However, I am aware that exceptions to the promise of confidentiality include cases where information is revealed concerning suicide, homicide, or child abuse and neglect. In addition, should any information contained in this study become the subject of a court order or lawful subpoena, the University of Denver may need to insist on compliance with the order or subpoena.

   I understand that I have the right to refuse to participate and the right to refuse to answer any particular question or discuss any particular issue during the interview sessions, and further understand that my participation in the research process is voluntary. I have the right to withdraw my participation at any time . If I have any concerns or complaints about the way I was treated, I may contact the University of Denver Institutional Review Board.

**Signatures**

I have read and understand the information provided in this form and voluntarily give my consent to participate in this research study.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Printed name of participant** | **Signature of participant** | **Date** |

APPENDIX C

**Interview Guides**

**Teachers, Support Staff, and Administrators**

These guides are meant to provide a general framework for informal interviews that will

be conducted throughout the research process. I will refrain from using the language of

equality and fairness in the actual questions so as not to bias the responses. Instead, each

question will address intentions and perceptions guiding decision-making.

**Teachers**

1. How long have you been an early childhood educator? Did you work in other facilities/organizations?
2. Can you tell me a little about the group of students you are currently working with? Range of abilities, family demographics, how this class compares with previous classes?
3. I understand that most of the curriculum is predetermined, can you speak a little about your approach to implementation? Is there enough material to cover a day? Too much? Do you have the materials you need to implement the intended curriculum?
4. Please describe your typical day in the classroom.
5. I noticed when X was doing Y that you Z. Can you tell me about your decision making process in that situation?
6. Do you feel as though most students who come through this program become better prepared for Kindergarten? Why? Why not?
7. How do you evaluate your students? Can you walk me through that process?
8. How does family life impact your students' behaviors or achievement in the classroom?
9. Tell me a little about the administrative process here at CPCD? How do new policies get determined and implemented?
10. What do you see as the strengths of the program? Weaknesses?

**Support Staff**

1. How long have you worked for the organization?
2. How do you see your role within the organization?
3. Tell me a little about the activities you find most enjoyable about your role at CPCD?
4. Is there anything you find especially difficult about your role?
5. Please describe your typical day.
6. What is your relationship to administrators and teachers like?
7. What is your impression of the varying levels of abilities and behaviors you see in the children who come through this program?
8. Do you feel well supported in your role at CPCD? How so?
9. I noticed when X was doing Y that you Z. Can you tell me about your decision making process in that situation?
10. What do you see as the strengths of the program? Weaknesses?

**Administrators**

1. How long have you been an administrator for CPC? Why did you choose CPCD to work for?
2. What are the cultural, linguistic, SES, and ethic demographics of the children who are served by CPCD? Do you feel as though these demographic features impact the instructional activities that do or do not go on in the classroom? How so?
3. How is curriculum determined?
4. What role do you have in providing professional development to your teachers and staff?
5. What goals do you have for CPCD?
6. In your view, what makes an effective early childhood educator? What do you look for when you are hiring new staff or teachers?
7. Do you have any formal evaluation process for teachers and staff? Do you undergo any type of evaluation?
8. How does federal policy affect your organization?
9. How does the community affect your organization?
10. What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of the program CPCD provides?
11. What does the future of this program look like?
12. Please describe your typical day.
13. I noticed you X when Y. Can you talk to me about your decision making process in that situation?
14. Do you feel as though you have the support and resources you need to provide the kind of services you hope to provide?
15. How are students admitted to the program?