

ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION/THESIS/RESEARCH PAPER/CREATIVE PROJECT:

Inside Perspectives on Early Childhood Program Quality: A Case Study of
Teacher Beliefs and Embedded Practices

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A cross-case approach was employed to examine early childhood teachers' perspectives on quality of early childhood programs and how they embed those perspectives in their daily classroom practices. Questions explored teachers' education levels, years of experience, and the ways in which their individual perspectives are manifested in the classroom. Three early childhood teachers were interviewed and observed, each with a different level of education: Child Development Associate (CDA) certification, associate's degree in early childhood education, and bachelor's degree in early childhood education. Each teacher worked in a licensed, nationally accredited program that is rated at the highest level of the Indiana quality rating system, Paths to QUALITY (Level 4). Qualitative methods were used, including analysis of teacher surveys and interview transcriptions, as well as CLASS observations. Results indicated

that the three teachers held similar perspectives on the importance of professional development, but they differed on the preferable way to obtain professional development: college education versus in-service training. There was a clear divergence among the teachers regarding the importance of a college degree in relation to manifestations of quality in the classroom. While the three teachers agreed that there is a lack of respect associated with their profession, they did not agree on the reasons behind this lack of respect. Likewise, all three voiced a need for increased support in their roles, but they had varying ideas of what that support should entail. The three teachers also varied in their understanding of the global concept of quality, specifically in regard to the National Association for the Education of Young Children accreditation and the quality rating system. While the teachers holding associate's and bachelor's degrees displayed similar quality implementations, the teacher with a CDA was not observed to apply the same level of quality practices.

This study has implications for practice and for future research. In order to meet professional development needs that can ensure quality practices, teacher education programs and non-formal training agencies need to provide early childhood teachers with professional development opportunities that help them advance their knowledge and link theories to application in the classroom. Opportunities should focus on personal factors and meet the individuality of the early childhood teacher. Policy makers and state administrators need to value the role of the early childhood teacher by providing a classification system that links qualifications to salaries and positions. Compensation initiatives for early childhood teachers should be brought into discussion and linked to

the quality rating system's children and dollars received per program. There is a necessity for future research into the perspectives of early childhood teachers in a cross-case study with teachers who hold an early childhood education/child development bachelor's degree. Such future investigation may indicate additional similarities or differences in beliefs on quality in early childhood education and could illuminate potential methods for ensuring that teachers are able to provide the level of quality that is called for.