RELEASING THE VOICE OF EARLY EDUCATION DIRECTORS:

DEGREE REQUIREMENTS

by

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ABSTRACT

Kristine Koenig Martin.  RELEASING THE VOICE OF EARLY EDUCATION DIRECTORS: DEGREE REQUIREMENTS. Under the direction of Dr. Connie McDonald, School of Education, April, 2011.

The discovery of “windows of opportunity” regarding learning as the brain develops during the preschool years reinforces the important role early education teachers play in the lives of children. As a result, the credentials of those who work with young children have come under investigation as it relates to the provision of quality early education. The purpose of this qualitative study is to look at the imposed challenges facing early educators regarding degree requirements via phenomenological methodology in an effort to hear the voice of early educators on the subject. This study is needed to investigate the gap between research and practice regarding the practicality of implementing credentialing requirements of early educators. Directors must be allowed to share their experiences and voice their opinion on the subject to provide a dimensional look at early education credential requirements.
Dedication

I would like to dedicate this document to my mother. When she was in her fifties she went back to school to obtain her first degree in nursing. Her example showed me that age was not a factor in higher education. Her relentless support has made my higher education possible.

I would also like to thank my husband for allowing me to pursue this dream. Never once did I hear a negative word from him regarding my degree work. Instead, he partnered with me as he proofed my work and cheered me on. Every woman deserves the support of a husband like mine.

Kristi Martin
Table of Contents

Dedication .......................................................................................................................... ii

Table of contents ................................................................................................................ iii

List of tables ........................................................................................................................ v

List of figures ......................................................................................................................... vi

List of abbreviations .......................................................................................................... vii

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Background .......................................................................................................................... 1

Definitions ............................................................................................................................ 6

Statement of the Problem ...................................................................................................... 7

Purpose of the Study ............................................................................................................. 8

Significance of the Study ...................................................................................................... 8

Research Questions ............................................................................................................ 9

Assumptions and Limitations ............................................................................................. 10

Overall Research Plan ......................................................................................................... 10

Summary of Introduction .................................................................................................. 11

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework ...................................................................................... 12

Regulatory Agencies and Degree Requirements ................................................................ 14

Research on Teacher Education ......................................................................................... 18

Research on the Effects of Degrees on Early Education ..................................................... 19

An Unheard Voice ............................................................................................................ 32
**Impact of Requiring Degrees** ................................................................. 39
**Analysis of Degree Programs** ............................................................... 46
**Summary of Research** ........................................................................ 51

**CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

- **Phenomenological Design** .................................................................. 52
- **Role of the Researcher** ........................................................................ 54
- **Procedural Design** ............................................................................... 60
- **Data Collection** .................................................................................. 65
- **Data Analysis** ...................................................................................... 76
- **Trustworthiness** .................................................................................. 85
- **Ethical Considerations** ......................................................................... 93
- **Summary of Methodology** .................................................................... 93

**CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH RESULTS AND FINDINGS**

- **Overview** .......................................................................................... 95
- **Participant Selection** ........................................................................... 95
- **Stage One: History** ............................................................................ 100
- **Stage Two: Experiences** ................................................................. 103
- **Stage Three: Reflection of Meaning** .............................................. 127
- **Summary of Findings** ........................................................................ 141

**CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION**

- **Summary of Findings** ......................................................................... 145
- **Discussion** ........................................................................................ 150
- **Literature** .......................................................................................... 153
Theoretical Framework ........................................................................................................ 161
Limitations .......................................................................................................................... 162
Conclusion .......................................................................................................................... 170
REFERENCES ......................................................................................................................... 171
APPENDICES
Appendix A: Participant Consent Form ............................................................................ 189
Appendix B: Research Budget ....................................................................................... 192
Appendix C: IRB Application ......................................................................................... 193
Appendix D: Face and Content Validity Assessment Tool ........................................... 205
Appendix E: Interview Tools .......................................................................................... 211
Appendix F: Instruments ................................................................................................. 220
Appendix G: Figures .......................................................................................................... 225
Appendix H: Tables ............................................................................................................ 227
List of Tables

H1: Survey Responses to Likert Questions..............................................................227

H2: Program Credential Requirements and Financial Assistance.........................228
List of Figures

G1. Credentials of Directors………………………………………………………………………………225

G2. Credentials of Teachers………………………………………………………………………………226
List of Abbreviations

Associate in Arts degree (A.A.)
Associate of Applied Science degree (A.A.S)
Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI)
American Montessori Society (AMS)
Bachelor of Arts degree (B.A.)
Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF)
Child Development Associate (CDA)
Early Care and Education (ECE)
Economic Opportunity Institute (EOI)
Harvest Child Development Center (HCDC)
Internal Review Board (IRB)
National Association of Child Care Professionals (NACCP)
National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
National Child Care Information and Technical Assistance Center (NCCIC)
National Council for Private School Accreditation (NCPSA)
National Early Childhood Program Accreditation (NECPA)
National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD)
National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER)
National Lutheran School Accreditation (NLSA)
National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (NSCDC)
Pre-kindergarten (pre-k)
Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS)
Southwestern Assemblies of God University (SAGU)
Texas Association of the Education of the Young Child (TAEYC)
Texas Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (TACCRA)
Texas Baptist Church Weekday Education Association (TBCWEA)
Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (TDFPS)
Teacher Education Assistance for College and Higher Education (T.E.A.C.H.)
Texas Education Agency (TEA)
Texas Licensed Child Care Association (TLCCA)
United States Census Bureau (USCB)
United States Department of Education (USDE)
United States Department of Health and Human Services (USDHHS)
United States Department of Labor (USDL)
Chapter One: Introduction

The field of early education has been receiving a critical eye as the United States educational system has diligently worked at preventing any child from being left behind. Brain research in the early 1990s validated the importance of the early years of the development of children resulting in an increase in research on the benefits of quality early education (Connell, 2009; Slaby, Louchs, & Stelwagon, 2005). At the turn of the century, the credentials of those who worked with young children came under investigation as it related to the provision of quality early education. As a result, many regulatory agencies and accreditation organizations have required early educators to obtain degrees. What appeared to be a logical decision based on research has now presented many implementation challenges, including the alienation of those currently working with young children by the imposition of credential and/or degree requirements. It seems that our educational system is at crossroad; implementing forms of Universal Pre-kindergarten (pre-k) which will require professionalizing a neglected work group and an inability to finance early education amelioration. This qualitative study looked at the imposed challenges via phenomenological methodology in an effort to hear the voice of early educators on the subject of degree requirements.

Background

As the United States works to compete with the world in the race to be intellectually competitive, more focus has been placed on early education. This trend has been primarily due to brain research supporting the importance of the early years of development of children (Connell, 2009; Slaby et al., 2005). Phrases such as
“foundational years,” “optimal windows of learning,” and “developmental outcomes” have been part of our postmodern educational lexicon relating to the first five years of human growth and development. Brain researchers have found a strong connection between learning experiences of young children and cognitive development. The active learning environment specifically found in high-quality preschool programs has been linked to supporting healthy brain growth (Slaby et al., 2005). Thanks to programs such as Abbot Preschool Program, Early Head Start, Head Start, and Perry Preschool Project, researchers have longitudinal data to support the benefits of quality early education. As data have been evaluated, the question of the importance of the credentials of early educators has received a critical assessment. Studies in the 1990’s and 2000’s led researchers to come to the conclusion that it was important for early educators to have bachelor’s degrees to insure the highest level of growth in various developmental domains (Barnett, 2004; Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2001; Bryant, Clifford, Early & Little, 2005; Clifford, Bryant, & Early, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2006; de Kruif, McWilliam, & Ridley, 2000; Duncan, 2003; Dwyer, Chait, & McKee, 2000; Helburn, 1995; Howes, 1997; Howes, Whitebook & Phillips, 1992; Kelley & Camilli, 2007; Kontos & Wilcox-Herzog, 1997; National Child Care Information and Technical Assistance Center (NCCIC), 2009; Pianta, Mashburn, Downer, Hamre, & Justice, 2008; Ryan & Ackerman, 2004; Saracho & Spodek, 2007; Schweinhart et al., 2005; Vu, Jeon, & Howes, 2008; Whitebook, 2003). Consequently, many regulatory agencies of states and accreditation organizations that oversee early education programs have implemented credential requirements for those who teach the youngest children in America. It is important to pause here and demarcate that research using the opinions and experiences
of directors and teachers working with young children to assist in policy development has been almost non-existent.

An indicator that the field which teaches children from infancy through pre-k has been overlooked and not heard can be found in the fact that there is a lack of a unified title for the industry. Common definitions that identify and describe the profession which works with the youngest of children are allusive (Early et al., 2007). For example, traditionally the moniker “early childhood” has been used in higher education to refer to kindergarten through eighth grade. Recently this title has been seen to represent pre-k (3- and 4-year-olds) through fourth grade. There has been a distinct void of a unified title for those working with infants through pre-k, the traditional early education group. For the purpose of this research, early education was defined as birth through pre-k and early childhood was defined as kindergarten through sixth grade. This choice of definitions aligns with brain research that supports significant changes in the brain around the age of 5 years (Gilkerson & Klein, 2008; National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (NSCDC), 2007) and again around 11 years (Brotherson, 2005; Gilkerson & Klein, 2008). Early education was also the title given infants through pre-k by the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI), and researcher Debra Ackerman (2004; 2005; Ryan & Ackerman, 2004) has applied a similar title, Early Care and Education (ECE), to this group in her research.

A conundrum has resulted as a voiceless field of early education directors has tried to fathom how to motivate their staff to obtain credentials to meet new requirements. Compliance with degree requirements has been diametrically affecting early education
professionals and programs. But, have the results positive? This study allowed the voices to be heard on this subject.

A multitude of reasons have been attributed to the challenge of early educators obtaining required credentials. The foremost reason has been that the early education field is the lowest paid profession in education, thus making personal resources to apply to higher education limited. Mandating higher education would result in a variety of expensive variables to programs which would result in additional costs to the consumers of early education (Early et al., 2007; Hart & Schumacher, 2005; Kelley & Camilli, 2007). Another pertinent variable has been that directors oversee a workgroup that falls into the non-traditional student category resulting in a complex set of motivational problems (Lobman & Ryan, 2007). In addition, this workgroup has been generalized as females who are approximately 39 years of age with competing work and family responsibilities (Hart & Schumacher, 2005; Saluja, Early, & Clifford, 2002). There has also been a fear that once a bachelor’s degree is obtained, the staff will leave for a higher paying position. This fear has been substantiated in studies done on groups such as Head Start (Hart & Schumacher, 2005). In a distinctly separate category of challenges has been the inadequate state of higher education to effectively meet the demands and educational rigor needed to instruct the early education industry (Ackerman, 2005; Early et al., 2007; Ignash & Slotnich, 2007; Lobman & Ryan, 2007; Maxwell, Lim, & Early, 2006; Morgan, 2009a; Morgan, 2009b).

A cacophony in the early education research field has been beginning to arise on the topic of credentials as recent research revealed findings contradictory to earlier studies. Current research has revealed that many studies regarding credentials of teachers related
to classroom quality were based on incomplete research (Early, Bryant, et al., 2006; Early, Maxwell, et al, 2007; Pianta et al., 2005). Early education has been under researched in terms of how teacher education effects early education environments when compared to older educational grades (Kelley & Camilli, 2007). Many studies in the past five years have been challenging the whole concept that bachelor’s degrees are the major predictor of classroom quality (Bueno, Darling-Hammond, & Gonzales, 2010; Early, Bryant, et al., 2006; Early, Maxwell, et al, 2007; Fuller, 2009; Fuller, Livas, & Bridges, 2006; Howes et al., 2008; Kelley & Camilli, 2007; Morgan, 2009a; Morgan, 2009b; NCCIC, 2009; Pianta et al., 2005; Vu et al., 2008; Whitebook, Gomby, Bellm, Sakai, & Kipnis, 2009; Xu & Gulosino, 2006). Xu and Gulosino (2006) went as far to say that in early childhood “…it is what teachers do rather than the credentials they hold that matters” (p. 364).

A clear problem exists not only in research supporting the need for early education professionals to obtain bachelor’s degrees, but also in the lack of release of the voice of the professionals who work for so little monetary profit to teach the youngest children in America. This topic should be of interest to anyone concerned about seamless education free from an awkward transition from early education to early childhood education in the United States. Listening to the experiences and opinions of early education professionals who educate and care for young children will extend our existing knowledge and assist in better decision making regarding credential requirements. The direct beneficiaries of this type of research are all the spheres of influence in early education settings: the directors, the teachers, the staff, the families, and ultimately the children. An indirect beneficiary may perhaps be our higher education systems as they could use information gained to
define and refine degree plans and course instruction so that it is conducive to true early education.

The need for research of this nature is necessary to progress in the field of early education. It seems that the industry is at a crossroad; credentials professionalize a field and lead to some higher standard practices, but there is an inability to impel the preponderance of early educators to obtain credentials due to a variety of complex reasons. Until someone stops and listens to what early educators in the trenches have to say, researchers and regulators will be basing future decision on incomplete data which could result in a factious environment and the exodus of thousands of workers from early education. Ultimately the children will be the victims of such demise. Critical theory, components of critical race theory, and sociocultural theory were used as the theoretical underpinning of this phenomenological research in an effort to release the voice of early educators so that future decisions regarding credentialing requirements can be made in an informed manner.

Definitions

As identified above, there has been lack of a consistent title for the field of education that deals with very young children. This fact supports the need for defined concepts within this study. Therefore, to aid in a clear understanding of the subject matter of this study, the following definitions have been provided:

- Early education is the area of education that focuses on children from birth through pre-kindergarten.
- Early childhood education is the area of education that focuses on children in kindergarten through 6th grade.
• Licensed programs are programs that are licensed by the state in which it resides. Licensing requirements vary per state.

• Accredited programs are early education programs that pass a voluntary accreditation process via peer evaluation per a set of elevated standards set by an accreditation agency.

Statement of the Problem

There is a gap between research and practice in educational institutions of today (Biesta, 2007; Broekkamp & van Hout-Wolters, 2007; Korthagen, 2007; Miretzky, 2007). This study is needed to describe the extent of the gap between research and practice regarding the practicality of implementing credentialing requirements of early educators. An enormous chasm is facing early education directors: how they are going to meet credentialing requirements when the preponderance of their workforce are nontraditional students without the means to finance higher education. In light of recent literature challenging the legitimacy of prior research, directors must be allowed to share their experiences and voice their opinion on the subject to provide a dimensional look at early education credential requirements.

Qualitative research will assist in closing this gap between research and practice by allowing the directors to become full collaborators in addressing the problems surrounding credentialing requirements (Silverstein & Auerbach, 2009). According to Korthagen (2007), this type of empowerment “brings together both a research and a practical focus” (p. 304). Qualitative research will also provide a mutually respectful professional learning relationship, thus bringing credentialing requirements of early educators into a practical focus based on overlooked experiences of directors.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover and ascribe meaning to how a selected group of early education directors in Tarrant County, Texas felt credential requirements impact the accredited programs they oversee. In the study, the central phenomenon of required credentials was generally defined as the obtainment of a bachelor’s degree in early education by directors and teachers. This study will provide a voice to a silenced group of educators which will give a depth of practical experience on the subject thus reducing the gap between research and practice.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it provides new information resulting in a deeper understanding of the phenomena by inviting directors to participate in discussions on a topic which directly affects their programs. A review of literature for this study revealed recent controversies regarding the legitimacy of older studies resulting in a call for more research. Allowing the essence of the experiences of early education directors to be voiced is a very significant step in authenticating a minor people group. This state is amplified by the fact that early educators are often viewed as babysitters and not real teachers (Ackerman, 2006, p. 97). Early education directors are the experts of the day-to-day operations of programs educating the youngest children in our society and must be allowed to participate in discussions that influence policy to insure that decisions are based on complete information. While there is significance in the simple act of asking their opinion, this study will aid in the understanding of a under researched topic. It is possible that descriptions revealed by the participants will aid in charting a productive course and negotiating funds to facilitate quality endeavors in the early education field.
This study is significant due to the fact that it has delved into a controversial subject that needs additional research, it validated a minor people group, and it provided information to aid in a deeper understanding of how degree requirements of early education teachers affect programs.

**Research Questions**

The central question broached in this study was the following: “When given the opportunity, how would early education directors describe their experiences regarding the effects of credential requirements?” Issue subquestions that guided the beginning stage of research were “What credentials do participants and their teachers currently hold?,” “What professional development plans are in place at the program?,” and “What experiences do directors have associated with credential requirements?” Given the emergent nature of qualitative inquiry, other issue subquestions were considered as research revealed experiences that needed to be explored and exposed. Procedural subquestions framed this study in an effort to release the voice of early education directors regarding the central research question. I looked for statements which described experiences followed by themes that emerged from those experiences in the areas of written and expressed beliefs. Once these statements and themes were explored, I looked for the differences between written and expressed experiences. Of importance to the study was the revelation of the contexts and thoughts about these experiences. These preliminary procedural subquestions led up to the summative question, “What is the overall essence of the experiences of the group?”
Assumptions and Limitations

Participants were chosen in a manner that provided an equal voice for degreed and non-degreed directors representing a variety of accreditation organizations. A major ethical consideration was to insure that the identity of the directors remained confidential. In a phenomenological study, the researcher is upfront about what they are doing, but I was concerned that my pursuit of a doctorate would affect the data. I considered this conundrum to be the most significant limitation of my study. Because of this situation, I balanced being “upfront about the research” while not letting my education influence participant responses.

Overall Research Plan

I implemented rigorous qualitative research measures via a survey, individual interviews, and focus groups with early education directors of accredited early education programs in Tarrant County, Texas. An emphasis was placed on triangulation in an effort to properly authenticate and bring honor to the unheard voice of early education directors (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2006; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2007; Tesch, 1990). Because I was seeking higher education credentials at the time of this study that could intimidate and/or influence participants input, I implemented elements of a transcendental design suggested by Moustakas (1994) in his text Phenomenological Research Methods. The approach of a transcendental phenomenological study is based on the researcher taking steps to insure that his or her beliefs, existing knowledge, experience, and any other preexisting traits do not present a bias when investigating phenomena so that the participants can be fully heard (p. 33). While I did not implement
some of the deeper metaphysical elements associated with a transcendental design, I did use its basic elements to control biases within my research.

**Summary of Introduction**

As a result of current brain research and a push from many spheres of influence within the United States for standardized education, the field of early education has been critically reviewed for its contribution to educational goals for children. Degree requirements for early educators have been a key component in this review. Unfortunately there has been a gap between research and practice regarding the practicality of implementing higher education requirements of early educators. This transcendental phenomenological study focused on illuminating the gap by providing early education directors with a venue to reveal their practical experiences on this subject. Authentication of this often silenced people group will provide the field of education with a deeper understanding of the phenomena. The primary question researched focused on acquiring descriptions of how early education directors were affected, or felt they would be affected, by credential requirements. Subquestions focused on current credentials of staff, professional development plans, and experiences with credential requirements. Additional questions were added through emergent qualitative practices. Steps were taken to protect the identity of the participants as well as reduce the influence of my education.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Literature on the topic of early education directors and their experiences regarding the effects of accreditation credential requirements was allusive in my research for this study. The literature review resulted in featuring peripheral and formative information on the topic. The literature review also revealed that much of the research done in the past five years was shallow in variable analysis and was not producing new studies, but was based on research done in the 1990s and early 2000s. This discovery was particularly true regarding studies done on how the education of early education teachers affects academic gains of children and classroom quality. A surprising change in the tone of literature was first documented in 2005 as researchers began to challenge the validity and reliability of earlier studies. This literature review revealed a recent trend in research that involved isolating process quality from structural quality components of early education in an effort to fully understand the effects of academic gains for young children.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

Literature used for the theoretical/conceptual framework was crucial in establishing a tone for the remainder of the study. Critical theory was the featured framework while critical race theory and sociocultural theory provided additional substance to the suppositions of the study.

Critical theory. Critical theory might seem like an unlikely theory to associate with those who work with young children, but the fact is that early educators are an overlooked and under-resourced people group. Mayes (2010) of the University of
Wisconsin described critical theory as a social theory used “…to expose class structure and other unequal power relations in society” (p. 189). Early educators are not looked upon as professionals by many people. They are often referred to as “day care workers” and “baby sitters.” The 2009 report from the Bureau of Labor and Statistics lists child care workers in the tax bracket with baggage porters, aerobics instructors, and home care aids making less per hour with a mean wage of $9.19 (United States Department of Labor, 2010). The category of “preschool teachers” which is associated with elementary and secondary education on the same site fared better with a mean hourly wage of $11.81 (USDL, 2010). The category for elementary teachers is included on the page of wage earners making $41,360 annually. It is fair to say that the early education people group is at the bottom of the class structure financially and socially in the field of education therefore validating the usage of critical theory. Feminist critical policy is now being applied to the field of early education as evidenced in a 2006 study by Ackerman entitled “The Cost of Being a Child Care Teacher: Revisiting the Problem of Low Wages.”

The definition of critical theory, according to Creswell (2007), further supports this framework by including phrases such as “…interpreting the meanings of…historical problems of domination, alienation, and social struggles…” and “…the envisioning of new possibilities” (p.247). Research for this study sought information addressing these components with a focus on envisioning new possibilities of vocal release for early educators.

**Critical race theory.** As an out-group or a socially marginalized unit, early educators can be considered a race of people who need to be given the opportunity to participate in discussions regarding their profession. A research article entitled “Introduction:
Thoughts and Ideas on the Intersectionality of Identity” addressed this type of expression in critical race theory “counterstorytelling” (Berry, Jay, & Lynn, 2010). The counterstory allows a multidimensional picture of the critical race narrative to be exposed so that presuppositions and perceived wisdom held by the dominate group can be challenged for the betterment of the whole (p. 3). Milner (2008) from Vanderbilt University found critical race theory a viable framework in analyzing and explaining teacher education, especially in the area of policies and practices. He further elaborated by saying “critical race theorists are concerned with disrupting, exposing, challenging, and changing racist policies that work to subordinate and disenfranchise certain groups of people and that attempt to maintain the status quo” (p. 222). My intent was not to be disruptive in my research, but to simply address the fact that the status quo in education is not allowing the experiences of this group of people to influence policy.

**Sociocultural.** Sociocultural theory seemed appropriate to use in a study on early education due to the powerful influence of Vygotsky on the field. Mahn (1999) said that “…the core of Vygotsky’s work examines humans as meaning makers” (p. 341). The phrase “meaning makers” applied to a social construct has such a strong connection to the intent of this qualitative study of phenomenological design. The social context of this study was important in the methodology to insure that participants felt that their opinions were valued in making meaning of the story surrounding the effects of degree requirements.

**Regulatory Agencies and Degree Requirements**

An important piece of this literature review was developing an understanding of how early education is regulated. The early education and care of young children is not
regulated at the Federal level and is therefore not regulated under the United States Department of Education (USDE). Instead, it is under the umbrella of the United States Department of Health and Human Services (USDHHS). This department has limited oversight over the industry and its primary focus is on supporting low-income family services. To date, state child care agencies have established marginal requirements in the realm of teacher education for early educators (Saracho & Spodek, 2007). As a result, there is a lack of consistency in both programs and the credentials needed to teach pre-k children (Aviles & Murphy, 2008; Bryant et al., 2005; Clifford et al., 2005; Zehr, 2009).

It is important to delineate the three distinct groups that can be found within the early education profession: public pre-k, Head Start, and child care. These three groups can be regulated by a variety of organizations that depend on the individual program structure and the paradigms of the state in which it resides. Some children attend multiple types of programs within one day and can be exposed to varying process quality and structure quality as a result of differing teacher credential requirements. Clifford et al. (2005) has referred to this scenario as being “…at a crossroads, caught between early child care programs, Head start, and schools” (p. 141). Not only is there a range of program types in the field of early education, but there are also an array of professional classifications to which an early educator can be placed. The type of program will often determine whether the professional is considered a caregiver, provider, or teacher. Requirements for training and education can be affected by which category the professional is aligned, resulting in a lack of consistent standards (Aviles & Murphy, 2008). Many researchers agreed that the same educational requirements should be applied to each class of early education professionals (Early et al., 2008; Saracho & Spodek, 2007), but due to the vast
array of paradigms within the field, unification is not feasible at the current time (Early et al., 2008). Clifford et al. has tagged the current move of states towards requiring degrees a “trend,” which can be seen in recent development of creative professional development systems (Sussman & Gillman, 2007). As a result, there is an increase in state-funded pre-k programs which commonly require credentials of early education professionals in the form of academic degrees (Clifford et al., 2005). Unfortunately, the educational research community knows little of state-funded programs (Clifford, Bryant, & Early, 2005).

State agencies. Each state has its own set of laws and regulations regarding preschool oversight making access and assessment of data difficult (Aviles & Murphy, 2008; Bryant et al., 2005; Zehr, 2009). Fortunately, the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) annually produces a state preschool yearbook tracking public preschool programs that are state funded, controlled, and regulated. Currently 38 state public educational systems offer some form of pre-k programming for four-year-olds and some three-year-olds (Barnett et al., 2009). According to a 2009 report done by NIEER (2009), 26 states now require public preschool teachers to have a bachelor’s degree. No literature in the past five years provided a collective report of degree requirements of non-public pre-k. Information of various individual states could be found, but the sporadic and inconsistent nature of what is available did not provide constructive data for this research.

Tarrant County, the county in Texas under investigation in this study, had an equal distribution of publicly funded and parent funded pre-k programs (NIEER, 2009). Public pre-k is regulated by the Texas Education Association (TEA) while the majority of the remaining programs are regulated by the Texas Department of Family and Protective
Services (TDFPS). Texas allows a few programs to be alternatively regulated via accreditation agency approvals. It must be noted that the alternative accreditation agencies that Texas approves may or may not be true accreditation agencies, thus adding to the difficulty of evaluation.

Texas requires state supported public and non-public pre-k teachers to have a Bachelor of Arts degree and a Generalist Teaching Certificate that has a cognate in ECE through grade 4 (NIEER, 2009, p. 135). State supported pre-k in Texas provides free partial day preschool for 55% of its children (p.8). Licensed pre-k teachers must have the minimum of a high school diploma or an equivalent. While more recent figures for Texas were not available, in 2003, 31% of Head Start teachers in the nation had a B.A. or higher degree in early childhood education (Hart & Schumacher, 2005, p. 3).

**Accreditation agencies.** Finding an all-inclusive centralized list of agencies that accredit preschools proved allusive in my search for literature. The National Council for Private School Accreditation (NCPSA) is an accreditation consortium that offers a list of member organizations, but very few include early education. The only other list that could be found was on the website of United Way, and it was limited in scope. The USDHHS does not provide any information on early education accreditation or accreditation agencies on its website. Therefore, I focused on the industry-wide, commonly known preschool accreditation agencies of licensed programs. I have chosen to review accreditation agencies that were not restricted to a particular state or region and have established programs.

The following early education accreditation agencies that met these parameters and showed up somewhat consistently in literature are the following: American Montessori
Society (AMS), ACSI, National Association of Child Care Professionals (NACCP), National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), National Early Childhood Program Accreditation (NECPA), and the National Lutheran School Accreditation (NLSA). Criteria for preschool teachers of NAEYC accredited programs is for 75% of the teachers to have a bachelor’s degree and the remaining to have an associate’s degree while NLSA and ACSI have the criteria of an associate’s degree. All three of these organizations, NAEYC, NLSA, and ACSI, are flexible with their preschool teacher criteria and do not require that it be met as written. AMS has an alternative way for teachers to work in its accredited programs without obtaining a degree. NACCP and NECPA do not have degree requirements.

**Research on Teacher Education**

The entire topic of research in the area of teacher education is a novice field. Researchers Grossman and McDonald (2008) went as far as to say that research on this topic “has developed in curious isolation both from mainstream research on teaching and from research on higher education and professional education more generally” (p. 185). Despite the under-researched position of early childhood teacher education (Kelley & Camilli, 2007), there has recently been what Cochran-Smith (2005) has deemed as “urgent calls for something new and improved . . . in teacher education” (p. 3). The obvious questions are what educational requirements are minimally required for teachers in early childhood education and whether bachelor’s degrees consistently improve early learning over the Child Development Associate (CDA) credential or associate’s degrees in early childhood (Bryant et al., 2005). A CDA is an early education credential by the
Council of Professional Recognition that has 120 hours of associated coursework that can be taken for nine hours of college credit.

Unfortunately, the field of early education has multiple players regulating different programs, functioning with its own set of parameters and paradigm (Aviles & Murphy, 2008; Barnett et al., 2009; Bryant et al., 2005; Clifford et al., 2005; Grossman & McDonald, 2008; Zehr, 2009). This fact alone highlights the difficulty in finding a unified position on the subject. While a bachelor’s degree is minimally required in many public pre-k programs, most parents cannot afford the cost that the private sector will have to charge to acquire and keep degreed teachers. As the field is looking for “new and improved” ways to address the topic of teacher education as Cochran-Smith (2008, p. 3) brought to light, a variety of States and organizations are experimenting with ways to augment the credentials of teachers. There has been a move away from doing research on teaching characteristics to that of teaching functions such as behaviors, decision making, knowledge, reflection, and disposition (Grossman & McDonald, 2008). Expansion of research beyond teaching characteristics and structural processes, such as teacher qualifications and adult: child ratios have been identified as viable ways to expand insight into classroom quality (Howes et al., 2008; Vu et al., 2008).

**Research on the Effects of Degrees on Early Education**

Research on the effects of degrees on early education provided a variety of conclusions. There is a clear disparity among early education researchers, some embrace higher qualifications and others question the value (Whitebook et al., 2009). While research prior to 2005 leaned toward the supposition that a degree improves academic gains of children and/or classroom quality (Barnett, 2004; Bowman et al., 2001; Bueno et
al., 2010; de Kruif et al., 2000; Duncan, 2003; Dwyer et al., 2000; Helburn, 1995; Howes, 1997; Howes et al., 1992; Kontos & Wilcox-Herzog, 1997; Ryan & Ackerman, 2004; Whitebook, 2003), current research presented divergent findings (Kelley & Camilli, 2007; Morgan, 2009a; Morgan, 2009b; Pianta et al., 2005; Vu et al., 2008; Xu & Gulosino, 2006). A major conundrum was that early education had been under-researched on this topic compared to K-12 (Kelley & Camilli, 2007). Research done in the past is now being deemed to have inconsistent findings (Kelley & Camilli, 2007) and to be based upon gaps in research (Xu & Gulosino, 2006). Several other possible reasons have surfaced to explain the inconsistencies between current research and dated research. Reasons included funding issues within programs (Vu et al., 2008), leadership over the teacher (Vu et al., 2008), wage differences (Early et al., 2006; Vu et al., 2008), “methodological variation” (Kelley & Camilli, 2007, p. 10), and the attraction of high quality programs to higher credentialed teachers (Early et al., 2006). It also needs to be noted that research has been done on public pre-k, private pre-k, and Head Start program, which have been established as being three distinct and different organisms. Comparing results from research done on one of these three entities and applying the results is inappropriate and irresponsible due to the diversity of the culture and climate of each type of program. Bachelor’s degrees were found “…likely to raise the quality…” of publicly funded pre-k (Bueno et al., 2010, p. 3), but it should not be assumed that the same finding will apply to other types of early education programs. Marylou Hyson of the National Association for the Education of Young Children was quoted saying that she agrees that early education teachers should have a bachelor’s degree, but degree requirements are not more important than the preservation of cultural congruency of teachers to students
(Shek, 2004). Despite research being challenged, the general consensus in literature within the field of education was found to be gravitating towards the stance that pre-k teachers need to have a bachelor’s degree.

**Research supporting degree requirements.** There have been many research projects and studies over the years that support the positive impact degree requirements have on the field of early learning (Barnett, 2004; Bowman et al., 2001; Bryant et al., 2005; Clifford et al., 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2006; de Kruif et al., 2000; Duncan, 2003; Dwyer et al, 2000; Helburn, 1995; Howes, 1997; Howes et al., 1992; Kelley & Camilli, 2007; Kontos & Wilcox-Herzog, 1997; NCCIC, 2009; Pianta et al., 2008; Ryan & Ackerman, 2004; Saracho & Spodek, 2007; Schweinhart et al., 2005; Vu et al., 2008; Whitebook, 2003). A connection has been established regarding bachelor’s degrees and the effect on the learning of young children in a variety of areas such as language development and emergent literacy. Level of education was reported by the NCCIC (2009) as being a contributor to early education quality. One broad-focused study done by Saracho and Spodek in 2007 was "...a critical analysis of 40 studies on the preparation of early childhood education teachers and the quality of their educational programs that were published within a 15-year (1989-2004) period" (p. 1). The results of this critical analyses linked program quality with teachers who were “better-educated” (p. 77). This team surmised that state involvement should be required to motivate teachers to obtain higher educational qualifications if the early education field is to ever reach desired professional level. While venues of motivation were not delineated, it was implied that states must mandate that early educators acquire degrees in order to teach pre-k children (Saracho & Spodek, 2007).
Within the studies supporting degree requirements, there are many caveats that were discovered during this review of literature that must be considered. Current research often only used old research to support their study. Such is the case with Bueno, Darling-Hammond, & Gonzales’ 2010 study called “A Matter of Degrees: Preparing Teachers for the Pre-K Classroom” for the PreK Now organization that was funded by The Pew Center on the States. In this study, the authors said the following: “Several recent studies indicate that a bachelor’s degree and specialized training in early childhood education and development may better prepare teachers to provide high-quality classroom environments and promote academic achievement” (p. 2). Following the endnote to the references reveals that the research used ranged in date from 2000 to 2005 (p. 19) which is five to ten years old and not considered recent research in rigorous studies. A study done by Ackerman in 2006 is another example of research using old studies.

**Research challenging degree requirements.** A review of literature shows a deeper consideration to the link between degrees and academic outcomes of children beginning around 2005. It is during this time that Pianta et al. (2005) provided concluding discussion of their research stating that teacher attributes such as experience, education, credentialing, and/or attitudes played a minor role in classroom quality, but they were related to academic gains. Shortly after the release of Pianta et al.’s 2005 research, Early et al. (2006) published a study that has become controversial due to its results stating that “…education, training, and credentialing are not consistently related to classroom quality or other academic gains for children” (p. 1).

In 2007 Early lead another research team which included five researchers from the 2006 study and an additional 13 members from a variety of academic institutions. Their
efforts were focused on reviewing seven past studies on the topic of teachers’ education and its link to classroom quality and academic gains if young children. This study concluded in the discovery by the team that “…findings indicate largely null or contradictory associations, indicating that policies focused solely on increasing teachers’ education will not suffice for improving classroom quality or maximizing children’s academic gains” (Early et al., 2007, p. 1).

The resulting two articles of research from Early et al. have caused educational researchers to take a deeper look into the subject as well as caused uproar amongst those supporting earlier studies. In response to commentaries written on the subject in trade journals, Early et al. boldly stated the following in the form of a policy commentary in the *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* in 2008:

One purpose of these manuscripts is to help the field in general, and policymakers and advocates specifically, understand that quality and outcomes are unlikely to improve by simply increasing teacher education requirements. Understanding the relationship between children’s outcomes and how teachers instruct and interact with children appears to be a more promising line of research than focusing on degree, major, or certification. Teacher quality should be measured by considering what teachers know, are able to do and how they behave in the classroom. A degree or certification does not appear to be a sufficient measure of teacher quality in any grade, PK-12. (p. 7)

They also confronted the rationale used to propagate the necessity of early education teachers having a bachelor’s degree because “the research base is lacking” (p. 9).

Contrary evidence was found to earlier studies that connected the higher education of
teachers in early education with higher quality and academic gains in the classroom. There has been a variety of responses in the early education research field. The Early et al. team of researchers concluded their response to commentary with the following:

    We believe that the Early et al. papers have played the hard but important role of moving us all beyond simple explanations to delve for a more thorough understanding of the complex role a teacher plays in ensuring quality and positive outcomes for children. (2008, p. 9)

As a result of these researchers challenging the validity of the connection between early education degrees of teachers to classroom quality and academic gains of young children, there has been an upsurge of research associated with the topic.

A variety of recent responses and journal articles have been written in the same challenging tone as the work done by Early et al. Previous studies are now being referred to as having focused on educational labels instead of standard definition (NCCIC, 2009, p. 1). Fuller (2009) boldly stated that the research by Early et al. in 2007 “disconfirmed” the benefits of early education teachers having a bachelor’s degree and warned against “…advancing ideals and philosophical claims…” that are based on “…weak and inconsistent association” (p. 164). The clarity of prior literature was contested regarding what levels of qualifications are necessary for early education teachers (Vu et al., 2008) while the need for any higher education requirements was questioned (Bueno et al., 2010; Early et al., 2006; Fuller et al., 2006). Howes et al. (2008) reported that decisions regarding what educational standards should be set are “premature” due to the “need of basic research into aspects of structural features” (p. 46). There was also a report of a lack of empirical evidence (Fuller et al., 2006). Other researchers conveyed that there is
little evidence that degrees improve teaching practices in early education (Pianta et al., 2008) while some felt that there are too many remaining questions regarding how teacher training connects with quality classroom practices which lead to enhance learning for children (Bueno et al., 2010). Some researchers felt that demonstrated skill is more highly connected to a successful classroom than a credential or degree (Pianta et al., 2008). Degree requirements were also deemed as “too narrow and also impossible to resolve with existing research” which led to inconsistent connections regarding degree effectiveness (Whitebook et al., 2009, p. 5). Hyson, Tomlinson, & Morris came to the conclusion in 2009 that there is no single factor responsible for the learning achievements of young children, “including what degree is held by the teacher” (p. 17).

There is also a surge of research challenging the findings of older studies. Fuller et al. produced a working paper in 2006 that challenges the 2003 research of Barnett on education of teachers of young children as well as the work of other researchers. This paper questions the validity and application of the five empirical studies on which the work of Barnett was based. The challenge to validity was in the following areas: one study was done in Bermuda; one tiny study was done in a small mid-western city and was done in a manner that could not isolate differing degree effects; a north-central Indiana study featured credential levels were not related to child outcomes and were likely effected by background aspects of the teachers; one showed little difference between teachers with a B.A. degree and teachers with some college (Fuller et al., 2006). This team of researchers went on to challenge the findings of the 1997 research of Howes and her subsequent paper with Brown in 2000 stating that their work showed “no significant differences were found when B.A. status was associated with child outcomes, assessed
across four domains of cognitive development” (p. 26). A summary of these past studies led the team of Fuller, Livas, & Bridges (2006) to assess that there was an evident “classic case of selection bias” within these studies (p. 27). The research by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) done in 1999 and 2002 were also challenged in the area of B.A. degrees due to lack of “discrete association” to the development of children (p. 28). Research by Blau in 2000 and research done by the Whitebook team of researchers in 2004 were included in the challenge of findings (p. 31). The bold team of Fuller et al. (2006) summarized their working paper by stating that “…we cannot find consistent evidence to support the claim that the bachelor’s degree yields significant gains in child development beyond the benefits observed when teachers have experienced some college”’ (p. 29) and “claims that a bachelor’s degree further advances child development simply cannot be substantiated by studies conducted to date” (p. 31). Regarding the necessity of degrees they said “the certainty of such claims would be reassuring if each was backed by empirical evidence – but they are not” (p. 40).

**Academic gains of children.** Since 2005, the tone of the research literature began to change regarding how the academic gains of young children were affected by degree requirements. In 2005, Hart and Schumacher reported that added teacher education in early education “…*can* [emphasis added] improve outcomes for preschool children” (p. 2). As supplementary variables were considered, results were no longer as conclusive (Early et al., 2006; Early et al., 2007). The assessment of Fuller regarding the two studies of Early et al. (2009) summarized their findings in the area of how a bachelor’s degree will assist in professionalizing the field and help in the growth of children was “weak and inconsistent” (p. 164). Researchers began to perform deeper analysis of data in an effort
to see if academic gains were connected to teacher degrees. Research by Xu and Gulosino (2006) resulted in their conclusion that “it is what teachers do rather than the credentials that influence student achievement” (p. 364). A meta-analysis done in 2007 concluded that “highest outcomes are associated with teachers who have earned a bachelor’s degree,” but the researchers urged readers against making any stronger claims (Kelley & Camilli, p. 31). This urging was based on the fact that the effect size was small regarding this correlation research (pp. 1-2). Early et al. (2007) found that “for academic outcomes, there was very limited evidence of any association between teachers’ highest degree and the scores at the end of the 4-year-old year” (p. 570). Early et al. extended research in 2008 which resulted in further outcomes challenging degrees of teachers as they relate to the academic outcomes of children. Current research was found to be challenging the status quo regarding the strength of the connection between these two components (Early et al., 2008; Fuller et al., 2006; Fuller, 2009; Vu et al., 2008).

Educational researchers are beginning to look at how academic outcomes are affected from new perspectives. Deciphering how much influence teachers have on young children is complicated due to the high amount of influencing variables (Kane, Rockoff, & Staiger, 2007) and the fact that it is difficult to assess preschool-age children. Knowing the extent variables such as the professional preparation of teachers, prior experiences, and/or innate abilities affects his or her performance is critical in the process of determining the effect that a degree has on the academic outcomes of children. Evaluating teachers is only part of the research puzzle. Gains in academic performance could possibly be linked to their individual learning styles or temperaments and therefore be more affected by other elements such as the classroom instructional climate or the
relationship to the teacher instead of the instructional knowledge base of teachers (Howes et al., 2008).

New perspectives based on issues such as these has spurned a research trend to separate out structural quality from process quality when doing studies on early learning. Howes et al. (2008) is an example of one recent study that is considering these elements separately. This research team looked at structural quality components such as teacher qualifications, program location, program length, and ratios of adults to children separate from process quality components the experiences of children, quality of teacher interactions, and content of instruction. The categories of structural quality and process quality each contain extensive components that require research when considering what affects the academic acquisition of children. Research by Howes et al. did not show “robust relations” between structural process components of teacher qualifications as related to academic gains, but instead showed a connection with classroom instructional climate (p. 46). Research by Early et al. (2006) also came to the conclusion that structural process components, which included the education of teachers and their credentials, are insufficient to show improved child outcomes. Professional development experts have recently examined degree and credential acquisition separately. This category, which is usually non-credit bearing, showed a strong relationship with the developmental outcomes of children when the number of years in the field of education and the level of appropriateness of classroom behaviors of teachers were considered (Saracho & Spodek, 2007). It is apparent through reflection on structural and process components of the early learning environment that there are many factors outside of degrees of teachers who influence the learning of young children.
It is important to know how a bachelor’s degree does or does not affect structural quality and process quality when working with the different types of early education programs (Clifford et al., 2005). Some types of early learning programs have been shown through research to benefit more children than others when studying the effects of bachelor’s degrees on classroom quality (Vu et al., 2008). Clifford et al. (2005) theorized that at-risk children should be placed with teachers who have the highest degrees “to maximize the chances that these children will receive a high-quality experience that will lead to improved school readiness” (p. 128). More extensive research is required regarding this subject before policy changes are enacted.

Many states attach teacher certification requirements to their degree requirements for those who teach pre-k. Therefore, a review of literature included this topic. One recent study showed that certification has little impact on student academic gains. This research concluded teacher certification could not be linked with positive student outcomes (Kane et al., 2007, p. 64).

It is obvious that the quality of care and education young children receive shapes their growth and development (Aviles & Murphy, 2008). Researchers must keep in focus that early education professionals are simply one component within the educational culture of the school. Components of the school culture affect how instruction is delivered including program essence, traditions, beliefs, policies, organizational assumptions, and internal/external influences (Short & Greer, 2002).

Research supports that high quality early learning and care programs can have a positive effect on the academic gains of young children. It has been said that “the greatest chance of succeeding in school” comes from participation in preschool programs
that are deemed to be of high quality (Slaby et al., 2005, p. 1). One caveat to this statement from Slaby et al. (2005) is that the children must attend regularly. Recent research has shown that children who enter kindergarten with fewer skills than their peers tend to stay behind (Aarons, 2010). Reducing the achievement gap in later grades seems to be closely linked to ability levels upon entering kindergarten (Howes et al., 2008). Performance and achievement of children in poverty have been researched in an effort to close learning gaps in later grades. Preschool attendance has been a variable that has been associated with narrowing gaps and higher academic gains (Aviles & Murphy, 2008; Slaby et al., 2005).

**Classroom quality.** That same challenge surfaced regarding the link between classroom quality and degrees of teachers as researchers further examined the topic at hand. A meta-analysis by Kelley & Camilli (2007) on the topic of program outcomes and teacher education resulted in the affirmation that higher levels of education led to more positive outcomes, but this statement was based on small mean differences. Pianta et al. (2006) reported modest associations between the education of teachers and classroom quality when a variety of variables were introduced. This group of researchers found that poverty variables produced the most vigorous correlations. Vu et al. (2008) conducted a study in 2008 using transcript analysis to look at differences in classroom quality. The results suggested that credentials were better than not having a credential, but a B.A. in school-district-sponsored classrooms “…did not significantly differ on any measure on classroom quality” than someone without a B.A. degree (p. 499). Various current research projects discovered some positive correlations, but the results were weak.
Research by Early et al. (2006) was based upon evaluating more complex variables to further expand knowledge on this issue. The preliminary study of these researchers found their results were inconsistent and that credentials of teachers and classroom quality were unrelated. The seven-study analysis of this team in 2007 resulted in the discovery that qualifications of teachers and classroom quality had few links regarding positive student achievement. Their analysis was that correlations between the two variables could only be found in simple studies because the research components could not withstand a complex model (Early et al., 2007).

**Teacher-child relations.** Teacher-child relationships are coming to the forefront in recent research as a strong component in the development of children (Howes et al., 2008; Jacobson, 2008; Pianta et al., 2008). When these relationships are high-quality, academic gains of children increase (Howes et al., 2008). Recent research is showing that there is a stronger connection between teacher-child relationships and the academic gains of young children than there is between teacher credentials and the academic gains of young children (Howes et al., 2008; Jacobson, 2008; Pianta et al., 2008).

**Parent response.** A 2008 study focused on discovering what parents desire in an early education program (Rose & Elicker). The warmth of the caregiver, not educational levels, was of high importance to the mothers, a point that held true in the study regardless of how the data was collected. The trait of warmth was one of the top three traits, and education was ranked lower than this attribute. Low cost was significantly more important to mothers without a high school diploma. This discovery appears to be linked to the fact that mothers with degrees usually are in higher paying jobs. Research
by Rose & Eicker (2008) revealed that there is a great deal of variance between mothers regarding what traits in an early childhood setting are attractive.

**An Unheard Voice**

The intent of this study is directly tied to the title, “Releasing the Voice of Early Education Directors: Degree Requirements.” The unheard voice of early educators is not a new phenomenon, but is a result of a type of social order that is often associated with issues dealing with children and low paid workers. Mansberger (2005) wrote the following in her article called “Leadership Preparation in Dangerous Times” in the *Academic Exchange Quarterly*: “The current educational policy climate is promoting a dangerously narrow definition of learning, teaching, and the purpose of public education that threatens to silence the voices and divergent views of the non-majority and less-powerful” (p. 7). Public school educators are higher paid and therefore heard more often in society than their early education counterparts. The narratives of K-12 teachers exist in large quantity compared to the almost nonexistent narratives of preschool teachers (Court, Merav, & Ornan, 2009). In 1997, Whitebook noticed the hierarchy within the education field and made the statement that those who work with young children “must struggle to make their voices heard among a competing chorus of other interests” (p. 7). She also said that “provider voices are often muffled by those of us who volunteer our opinions, often repeatedly, and we fail to consider whether our group process encourages or ensures everyone an opportunity to share their perspectives” (p. 3) and that her “hope is that the early childhood field will begin to recognize and challenge the cultural standards of leadership that silence many of our most creative and dedicated colleagues” (p. 7). The desire of Whitebook (1997) was that early education professionals would
stand up against the imposed silence and be heard has not been actualized. The end result is that the voice of preschool professionals is relatively unheard (Court et al., 2009).

Today the field of early education is still being guided by leaders outside of physical programs. Whitebook (1997) felt in the 1990s that one of the main reasons for the resulting social order was due to lack of finances within individual programs to support advocacy efforts and network providers through professional development ventures. This conundrum is still present today. Early education is a labor-intensive field, and costs to operate high quality programs are increasing as new standards are being put in place to regulate the industry (Miller, 2008). Budgets are consumed with labor cost ranging between 50 and 70%, depending on the program type. Spending additional funds for substitutes and/or extended hours for early educators to attend venues where their voice can be expressed and heard is not feasible. As a consequence, the leadership void has been filled by those who are outside of physical early education programs and do not directly work with young children (Whitebook, 1997). The resulting representative voice does not fully relate to what is actually taking place within early education programs of today.

The identity of the early education field has become fragmented and disjointed as the leadership void has been filled by persons who have been separated from practitioners. An ideological chasm has occurred with persons involved with academia or politics on one side and persons with actual experience on one the other side. This chasm is magnified by the fact that not all Americans see early education as a necessity (Whitebook et al., 2009). In addition, there is not a collective name to identify the profession (Stephen, 2010), which, according to Goffin & Washington (2008),
“provide(s) concrete evidence of our confusion about the purpose of our work and public evidence of internal divisions” (p. 25). These two researchers go on to say that “it reflects our internal ambiguity regarding who we are as an organized field of practice” (Goffin & Washington, 2008, p. 26). The simple principle of varying titles (Stephen, 2010) has caused an identity crisis which has further prevented the voice of early educators to be heard.

The unification of the field has been a difficult task. Gable, Rothrauff, Thornburg, & Mauzy (2008) have stated that seeking consensus within the field is paramount to professionalizing and taking the industry forward. This team stresses that the area of formal education and early education training needs priority attention (Gable et al., 2008). Goffin & Washington (2008) tagged the needed process to unify early educators as “adaptive work,” an activity that is arduous (p. 25). The following quote from these two educators poetically describes the magnitude of the ensuing process: “The field’s adaptive work will likely evoke difficult debate, painful decisions and choices, and the loss of some of field’s historically cherished positions” (p. 25).

The voice of those working day-to-day with young children must be heard in an effort to move the field of early education towards being a professionally recognized people group. The amount of professional opportunities to be heard must be in proportion to the rise of imposed professional standards so that the field can fully engage in adaptive work. The review of literature for the study at hand uncovered a 2008 research document that allowed the voice of those educating and taking care of young children to be heard (Shpancer et al.). It stated the following: “Notably, caregivers in this study did not spontaneously mention improved education as one of the ways to make the daycare
experience better for themselves and the children” (p. 409). This statement is an example of the voice that needed to be heard.

**Professionalization.** The occupation categories that early educators fall within span the “service” industry and the “professional” industry according to the USDL (Torrence & Donohue, 2007). Those associated with public pre-k are linked with kindergarten and elementary teachers and are therefore considered to have a professional occupation (USDL, 2010). The rest of the early educators are grouped into the service industry with porters and aerobics instructors, a factoid that further takes away the educational voice of those working with young children (USDL, 2010). This division of occupational association is a travesty and could be one of the key factors holding back the professionalization of the field as a whole.

Those who choose to work with young children typically have a different personality and temperament than those who choose to work with older children. Early educators have a tendency to be highly gifted as nurtures and mercy bearers, therefore bent to acts of service. But, this service temperament does not negate the professional components of the position required in providing high-quality care and education to young children. It is surmised that the rational and affective aspects of the profession attracts those who value intrinsic rewards (Shpancer et al., 2008). Court et al. (2009) reported that this field is a great example of the intertwining of personal and professional traits in teaching. In lower-quality early education programs the expectations are usually lowered to that of custodial care rather than expectations of teaching and educating using advanced skills (Bellm & Whitebook, 2006). The misunderstanding of early education often associates the field with this lower type of programming, thus de-professionalizing the whole people group.
A question to be asked is if the requirement of degrees is the key to professionalizing the field. While it is true that many teachers in the public pre-k system are required to have degrees, most other early educators are not. Many organizations and regulatory groups feel that raising the educational level of early educators is a way to professionalize the field, thus drawing public respect and raising the status (Bueno et al., 2010, p. 2). This tactic seems logical because one of the traits of a high-quality classroom is teacher education as established above. But, the literature review for this study has shown that the educational level of the teacher is only one aspect of academic gains.

The Economic Opportunity Institute (EOI) (2009) posed in their article, “The Early Childhood Education Career and Wage Ladder: Bringing Professionalism to Early Childhood Education,” that compensation, consistency, and education and training are the keys to professionalization (p. 1). Turnover of teachers within the pre-K workforce is approximately 30% annually and four times more likely than for K-12 teachers (Bueno et al., 2010). Teacher turnover negatively affects classroom outcomes (Whitebook et al., 2009). It has been discovered that professional development ventures for early education teachers aid in reducing turnover rates (Whitebook et al., 2009).

Raising the educational level via professional development does not require acquisition of a costly degree. There are many other more affordable options such as the CDA credential and the participation in other educational trainings. Reasonable expectations must be held regarding the cost of higher education and lack of professional recognition.

**Wages.** Wages earned in the field of early education have not risen in the job market since the 1980s according to a report called *Losing Ground in Early Childhood*
Education: Declining Workforce Qualifications in an Expanding Industry by Herzenberg, Price, & Bradley (2005). There has been a 13% decline in teachers and administrators with any higher education hours and/or degrees between the 1980s and the 2000s (p. 1). The decline is mostly in the age groups between the mid-20s to the mid-40s leaving those in their late 50s and older as the most educated group of early educators (p. 26). The authors of this study attribute a partial explanation of this downward trend to low wages and benefits, rapid growth of the field, and a public policy that focus on quantity versus quality (Herzenberg et al., 2005). Federal funds have been allocated to training through the Child Care and Development Block Grant that is now called the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF). Unfortunately, a substantial amount of the funding has been spent on training that has not increased the percentage of degree acquisition in early education (Bellm & Whitebook, 2006) and has only had a slight positive effect on wages.

Wages of the early education workforce are directly tied to program income which is meager considering how much it costs to provide high-quality education and care for young children (Sussman & Gillman, 2007). Most parents cannot afford to pay the tuition associated with high-quality programming that is supported by teachers with degrees. Such quality programming usually requires higher pay and benefits to attract and retain teachers (Bellm & Whitebook, 2006). Therefore market forces can be considered the main contributor to lower wages (Fowler, Bloom, Talon, Banneker, & Kenton, 2008). As it stands, early educators fall into the category of the working poor (Bueno et al., 2010). The marketplace can be attributed to being one of the biggest influencing factors in the quality of early education and care due to the impact of low wages (Ackerman, 2006).
Low wages are one of the structural elements in early education that most often cause turnover in the workforce (Bueno et al., 2010). The process elements of working with young children attract early educators, while low wages and stressful working conditions cause turnover (Shpancer, et al., 2008). This paradigm is magnified if the person has a degree (Ackerman, 2006) due to the fact that the wages and benefits of elementary teachers and are substantially more than that of non-public school workforce.

Undeniably, wages affect the quality and professionalization of the field of early education. The issue of how to link higher income to the attainment of higher education has challenged early education advocates, directors, regulators, and politicians (Torrence & Donohue, 2007). Unfortunately, a review of literature failed to show any way to increase the wages within the current marketplace framework without government assistance.

Literature revealed that there has been a recent surge of creative governmental programs designed to supplement the wages of early educators. Cash incentives and career lattice concepts are being tried in a variety of states using Federal block grant funds (Bellm & Whitebook, 2006; Mietlicki, 2010; Gable, Rothrauff, Thornburg, & Mauzy, 2008; Whitebook, Ryan, Kipnis, & Sakai, 2008). Tennessee is one state that has implemented a lattice program to improve compensation as early childhood teachers reach higher levels of professional development (Mietlicki, 2010). New Jersey instituted the Abbot Preschool Program with one goal being that of equalizing the qualifications and pay between pre-k and K-12 teachers (Whitebook et al., 2008). Bachelor’s degrees were mandatory for teachers teaching pre-k programs within Abbott schools, thus changing the acquisition dynamics within this state. Other states such as California and
Oklahoma have instituted creative programs using Federal dollars to address wage issues. Research revealed that most early learning projects supported in government funding have not been liquidated due to the rough economic times (Robelen, 2009).

A review of literature revealed a variety of results from governmental programs effort to increase wages within the field. Success rates in Tennessee were found to be related to those who had participated in some form of post-education prior to entering the program (Mietlicki, 2010). Statistics from the 2008 study of Tennessee showed less than 50% of the early educators who started the career lattice orientation actually went on to use higher education scholarships that covered 75 to 100% of tuition costs (p. 99). This fact draws the question of whether career ladders providing salary incentives can be enough to inspire early educators to acquire college credits. Over one-half of the directors of Abbott Preschool Program facilities reported positive results from the project associated with higher levels of education attached to wage increases in a study done by Whitebook et al. (2008). This statistic can be viewed as positive or negative, especially in light of how much government dollars have been allocated to this project (Bellm & Whitebook, 2006). Most government programs that address the issue of low wages and benefits of early educators are new and have not been fully researched regarding outcomes and implications. Time will tell.

**Impact of Requiring Degrees**

The question of what the impact will be of requiring degrees must be asked and answered to fully understand the voice of early education directors. The process of investigating required professional development systems for early educators have been found to be under researched and could produce a huge impact on a variety of industries
(Lobman & Ryan, 2007). Torrence & Donohue (2007) estimated that there was a 2.3
million person workforce in the early childhood field in 2007 (p. 5). This pair of
researchers stated in their journal article, “EC E-Learning: A national review of early
childhood education distance learning programs,” that the connection between an
educated workforce and a high-quality workforce is “often not enough” (p. 10).

The development of stricter standards for teacher education is considered by some
researchers as being premature due to new studies challenging basic research that has
been used to support such measures in the past (Howes et al., 2008). Increased program
costs and teacher shortages are two main impact concerns (Bellm & Whitebook, 2006).
A large personal cost impact to teachers was also discovered. Many issues must be
considered regarding impact when instituting degree requirement policies of early
educators and many researchers were found to be delving into the challenge (Ackerman,
2005; Frede, Jung, Barnett, Lamy, & Figueras, 2007; Gilliam & Marchesseault, 2005;

It was found in this literature review that early educators themselves will be impacted
immensely and will face a variety of obstacles to meet degree requirements. Ackerman
(2005) listed the challenges as the following: “the constraints of being an adult learner,
lack of academic experience, possible language and cultural barriers, and the minimal
wages that are standard in the field” (p. 6). Literature showed that the average early
educator takes five years to obtain a two-year degree according to statistics from the
Teacher Education Assistance for College and Higher Education (T.E.A.C.H.) program
(Hart & Schumacher, 2005). The impact on the lives of the early educators will be
instantaneous while the results will come slowly for them and the industry while degrees are obtained.

**Recruitment and Retention.** Recruitment and retention have become important issues in the quest to provide high-quality early education. Degree requirements have had a direct impact on these two issues. Recruitment of workforce into the field is more difficult due to low wage and benefits and the fact that many programs cannot provide increases commensurate with new educational requirements (Ackerman, 2006). A survey done by Rolfe in 2005 showed that two-thirds of directors had recruitment difficulties.

Retention is more commonly discussed in terms of turnover in early education. Turnover is a widespread problem and is directly connected with program quality where issues of stability and relationship are critical to young children. Wages, benefits, working conditions, and new education requirements are directly tied with turnover (Ackerman, 2006; Aviles & Murphy, 2008; EOI, 2009; Fowler et al., 2008). Turnover rates ebb and flow due to a variety of issues, therefore statistics often change. Abbot Preschool Program directors recently reported an approximate 25% turnover rate (Whitebook et al., 2008, p. 2) while it was reported that those in Illinois are seeing approximately a 38% rate (Fowler, et al., 2008, p.3). It must be noted that Illinois has also implemented a career lattice program for early education where some wages are also being supplemented with Federal funds (Fowler et al., 2008). Higher education requirements of New Jersey that were mandated for 2005 resulted in almost a 25% turnover due to teachers who could not and/or would not meet the new standards (Whitebook et al., 2008, p. 2). It is very interesting to annotate that the directors reported that new teachers who met the upgraded requirement were “less competent in managing
the classroom and in implementing developmentally appropriate practices” than were their staff prior to the project (Whitebook et al., 2008, p. 3).

As documented in this literature review, public and Federal finances initiatives that supported higher wages and compensation were found or associated with being the key to improving teacher retention. In light of this finding, it must be recognized that there are many private, faith-based programs that do not accept government funding. Special consideration must be taken regarding the impact of degree requirements for this specialized program-group. As far as state initiatives using block grant money, associative retention rates have not substantially improved. Head Start directors in the Abbott Preschool Program reported the loss of 125 certified teachers to higher paying public schools once reaching the new education requirements (Abbott v. Burke, 2002, p. 13). Contrary to this report, Whitebook et al. (2008) recounted in their study two years later that Abbott Preschool Program directors did not report teacher turnover to public schools. A different issue was found by this group of research involving inequity issues regarding Abbott pre-k employees receiving higher wages and benefits than their non-Abbot employees (Whitebook et al., 2008). Literature revealed conflicting reports on how public and Federal finances initiatives affected retention.

**Cost.** Requiring early educators to obtain degrees comes at a high cost over a long period of time. There would be a financial hardship on many early educators because they can only go to school part-time which renders them ineligible for aid. In a study done by Ackerman (2005), it was reported that an early education teacher would have to outlay over one third of their paycheck in pursuit of a degree based on 2004 statistics (p. 7). Knowing that early educators are essentially the lowest paid people group in the
education industry, expecting early educators to pay for college is not practical. Literature supported the fact that financial support must be put in place if early educators are expected to enter higher education (Hart & Schumacher, 2008; Lobman & Ryan, 2007). Such an endeavor would be costly to the public therefore, policy makers must find a balance between desired child outcomes and the ability for programs to pay salaries for higher credentialed staff because of the connectivity of the two variables (Early et al., 2007). Research by Lobman & Ryan (2007) also solicited additional financial support from policy makers so that all spheres, directors, administrators, and higher education faculty, can support early educators in this quest.

While the financial amount needed for early educators to obtain a bachelor’s degree was difficult to calculate due to the quantity of variables within the industry, Head Start research provided a glimpse into what it would cost reach this goal on a smaller level. Hart & Schumacher reported that such an initiative to assist teachers of Head Start programs in obtaining bachelor’s degrees would cost approximately $298 million over an eight year period (2005, p. 10). The financial impact would multiply if applied to the whole industry.

**Availability of teachers.** The availability of teachers becomes an issue when degree requirements are not implemented equally across the industry. The literature review revealed that this principle has been considered a possible factor affecting past and future research. It was surmised that higher quality programs attract teachers with higher credentials, therefore affecting research results (Early et al., 2006). Availability is also affected when degrees are obtained and pre-k teachers leave the field to teach older children in the higher paying K-12 industry (Early et al., 2007). Higher compensation
and increased benefits easily lure early educators into other education arenas. This statement was supported in research by Hart & Schumacher (2005) which showed that 27% of teachers in Head Start programs left their positions in 2003 for another opportunity that had a better compensation package (p. 4). A degree would position an early educator for a number of substantially higher paying jobs in public education and other education areas as well. Kelley and Camilli (2007) succinctly stated what would be needed to retain early educators in their following statement: “Teacher salaries and fringe benefits would need to be roughly compatible to those of public school teachers; otherwise an incentive would be created for teachers to leave the preschool labor pool for public school and other fields” (p. 32).

Meeting the needs of nontraditional early education students. Literature showed that the nontraditional student category, in which the average early educator falls, is considered a high risk people group in higher education (Pusser et al., 2007). This topic, like many others researched in this literature review, was identified as an under-researched area (Shpancer, et al., 2008). As high risk learners, they are at the greatest risk of failing to complete preliminary coursework much less obtaining degrees (Pusser et al., 2007). The primary risk factors include family commitments, balancing full-time work and school, lack of financial resources, problem adjusting to college that is designed for a younger audience, (p. 3) and low self-esteem. Early educators were reported as following nontraditional pathways in their pursuit of reaching higher educational goals. Nontraditional pathways included on-line courses, off-hour programs, the accessing of satellite campuses, using for-profit colleges (p. 2), and/or non-credential CDA courses. According to Pusser et al., as adult learners early educators need the
following four things to help overcome high risk status: mentors, financial aid, a peer community, and specific academic plans (p. 7). Support services addressing the needs of adult learners as these help to take the student out of the high risk category thus increasing their chances of obtaining degrees (Dukakis, Bellm, Seer, & Lee, 2007). Understanding the needs of this nontraditional learning group will lead to an improvement in serving the youngest children of our society (Shpancer et al., 2008).

**Student support services.** Student support services were identified as critical to the early education workforce with a nontraditional educational status (Dukakis, & Bellm, 2006). Two suggested services that resulted from a study by Whitebook et al. (2008) were the development of a “reasonable timeline” associated with the acquisition of new credentials for early childhood educators and higher education programming that fits the needs of non-traditional learners (p. 7). Dukakis, Bellm, Seer, & Lee (2007) provided a deeper look into what is needed to support these non-traditional learners in the higher education pursuits in their report “Chutes or Ladders? Support Services for Early Childhood Students in Higher Education.” They identified the following five essential components necessary in successful student service programs: targeted delivery; advising and counseling; financial support; skill-based support; access-based support (p. 3). Though costly, student success rates increase when critical student support services are provided to early educators while they are acquiring degrees and gaining professionalization of the early education field (Dukakis & Bellm, 2006; Dukakis et al., 2007; Whitebook et al., 2009).

The biggest hurdle is the financial burden or inability to pay for a higher education. It has been established that many early educators are in a class with the working poor. The
income of most early educators will not support the expense of quality training much less college or university credit hours (Ackerman, 2006, p. 90). An additional challenge is that finance aid can be elusive for the adult student (Pusser et al., 2007). It has been estimated that six credit hours, or two courses, is equal to 3 to 4 weeks of net income of pay of early educators (Ackerman, 2006, p. 90). This estimate, even when adjusted for cost of living increases and inflation highlights the financial difficulty facing early educators in degree acquisition.

**Analysis of Degree Programs**

Literature revealed that there is a question about the ability for higher education institutions to effectively educate early educators (Early et al., 2007; Maxwell et al., 2006). Many components have contributed to the inability of higher education to effectively implement programming for the relatively new field of early education (Morgan, 2009a) including the ability to meet nontraditional needs of students, higher education leadership, issues in coursework viability, availability of degrees, and articulation. There was also a lack of consistency and quality reported within the variety of degree levels and degree programs available to pre-k teachers (Levine, 2006; Bellum & Whitebook, 2006; Dukakis & Bellm, 2006). Research by Whitebook et al. (2006) showed evidence that changes are needed in the higher education system as it related to early education. Research showing a disparity between what was previously reported and the results of recent studies has brought to light the need for further examination of the components of degree programs that involve early education. As a result, many new studies critically looked at educational components such as content, course quality, and the quality of the instructors (Dukakis & Bellm, 2006; NCCIC, 2009).
Leadership. As the demand for coursework grows, the demand for qualified leadership in the form of higher education instructors and department specialists who can address quality in early education also grows. Lobman & Ryan (2007) pointed out that it would be inappropriate for policy makers to expect early educators to obtain more training in early education when those teaching in higher education do not have the knowledge themselves (p. 24). The research team of Whitebook et al. (2009), said that the situation of having unknowledgeable higher education instructors has resulted in an “urgency to build the capacity of ECE teacher preparation programs, which currently face heavy teaching loads and inadequate staffing” (p. 10). This situation is amplified by the fact that there is a deficiency in doctoral-level leaders who understand and have experience in true early education that focuses on the preschool years (Hyson, Tomlinson, & Morris, 2009).

Course instruction and the practical knowledge of the subject by the instructor are pivotal to providing quality learning experiences. Unfortunately, many college and university level instructors do not have applicable experience working with preschool-age children (Bueno et al., 2010). Lobman & Ryan (2007) used New Jersey as an example of the conundrum that exists. They reported that the lack of content in courses in New Jersey was contributed to the fact that “many faculty members currently working in institutions of higher education do not have up-to-date knowledge” (Lobman, Ryan, & McLaughlin, 2005, p. 13). Recent research reported the same scenario, thus confirming the supposition and further stating that some early education faculty are deficient in research and theory based on “inadequate knowledge” (Hyson et al., 2009, p. 1). The hypocritical state of having unknowledgeable higher education teachers teaching pre-k
teachers is not in the best interests of our country regarding the advancement of the academic skills of young children.

This review of literature found institutions of higher learning stating the need to hire faculty with applicable experience and knowledge in the area of early education as a priority (Bueno et al., 2010; Hyson et al., 2009; Whitebook et al., 2009). There is an obvious void in leadership which will increase as requirements increase. Strong consideration for the provision of financial resources to secure the faculty needed to meet the need must be paramount in the decision making process for policy makers.

**Coursework.** The components necessary for a student to be fully prepared for effective teaching and viable in the workforce have been debated for many years (Bueno et al., 2010). With that said, it is imperative that coursework must be based in early education practices for degree requirements to fully benefit the young children who early educators teach (Ackerman, 2005). Unfortunately, literature analyzing the coursework of degrees that are offered to early educators for bachelor’s degrees revealed that this is often not the case. Morgan (2009a) boldly wrote in an article taking a closer look at higher education that “academic credentials do not correlate with ECE competencies” (p. 37). Dukakis & Bellm (2006) stated that California’s “higher education system is somewhat mismatched with the higher education needs of the ECE workforce” and that “there is a general lack of upper-division and graduate ECE courses (p. 4). Many A.A.S. early childhood degrees are written in a manner that does not transcend into a teaching program (Ignash & Slotnich, 2007). Associate degree programs were found to be geared towards non-public pre-k programming such as child care, Head Start, or private preschool (Hyson et al., 2009). In 2006, Maxwell et al. did a study representing
approximately 85% of the early childhood teacher preparation programs within the United States higher education system. Of the early childhood degree programs reviewed by Maxwell et al. (2006), only 2.3% of the bachelor’s programs had exclusive content covering all ages of early education (p. 10). All others included school age educational components. This group of researchers also reported that 70% of the associate’s and bachelor’s degree programs “required at least one course in…the education and care of preschool aged children” (p. 11) and that “20% of the bachelor’s degree programs covered the age range of 3-8” (p. 25). His findings showed that few programs included traditional early education content areas. Levine pointed out in his 2006 study that teacher education degrees vary in quality and lack consistency. Hyson et al. (2009) reported similar findings with the addition of a disparity in the usage of theory and research. Online courses were found to be underdeveloped (Pusser et al., 2007), and a lack of integration of pedagogical knowledge was lacking (Whitebook et al., 2009). This review of literature revealed that early education coursework must be improved.

**Availability.** The subject of availability of early education bachelor’s degree programs is one that is being overlooked in the policy development phase of degree requirements of early educators. If implemented, the demand would overwhelm higher education institutions (Morgan, 2009a). Ackerman (2005) also challenged the ability of higher education programs to handle the number of early education teachers needing degrees as well as their ability to provide quality early childhood coursework. Only 30% of higher education institutions offered early childhood degrees in 2006 and of this group, only 44% were 4-year institutions (Maxwell et al., 2006, p. 6). In 1999, New Jersey mandated 30 of its poorest school districts, known as the Abbott schools, to obtain B.A.
degrees for all preschool teachers. They did not have any programs that focused on preschool which created a gap in the preparation of teachers (Lobman et al., 2005, p. 5). Literature showed that availability was an issue.

**Articulation.** Articulation in the two areas of prior experience to course credit and associate’s degrees to bachelor’s degrees is vital in meeting the diverse needs of the early education workforce (Aviles & Murphy, 2008). The articulation of prior experience to college credit will increase the chances early educators who fall within the non-traditional student category in obtaining degrees. NCCIC (2010) described articulation as a “pathway for professional development” (p. 1). Creation of a supportive pathway was found to be one way to increase college credit acquisition (Torrence & Donohue, 2007) and reduce wasted financial and time resources (Aviles & Murphy, 2008).

Due to the expense of entering a 4-year institution of higher learning, most early educators will begin their quest in obtaining a credential in a two-year community college-type environment. This trek presents its own set of problems because articulation of a two-year early education degree to a four-year institution is problematic in most cases (Ackerman, 2005; Hart & Schumacher, 2005). Ignash & Slotnich (2007) identified only 5 states “as truly having statewide articulation agreements in teacher education (p. 50). Tennessee is one state that was identified as being successful in implementing a statewide articulation system between 2- and 4-year institutions (Mietlicki, 2010). Federal leadership was found to need guidance regarding articulation of community-based programs to higher education institutions (Aviles & Murphy, 2008). Without a resolution in articulation problems, many early educators will not continue on to earn
bachelor’s degrees due to additional coursework which translates into the expenditure of more time and finances.

**Summary of Research**

While current topical literature was allusive, the reviewed literature covered a wide range of peripheral and formative information on the topic. Most literature concerning the effects of degrees on early education was based on studies done before 2005. This discovery supports the premise that there is a lack in current research on the topic of this study. Both the topics of child outcomes and classroom quality showed an increase in research challenging prior studies. While all literature generally supported that there were some benefits to early education teachers having bachelor’s degrees, many new studies placed little weight upon it as being the primary reason for positive results in the academic gains of children. Literature did reveal a bearing on the entire education industry if degree requirements are implemented in the form of a cost impact on multiple spheres of influenced and a lower availability of teachers. An analysis of institutions of higher learning highlighted an inability to implement proper early education coursework with qualified leadership for the masses. Overall, this review revealed that current literature does not support that bachelor’s degrees for early educators will conclusively improve the profession and that there is a need for deeper research.
Chapter Three: Methodology

I chose to execute a qualitative study in search of answers to the following question:
How do directors of accredited preschools feel about accreditation standards requiring early education professionals to have degrees? Beginning research subquestions were “What credentials do participants and their teachers currently hold?,” “What professional development plans are in place at the program?,” and “What experiences do directors have associated with credential requirements?” The inductive process of a qualitative study and the emergent nature of the process helped to form additional questions to explore based on the participants multiple realities (Ary et al., 2006; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2007; Seidman, 2006).

Phenomenological Design

This study is of a phenomenological design with basic transcendental measures to release the voice of the participants in an effort to let their experiences on the topic be used in forming or reforming early education policy. I chose a phenomenological approach because I wanted to discover how early education directors truly felt about the topic that I investigated. It was my belief that directors have not been terse on the subject, but instead have not been given a venue to express their feelings and experiences. Therefore, a phenomenological approach was most appropriate to hear what early education directors had to say. Personal narratives of teachers have come to the forefront of educational research in the past 20 years as a form of method of inquiry (Court et al., 2009).
Because I have had a rich history as an early education director who is committed to being a life-long learner, I implemented elements of a transcendental study to insure that my educational quest did not alter the responses of participants. A study of a transcendental phenomenological nature insured that my beliefs, existing knowledge, experience, and any other preexisting traits did not present a bias during my research (Moustakas, 1994). My story was given a prominent placement in the study to expose my perspective, thus reinforcing transcendental practices. My design took into consideration three processes to assist in implementing transcendental phenomenological methodology established by Moustakas (1994). Epoche is when the researcher will purposefully “refrain from judgment” (p. 33). Transcendental phenomenological reduction takes the action of epoche one step further through the researcher looking at the event as if he or she was encountering it for the first time (p. 34). The third process is imaginative variation where the researcher endeavors to “grasp the structural essences of experience” (p. 35).

I chose not to adhere to the deeper transcendental phenomenological practices of Husserl (Husserl, 1999a; Husserl, 1999b) due to its metaphysical associations being in conflict with my biblical worldview. Instead I supplemented the basic transcendental practices that I have chosen with the biblical principle found in Leviticus 19:15 (New International Version, 2010) where it says the following: “Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly.” The word “justice” infers the act of an investigation and has similar traits to a phenomenological study. I have been committed to investigating my topic fairly and in a manner that was impartial to all sides of the issue.
Role of the Researcher

The nature of a phenomenological study leads the researcher to face his or her personal statements and experiences with the topic. Husserl, a German late 1800s and early 1900s philosopher and researcher, was the first to call this step the “epoche” or the exclusion of the personal self of the researcher and the natural world from influencing research (Husserl, 1999a; Husserl, 1999b). Moustakas (1994) referred to the epoche as the beginning step in phenomenological studies and “returning to the self to discover the nature and meaning of things as they appear and in their essence” (p. 26). Husserl associated the epoche with “parenthesiz[ing] everything…which belongs to the natural attitude” (Husserl, 1999b, p. 65). He also used the word “expulsion” in his writings to frame this principal (p. 67). In 1927 Husserl added the additional adjective of “bracketing” to describe the epoche, a term that is commonly used by modern phenomenological researchers (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1999; Tesch, 1990; Van Manen, 1990). Moustakas, a student of Husserl, provided readers with an overview of his technique using modernized language in *Phenomenological Research Methods* (1999), where he summarized the process of the epoche as one of looking at data in a fresh manner by setting aside “everyday understandings, judgments, and knowings” (p. 33). I chose to refer to the epoche step as bracketing from this point forward in my study because I felt this word provided a clearer picture of the intent of the process. As a qualitative research specialist, Creswell (2007) advised that the bracketing step be done at the beginning of a study to reveal in a forthright manner how personal contexts influence the researcher (p. 235).
Following the advice of Creswell (2007) and in an act of transparency, I revealed how the topic of this study affected me personally at the beginning of this section to help the reader understand my frame of reference. Because of my passion on the topic, I divulged how my life had intersected with degree requirements and additionally paused to expose my feelings in an effort to bracket my experiences within this study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994; Husserl, 1999a) before proceeding to discover the experiences of others (Creswell, 2007).

A major role of the researcher is to execute a trustworthy study. To reach this goal I performed a thorough audit trail throughout my work. My audit trail included a reflexivity log that consisted of memoing research observations with the use of rich and thick descriptors as well as low-inference descriptors where applicable. Audit trail memoing also included reflective and negative case analysis documentation (Ary et al., 2006).

**Biography of researcher.** I began my profession in early education (birth through preschool) in 1986. My passion has always been high quality, developmentally appropriate learning environments that are patterned after the teaching style of Jesus, but my path to personal higher education ended short of a diploma in the early eighties. As the beginning years passed in my ministry, God opened up a variety of venues in which I shared my passion despite my lack of college credentials. Opportunities included a position as a curriculum coordinator at a Christian preschool, directing a secular preschool, holding a position in Austin as the faith-based representative on the advisory committee to Child Care Licensing, and speaking engagements where I shared my biblical worldview on early education.
In 1994, I became the founding director of Harvest Child Development Center (HCDC) at Harvest Church in the North Fort Worth area. HCDC is licensed for 600 children ages six weeks through thirteen years. It quickly became one of the largest preschool/childcare programs in the nation. As HCDC reached capacity enrollment three years after opening, I felt the need for higher educational accountability. The spring of 1998, I cried out to God regarding the path that He wanted me to take. I heard the audible voice of God tell me that He had called me to “teach teachers” and felt the confirmation not to compromise on providing young children with developmentally appropriate, learning environments. In an act of obedience and not knowing where to start, I lead my early education team at HCDC through accreditation with ACSI the fall of 2000.

As a licensed child care director for the State of Texas, I only met the basic credentials to lead an ACSI accredited program. I held two preschool credentials, a CDA and a National Administrators Credential, with the addition of 64 “basket weaving” college credits. I had always wanted to attend a university, but I never had anyone encourage and/or support me in the dream. During the accreditation visit, the chairperson challenged me to pursue a degree “so that my credentials would match my expertise.” This challenge resonated deep within my spirit. God had previously opened a variety of doors for me to share biblical truths regarding the education of His youngest children and I secretly longed to do more for Him. At 40 years of age, I found myself back at my local community college where I left off 20 years earlier. Looking back, my life then closely represented the profile of early educators (39 years of age without a degree and a non-traditional learner.)
One year after the accreditation visit to my school, I was finishing my associate degree. It was also at this time that I traveled to Colorado Springs to attend ACSI’s first International Early Education Leadership Conference. I was drawn to Southwestern Assemblies of God University’s (SAGU) booth that was hosted by Dr. Mary Campbell, the chair of their graduate education department. I shared my journey with Dr. Mary and explained to her how I felt God was calling me to be a spokesperson for Christian early education. I felt like she could see deep within my soul and the desire I had to further my education. Not only did she encourage me in my trek, but she also spoke new words into my life, “Graduate School.” Dr. Mary led me down the path to earn my bachelor’s in Professional Development and helped me enrolled in the Harrison School of Graduate Studies in 2003.

In 2004, I joined ACSI’s early education missionary team to South Africa where we worked in eight preschools. My specific task was to work with the directors. On the twenty-four hour flight to Johannesburg, God placed me next to Dr. Becky Carwile, an education professor at Liberty University. I was touched by the mothering heart of Dr. Carwile towards me during the long flight and the spirit that I saw her display with everyone she met while in South Africa. It was not until after this trip that I learned that this selfless professor was suffering from breast cancer. She shortly went on to Heaven, but she left an early education legacy that has touched my heart forever.

In 2006, I graduated from SAGU with the first Masters of Education in Early Education Administration. The example of Dr. Carwile spurred me on to enter the doctoral program of her university. I began my pursuit of a Doctorate of Education in educational leadership at Liberty University in 2007.
My trek is unique in early education. The preponderance of early education professionals who I have met do not have degrees, hence the importance of my biography and the importance of this study.

**Intersection with the topic.** As the executive director of a large ACSI accredited early education program, I have faced a new requisite standard requiring my staff to have education degrees and/or credentials. Chapter One of this study delineated the history of degree requirements in accredited early education.

From the beginning of my profession in early education in 1986, I was made aware of the ominous threat by authorities to impose degree requirements in my new vocational path. While I currently exceed degree requirements, the first fourteen years of my career I faced the threat of not being able to continue in the ministry I loved due to the lack of credentials. My biography revealed my personal trek to obtaining a higher education. Unfortunately, my trek is not shared by the majority of early educators.

I have faced a different type of looming threat; I oversee dedicated early education professionals who are being forced to evaluate their career path because of new standards from our accrediting agency. While I secretly desired a reason to go back to college, many early educators I know are repelled by the thought of engaging in higher education. I have been able to woo some of my staff into enrolling in our local community college by offering 50% tuition scholarships and loaning textbooks to reduce the financial impact of going back to school. While this tactic has lured approximately 25% of my staff, I still have staff who cannot afford taking $75 out of their small income to pay for one college course. Three of my staff are transparently saying that they will quit before they will go back to school to get a degree. Other staff have written their professional development
plans to include the goal of obtaining a credential, but not committed to attaining a degree. My director, assistant director, and department supervisors all are on the trajectory to acquire their associate’s and/or bachelor’s degrees.

I have four more years to bring my team up to the credential requirements of our accrediting body. I honestly do not know if my entire team will engage in a path to acquiring meeting degree requirements much less secure compulsory credentials by the deadline. While I have not included the voice of the director of my program in this study as a participating director, I pray that this study will expose the true feelings that early education professionals have on this topic.

**Reflections on the topic.** During my doctoral coursework, I was challenged by the late Dr. Jill Jones to do a phenomenological study on my field of early education because of the lack of venues for this people group to be heard. As an early education director, I can only recall a few times where my opinion was sought on topics of my profession and I cannot remember an occasion where I was asked how degree requirements for preschool teachers would affect my program. Choosing the topic of releasing the voices of early education directors regarding teacher degree requirements became significant to me as a researcher and early educator due to State and accreditation agency trends to require such credentials.

I often have pondered what will happen to the private early education sector if all licensing and regulatory agencies require early educators to have credentials and/or degrees. While this study will only look at degree requirements, the industry still has to face a precluding step of credential requirements. My fear has been that once early
educators are required to obtain degrees that they will vacate the private sector to take higher paying jobs in the public school system.

In my twenty-five year career in early education, I have found that very few persons with degrees are better early educators than those without degrees. I strongly feel that early childhood bachelor’s degrees prepare teachers to work with elementary children, but they are too pedant and do not have enough content on how to teach young children. Brain research suggests that brains morph around the age of five years of age (Gilkerson & Klein, 2008; NSCDC, 2007). Research supports that the needs of preschool children are different from that of their elementary school counterparts requiring alternative educational practices in an effort to support their learning and development in a healthy manner (Brotherson, 2005; Gilkerson & Klein, 2008; NSCDC, 2007). I have strongly felt that higher educational institutions must evaluate how they are preparing teachers to teach the preschool children of our society. I have felt that graduates with degrees specializing in high school education are not prepared to teach elementary-aged children. This same scenario can be applied at a lower level. I feel that graduates with degrees specializing in early childhood education are not prepared to teach early education. I passionately have felt that the following question must be asked of professionals directing early education programs: Is someone with a bachelor’s degree in education a more effective early education teacher than someone without a degree?

**Procedural Design**

**Setting.** I studied early education directors from Tarrant County, Texas. Tarrant County had 63 accredited licensed early education programs during the beginning phases of this study (TDFPS, 2010). It is an urban area located in the north central part of Texas.
and touts on its website as being one of the fastest growing counties in the United States (Tarrant County, 2010). According to the United States Census Bureau (USCB) (2010), it had an estimated population of 1,789,900 in 2009 and spans over 863 square miles. Tarrant County is a substantially White area with a corresponding percentage of 78.4, a Black population of 14.4%, and Hispanic or Latino population of 26.7% (USCB, 2010). The remaining inhabitants are from people groups that have single digit representative percentages (USCB, 2010). Tarrant County has a high school graduate rate of 81.3% and bachelor’s degree or higher rate of 26.6% for persons that are 25 years or older, a rate slightly higher than the state rate (USCB, 2010). The median household income is $56,265, also higher than the state rate (USCB, 2010).

**Participants.** The original design of this study was to secure a purposeful sample of 14 to 20 early education directors of accredited early education programs from Tarrant County in northeast Texas (Ary et al., 2006; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002; Seidman, 2006). Qualitative experts take a variety of positions concerning the quantity of participants in a study. Polkinghorne (1989) suggests using five to 25 participants in phenomenological studies while Creswell (2007) suggests doing in-depth interviews “with as many as ten individuals” (p. 131). Ary et al. (2006) suggests interviewing 10 to 25 persons and a focus group size of six to 12 participants. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) suggested a similar group size of seven to 10. The overall recommendation from Bogdan and Biklen (2007) on this subject is to “think small” (p. 56). My choice of the number of participants fell within these suggested parameters. Regarding the traits of the participants, I looked for directors of accredited programs and licensed. In the event that the desired amount directors of accredited programs could not
be found in Tarrant County, I included directors from non-accredited programs that have overseen accredited programs in the past. Negative case sampling was done to enrich and deepen data acquisition while bringing balance to the study (Ary et al., 2006; Seidman, 2006). Participating directors were an equal mix of those currently with bachelor’s degrees and without bachelor’s degrees.

I rigorously choose the participants to ensure that the overall voice of the early education professionals in Tarrant County was heard through purposeful and maximum variation sampling (Seidman, 2006). I implemented a variation of snow ball sampling using key informants to help me identify early education directors who had something to say about the topic of this study (Ary et al., 2006; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). One avenue that I took was to solicit names of directors from the qualifying accreditation agencies. I also asked the leaders of child care associations that have members in Tarrant County to recommend directors to be featured in the study. A phone script was used to reduce researcher bias and to ensure consistent application within the process of identifying possible participants. The Participant Nominee Solicitation Phone Script was the interview tool that I used and can it be found in Appendix E.

Once nominees for the study were collected, initial contact was made personally by me via the phone to introduce my study and establish a relationship to aid the obtaining commitments to engage in the study (Seidman, 2006). I explained to the directors a broad overview of my study, how I gained access to their name, and what was expected if they were chosen to participate (Seidman, 2006). After the initial phone contact I emailed the nominee a copy of the participant consent form (Seidman, 2006). A copy of the consent form can be found in Appendix A. All nominees that agreed to participate
received a survey interview. A phone scripts was again used to reduce researcher bias and to ensure consistent application within the process of securing participant participation. The Participant Participation Phone Script Participant Selection Confirmation was the interview tool that was used during this stage and can be found in Appendix E.

Selection for the last two interview stages on my research was done once the data from the survey interviews had been analyzed. A key component in the selection of directors was based in the richness of their expressed experiences within the open ended questions to aid in capturing the essence of the phenomena being studied. I chose to refrain from including directors who seem too eager to participate as suggested by Seidman (2006) to insure that my data is not swayed by a radical voice. If possible, I wanted at least one director holding a bachelor’s degree and one non-degreed director from each qualified accreditation agency to be included in the study to further meet the criteria of negative sampling (Ary et al., 2006; Seidman, 2006). Phone scripts were also used to secure appointments with participants. The intent was again to reduce researcher bias and to ensure consistent application within the process of securing participant participation. The Participant Selection Confirmation, Individual Interview Appointment Phone Script, and Focus Group Appointment Phone Scripts were the interview tools that I used during these stages and can be found in Appendix E.

In appreciation of the participation of the directors in the study, those submitting a survey interview received a thank you email. For those participating in the live interviews stages, the directors were provided dinner at their focus group and they
received a certificate for a chair massage. Participants could choose to redeem the certificate at their home, office, or the office of the massage therapist.

When I was granted Internal Review Board (IRB) permission to begin my research, I discovered that my participant pool was actually much smaller than I expected. I have fully disclosed this discovery in Chapter Four where I describe in detail my research steps. I ended up with eight participants through the rigorous implementation of the above delineated steps. In a commitment to confidentiality and the preservation of the identity of the directors, I chose to describe the participants as a group. This decision was made after I discovered that the number of accredited programs was significantly lower than my initial research revealed. Due to the low numbers, I felt that individually describing each participant would lead to easy identification of the director.

As prescribed, all of the participants were from licensed programs in Tarrant County, Texas. Seven of the programs of the participants were accredited. The eighth program was accredited in the past and was in the process of obtaining accreditation status through a different organization. All eight participants were females: two Black and six Caucasian. The approximate ages of the participants were as follows: two of the directors were in their thirties, three were in their forties, and three were in their early fifties. The directors had an array of credentials. While many of the participants had multiple credentials, following is the highest credential reported for each of the participants: two directors had their CDA certifications, one had her associate’s degree, one had her bachelor’s degree, three had their master’s degrees, and one has college hours not culminating in a degree or credential. The participants represented a variety of types of programs. One participant was an owner-director, two participants were
directors of non-profit programs that were church-based, two directed for-profit programs run by a national chain, one directed a for-profit corporate program, and the other two directors worked for a large corporation that provided non-profit programs for large corporate businesses. Six of the eight programs were affluent while two of the programs were older demographic areas with older facilities.

**Budget.** The estimated budget for this research totaled $1,488. Approximately one third of the expenses come from travel to and from the interviews and to reimburse the massage therapist for gas and mileage. The focus group dinners made up approximately one fourth of the budget. Budget expenses were significantly reduced due to the donation of the services of the massage therapist. In appreciation, the massage therapist received a spa or restaurant gift certificate. A spreadsheet of the research budget can be found in Appendix B.

**Data Collection**

I used three forms of interviewing as my method of data collection based on Creswell’s (2007) recommendations of using multiple techniques in phenomenological studies formulated on the goal of understanding the experiences that early education directors have had regarding degree requirements of teachers (Seidman, 2006). Multiple interview types such as traditional individual interviews, focus groups, emails, and multiple interviews are often conducted in phenomenological studies (Creswell, 2007). Bogdan and Biklen (2007) supported the use of interviews as a “dominant strategy for data collection” because they provide a viable source of first-hand descriptive data (p. 103). Interviews are the most widely used data collection method in phenomenological
studies (Ary et al., 2006). Interviewing was my chosen data collection method due to the following comment from Seidman (2006) which supports the intent of my inquiry:

[The interview] is a powerful way to gain insight into educational and other important social issues through understanding the experiences of the individual whose lives reflect those issues. . . . It affirms the importance of the individual without denigrating the possibility of community and collaboration. (p. 14)

According to Moustakas (1994), an emphasis of my chosen phenomenological approach features forming questions that assist participants in “a return to experience in order to obtain comprehensive descriptions that provide the basis for a reflective structural analysis that portrays the essences of the experience” (p. 13). Data collection was administered under this construct.

After Internal Review Board (IRB) approval and the collection of nominees, I begin data collection by sending an on-line survey-type interview to the participants. The IRB application can be found in Appendix C. This step was followed by administering individual interviews with the directors. Data collection was concluded by conducting focus groups with the participants. This format was a modified version of suggested interview structure for phenomenological studies by Seidman (2006) which featured a three-interview series methodology. I modified his version from three individual interviews to three forms of interviews with the same participants while using his suggested themes. The decision to use a modified Seidman approach was based on writings of Creswell (2007) stating that researchers should choose data collection methodology based on types that are practical to implement while reaping the most insight. Both of these goals were facilitated through my chosen methodology. Seidman
(2006) supports the exploration of alternate structures in his three-step interview process as long as chosen avenues support reflective expression that assists in the organization of the participants experiences. In addition, I applied the following advice from Creswell (2007) when choosing data collection procedures: “I encourage individuals designing qualitative projects to include new and creative data collections methods that will encourage readers and editors to examine their studies” (p. 129).

**Themes of inquiry.** Seidman (2006) stated that in the three-interview series each section should adhere to the following topic guide: the first interview should revolve around the topic of focused life history; the second interview asks questions regarding the details of the experience being researched; the third interview is based on questions that cause the participant to reflect on the meaning of their experience. I took each of these themes and applied them to the sequential steps of survey interviews, in-person individual interviews, and focus group inquiries.

**Questions.** Each step of my data collection had a focused theme of inquiry using open-ended questions (Ary et al., 2006; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Moustakas, 1994; Seidman, 2006). Open-ended questions were developed according to a substantive theoretical framework to insure that information gained from the specific audience of participants revealed the effect of the topic under investigation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). This step was implemented through the use of carefully chosen phrases and/or adjectives in order to draw out the experiences of the participants (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and provide rich data (Ary et al, 2006). Guidelines for Writing Good Questions by Ary et al. (2006) were used in development of questions for all three interview stages. A copy may be found in Appendix D.
Ary et al. (2006), Bogdan and Biklen (2007), Creswell (2007) and Moustakas (1994) also supported the implementation of open-ended questions, with Creswell (2007) prescribing a limit of approximately five per interview. Van Manen (1990) supported the usage of a limited number of questions during interviews. I chose to develop approximately five interview questions for these stages and have a list of probing statements as suggested by Ary et al. (2006). See Appendix E for the list of probing statements that could be used deepen the exploration of the phenomena during the interviews.

**Interview guides.** Interview guides are important in multi-subject projects to assist in the collection of comparable data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) and focus on gathering of experiential information and the exploration of the topic (Seidman, 2006). I used semi-structured interview guides in my individual interviews and in my focus group interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007), a procedure supported by Moustakas to aid in gaining comprehensive data (1994). Questions were semi-scripted using the following General Interview Guide questions by Moustakas (1994) to assist in guiding question development:

1. What dimensions, incidents and people intimately connected with the experience stand out for you?
2. How did the experience affect you? What changes do you associate with the experience?
3. How did the experience affect significant others in your life?
4. What feelings were generated by the experience?
5. What thoughts stood out for you?
6. What bodily changes or states were you aware of at the time?

7. Have you shared all that is significant with reference to the experience? (p. 116).

While not all of these questions fit with the scope of my study, they were used to help frame interview and focus group questions. The developed interview questions and probing statements constituted what was considered an interview guide for the study.

**Face and content validity.** Face and content validity measures were taken into consideration regarding interview questions in light of suggested procedures of qualitative specialists. Standardizing procedures were not implemented as a means of establishing validity as suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (2007) in their phenomenological interview guidelines that state such measures do not produce answers which are more valid. Seidman (2006) specifically addressed the issue of validity in phenomenological research and the resulting mechanistic responses in his following statements: “What are needed are not formulaic approaches to enhancing either validity or trustworthiness but understanding of and respect for the issues that underlie those terms” (p. 26). These comments supported the application of semi-formal face and content validity measures with each of my three interview stages.

Interview question face and content validity was established through peer review (Ary et al., 2006; Creswell, 2007). Early education peers were solicited via email to provide validity assessment and were supplied with Guidelines for Writing Good Questions by Ary et al. (2006) to use as an evaluation tool to assist in this process. This tool can be found in Appendix D. The use of peer review processing to assess face and content validity is considered a qualifying scientific procedure by Ary et al. (2006).
**Control of bias.** According to Bogdan & Biklen (2007), it is difficult to remove influences from the researcher on research due to biases. To implement control of my bias in the study and ensure that true phenomenological research was done, I took steps to “bracket out” (Creswell, 2007, pg.60) my experiences on the topic under investigation through the writing of my educational biography, intersection with the topic, and reflections on the topic prior to the data collection stage (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994; Husserl, 1999a). I also implemented the additional transcendental procedures throughout my research of reduction where I looked at the phenomena as if it were a new experience and imaginative variation where I worked at grasping structural experiences. Member checks (Ary et al., 2006; Creswell, 2007) and peer review procedures (Ary et al., 2006; Creswell, 2007) were implemented as well as reflexivity processes in the form of keeping a reflection log to aid in the control of researcher biases (Ary et al., 2006). Negative case sampling was done by having half of the participants be non-degreed and half degreed (Ary et al., 2006; Creswell, 2007; Seidman, 2006).

**Internet survey interviews.** A survey was conducted as the first step in the interview process. This stage of data collection, unlike the live interviews, was structured due to the nature of surveys. I chose to begin with this type of interview to assist in reaping solid data to use in participant selection for the last two stages of data collection. Van Manen (1990) supported the usage of written responses by participants because of the added depth such reflective activities reveal. While the focus of this electronic interview was to learn the basic history of the participants on the subject (Seidman, 2006), the primary purpose of this interviewing step was to draw out individuals that were hesitant
to share their inner thoughts and experiences, a trait that Creswell (2007) says is important in obtaining adequate data.

The survey was done via SurveyMonkey and consisted of thirteen structured questions. The first three questions were multiple choice followed by seven Likert scale questions. The survey was concluded after answering 3 open-ended questions as supported by Moustakas (1994). The questions were developed by drawing upon my years of field experience and information gained in the literature review for initial formulation. Questions based on social issues were given priority inclusion and consideration, a practice that is used in framing phenomenological studies (Moustakas, 1994). Questions were peer reviewed and a copy of the survey can be found in Appendix F. The first three multiple choice questions of the survey were chosen specifically to gather foundational information. The next seven multiple choice questions were chosen to establish the level of the history of the participants with the subject. The final three questions were open-ended and were designed to validate the voice of the director by allowing them to express their feelings on the subject, a choice that was essential in participant selection for the last two interview stages of this research (Creswell, 2007). Face and content validity was addressed by peer feedback review of the questions.

**In-person interviewing.** I implemented what Seidman (2006) called “in-depth, phenomenologically based interviewing” to the second and third interview stages (p. 15). This technique features the use of open-ended questions as the primary inquiry method that are spaced over a 2- to 3-week time frame to limit “idiosyncratic interviews” (Seidman, 2006, p. 21). Seidman (2006) recommended a 90 minute interview to provide in-depth data acquisition while Ary et al. (2006) suggested one to two hour interviews.
Moustakas (1994) did not give a specific time allotment but recommended a “long interview” (p. 116). Due to the nature of the job of early education directors, I was respectful of the time elements of my interviews. Many early education programs do not have multiple personnel to assist with day-to-day operational duties. Therefore, I asked for the personal interview to last between 60 and 90 minutes. Because the focus group interviews were done at night, I strove to adhere to the 90 minute recommendation by Seidman (2006). These two interview stages were developed with a focus of looking at the survey answers and formulating substantive theoretical questions to find out what information still needed to be uncovered (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

The structure of the qualitative interview varies (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) from casual to formal formatting (Ary et al., 2006) and span from unstructured to structured formatting (Ary et al., 2006). Moustakas (1994) encouraged the implementation of informal interviews. Creswell (2007) suggested implementing a type that would be practical to execute while reaping the best information. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) encouraged researchers to choose a type based on research goals. These comments were taken into consideration along with the fact that I did not want my participants to be intimidated by my pursuit of a doctorate degree, but wanted the participants to feel like they were valuable within the field of education.

Interviews were done in a casual, but professional manner. While I administered semi-structured interviews, I implemented a purposeful format into the individual interview and focus group sessions to ensure that these data collection stages were considered trustworthy (Seidman, 2006). I begin all interviews with social conversation (Moustakas, 1994), and small talk to put the participants at ease (Bogdan & Biklen,
I allowed the responses from the directors to direct how casual or professional I conducted the interview in progress, an adaptive process that Bogdan and Biklen (2007) said is essential in the acquisition of rich data. After this initial period of social interaction, I briefly reviewed the purpose of the interviews and reiterated that all discussion will be treated in a confidential manner (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The question phase began after the participants were given the chance to ask for any clarifications on procedures. Each question was administered with the following steps: the question was asked; I paused for the participants to reflect on the question and for me to listen to responses (Ary et al., 2006); I initiated prompts as deemed necessary to retrieve deeper information (Ary et al., 2006; Moustakas, 1994); and I added a statement of non-biased encouragement (Ary et al., 2006). After questions processed through these steps, I brought the interviews to a close by thanking the participants and asking what would be a good date and time for focus group participation.

Additional measures were taken to insure quality data collection. I refrained from using “why” questions or prompts due to a warning from Patton (2002) stating that these types of questions “presume cause-effect relationships, an ordered world, and rationality” (p. 363). Probing questions were also be used in this phase to solicit a deeper understanding of the essence of the phenomena (Ary et al., 2006). In an effort to assist the participants in deep thought and full expression of views, interviewees were treated as experts in their field and shown appropriate empathy according to interviewing practices suggested by qualitative researchers (Ary et al., 2006; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

**Individual live interviews.** This second data collection stage was according to the parameters set above using open-ended questions to draw out experiences. The
interviews were casual (Ary et al., 2006; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Moustakas, 2006), but of a professional nature and were designed to be done in field at the facilities of the participants, preferably in their offices to place the directors in a comfortable setting. Interviews were taped with a digital voice recorder (Ary et al., 2006; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Seidman, 2006). I chose to take detailed notes during each interview not only to show interest but to provide backup information in the event of mechanical failure of the recording device (Ary et al., 2006).

A semi-structured interview guide was developed according to the above parameters to assist in gaining desired information while creating an environment that supports expression of new topics (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Coding information gathered from the survey questions was used to formulate questions with an emphasis on capturing the stories of the participants. Face and content validity was addressed via bracketing procedures (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994; Husserl, 1999a) and peer feedback review of the questions as done with the interview questions (Ary et al., 2006; Creswell, 2007).

**Focus group interviews.** This last stage of data collection was done to solicit reflections on the meaning of the experiences of the participants with degree requirements for preschool teachers. The choice to do focus group interviews was done based on the desire to help draw out information from participants that would otherwise be hesitant to contribute on a one-on-one basis (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). This decision was primarily based on suggestions by Creswell (2007) of ways to draw out the best information from participants. Participants from the individual interview stage were broken into two focus groups, one with degreed directors and one with non-degrees
directors. These two events were done at a local restaurant with a private room. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) warned that individual members within a focus group may be too embarrassed to share their voice, thus supporting my decision to separate out degreed from non-degreed directors during this interview stage. Separating these two groups follows negative sampling protocol to facilitate freedom of expression from all types of participants (Ary et al., 2006; Seidman, 2006). Creswell (2007) suggested in-depth interviews to be done with up to 10 similar participants while Bogdan and Biklen (2007) suggest seven to 10 participants, therefore supporting my decision to have separate focus groups.

The two focus group events featured a sit down meal followed by a casual, but not informal questioning period (Ary et al., 2006). Five focus group questions were developed based on the open coding information gathered from the data analysis of the interviews (Creswell, 2007). Questions were semi-scripted (Moustakas, 1994), and developed according to the above procedures. Face and content validity were addressed via bracketing procedures (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2007; Husserl, 1999a; Moustakas, 1994) and peer feedback review (Ary et al., 2006; Creswell, 2007) of the questions as established for the prior interview tools. Both sets of participants were asked similar types of questions; questions varied only in terms of which group is being addressed. Focus groups were audio taped (Ary et al., 2006; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Seidman, 2006) with the addition of videotaping to aid in the identification of the individual statements from each participant if needed. With two forms of recording taking place during the focus groups, I only occasionally took notes to show added
interest while being free to concentrate on adding prompts into the conversations to deepen the quality of the responses.

**Data Analysis**

Research analysis is the process of organizing, dissecting, coding, synthesizing, and finding patterns within the acquired data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). According to Ary et al. (2006), data analysis procedures vary and are free from a set of standardized rules, but steps must be rooted in the processing of the acquired data. Data analysis in qualitative research is an inductive practice (Ary et al., 2006; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2007; Husserl, 1999a; Husserl, 1999b; Seidman, 2006), and Moustakas (1994) referred to this process as “intuitive-reflection” (p. 32). While some data analysis procedures begin during the data collection stage (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007), the foundational step of the process is the transcription of data. Transcription of data in my study began within 12 to 48 hours after each individual interview was finished and within 12 to 48 hours after each focus group session had concluded. After data transcription, I followed the organizational framework of data analysis for phenomenological studies suggested by Creswell (2007, p. 156-157) with slight modifications to incorporate some techniques suggested by other qualitative researchers. A phenomenological analysis template is provided by Creswell (2007), but it varies from his more comprehensive organizational framework. His data analysis organizational framework is a synthesis of research styles and is described by me in the following synoptic steps: (a) organizing, (b) coding, (c) describing, (d) classifying, (e) interpreting, and (f) presenting of data. Following the analysis template of Creswell (2007, p. 159), I moved the step of describing to the end of data analysis to provide a smoother flow resulting in the following steps: (a) organizing,
(b) coding, (c) classifying, (d) interpreting, (e) presenting of data, and (f) describing of data.

The modified data analysis steps perfectly framed interview techniques chosen for this research. As a result, I purposefully chose not to focus on transcendental analysis measures by Moustakas that feature analysis of structural and textural descriptors in an effort to analyze the essence of the experiences of the participants. This decision aligns with my chosen methodology to only have transcendental underpinnings within my research.

Data captured from the surveys, individual interviews, and focus groups was analyzed per this framework to capture the voice of the participants in an effort to provide structural corroboration in the form of triangulation (Ary et al., 2006; Bogdan & Biklen, Creswell, 2007, Tesch, 1990). Analysis phases after the surveys and the individual interviews was done in a timely manner to facilitate a target time of between two to three weeks between the individual interviews and the focus group interviews as suggested by Seidman (2006) to keep participants engaged in the topic being researched. The survey stage of the interviews went through each of the above first five steps of data analysis before the second interview stage of individual interviews began. Information gained was used in the formulation of individual interview questions as delineated in the above section on questions. The second interview stage of individual interviews was treated differently.

Data analysis steps of one and two were done to the individual interviews to help develop individual profiles according to Seidman (2006). The stages of classifying and interpreting were done in the format of individual profiles which are an effective data
analysis process that aids in the sharing and analysis of data (Seidman, 2006). Following are the steps suggested by Seidman (2006) to be used in developing individual participant profiles: reduce text by marking text and chunking data; reduce data by grouping it into categories; study categories for themes; and write a vignette of the experience of each participant first in first person; and then use the voice of the researcher to recreate the described reduced experiences (Seidman, 2006). Individual participant profiles were kept as whole units and not reframed into one document to honor the individual voices of the participants. The fifth step of presenting of data gained from the analysis of the individual interviews was done as deemed appropriate.

Focus group interview data analysis built upon the obtained results of the prior phases while developing significant statements that represent the entire pool of participants. This stage followed the same steps used to analyze the individual interviews. Profiles were developed to express the essence of the experiences of each focus group. Again, the fifth step of presenting of data gained from the analysis of the focus groups was done as deemed appropriate.

In one final process, step six was applied to the collected data analysis information from surveys, individual profiles, and focus group profiles. The data was synthesized as a whole unit to into one description to release the voice of the early education directors on the topic of degree requirements of teachers (Creswell, 2007). A synthesized analysis of data was represented in appropriate graphs, charts, and figures to aid the reader in understanding the essence of the phenomena being studied (Ary et al., 2006; Creswell, 2007; Husserl, 1999a).
Control of bias. Control of research bias was addressed in this section as it relates to data analysis. Negative case analysis procedures during this phase assisted in reducing biases (Ary et al., 2006). This is where I actively looked for information that was contradictory or different from what was expected (Ary et al., 2006). I also engaged in “bracketing” as a way to control my bias through the review of my statements of reflection on intersection with the topic of the research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2007; Husserl, 1999a; Moustakas, 1994). The supplementary transcendental procedures of reduction or looking at something through fresh eyes and imaginative variation where I will look at the structural essence of the experience was done to further reduce any researcher bias (Moustakas, 1994).

Transcribing data. Transcripts of interviews and focus groups was originally chosen to be done using transcription software (Seidman, 2006) after I assigned individual identifiers to each participant (Ary et al., 2006; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2007; Seidman, 2006; Tesch, 1990). I designed my methodology to use two to four assistants to aid in the timely transcription of the interviews so that focus groups could begin within approximately three weeks of the first individual interview (Seidman, 2006). Transcription assistants performed the computer transcriptions as well as an auditory comparison of the audio taped interviews to a paper copy of the transcribed document (Seidman, 2006). I sought volunteers, but designed my methodology so that in the absence of capable and willing persons, I would pay minimum wage rates for transcription hours. Persons selected were chosen based on their abilities to interface with technology and accurately hear transposed information, not on their credentials and/or expertise in early education. Transcription assistants were trained on the software
and how to transpose auditory information. They were given the following written procedures to follow (Seidman, 2006): write a heading for each interview indicating the participant, date, beginning time, ending time, and interview site (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007); type using a four inch right margin, double spaced, and using 12 point Times New Roman font; transcribe the words directly as spoken; do not make any adjustments to improper grammar; include documentation of audible expressions such as laughs, sighs, and long pauses (Creswell, 2007; Seidman, 2006); punctuation must be done thoughtfully to identify changes in thought (Seidman, 2006) therefore, start a new paragraph every time a change in content occurs (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Seidman, 2006); and to delete any information that would identify the participants (Seidman, 2006). These steps were done to help avoid any bias within the data analysis process (Ary et al., 2006). Transcription was done after each interview had been executed (Ary et al., 2006).

**Organizing data.** The first phase of data analysis began by the organization of files (Ary et al., 2006). All transcription files were organized through the use of colored inks and paper using the computer program Microsoft Word. Green ink was used to represent discussion from degreed directors and red for non-degreed directors. The choice of assigning green ink to the degreed directors was done because of the association of the color with the concept of “go” or “yes” and red ink to the non-degree directors was done because of association of the color with the concept of “non” or “no.” Black ink was used in all transcriptions of researcher memos, field notes, audit trail documentation, and coding labels. The surveys were printed out on white paper while the transcriptions from each individual interview and each focus group were printed on separate colors of paper. The color of paper for the individual interviews was designed to assign pseudonyms such
as the following: pink – Peggy; light yellow – Yolanda; light blue – Blaire; lavender – Linda; peach – Petra; light green – Grace; tan – Tammy; grey – Gina; yellow – Yvonne. I assigned pseudonyms after the individual interviews (Seidman, 2006). Each participant was given a pseudonym that was fitting to their experience and demographics while being cautious not to attach a name that would cause a stereotypical distortion of the discussions (Seidman, 2006). The focus group transcriptions were printed on two colors not used for individual interview identification.

Organization of data was designed to continue through the development of paper files and computer files. Computer files were not kept on a hard drive, but instead, files were stored in the password protected Dropbox account of the researcher. Dropbox is a secure Internet file management system that provides access from any computer (Dropbox, 2010). Backup copies have been put on a flash drive and are kept in a locked cabinet.

**Coding data.** The coding of data features the reduction of data into small units via identification of categories and refinement of themes (Ary et al., 2006). Memoing (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2007) and constant comparative practices (Ary et al., 2006; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2007) were used to strengthen the information gained from coding of data. Open coding was used on data collection procedures with an emphasis placed on finding the common voice of the participants (Ary et al., 2006; Moustakas, 1994). Initial coding discoveries from memoing were used as a foundation in the process. Constant comparison methodology (Ary et al., 2006; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2007) was used in coding to inductively compare data simultaneously in an effort to discover the voice of the participants (Ary et al., 2006).
This phase of data analysis begin with a casual reading of each interview. Each individual interview was completely processed before beginning the analysis of another individual interview. A second reading was done while I circled key words and phrases (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) and implemented memoing procedures (Ary et al., 2006; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Memoing was used to compare information, “an essential preliminary step to developing a coding scheme” according to Ary et al., (2006, p. 491). The second step in coding of data was the development of initial tentative schematic categories with an emphasis on being “internally consistent and distinct from one another” (p. 493). Coding was continued by cutting apart the paper transcriptions into segments of like information and arranging data into groups according into developing categories (Ary et al., 2006; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2007) via storyboarding (Ary et al., 2006), a literary and media technique used to help authors visualize story development. Slips that contain information that span more than one category were duplicated and storyboarded accordingly (Ary et al., 2006). I then re-read category groups to insure that all slips of paper belonged together. One last step was to return to any uncoded data and place this data into possible categories. Uncoded data was discarded after this step in the coding process (Ary et al., 2006). I then assessed the frequency of data with the same codes to establish important theoretical concepts and facilitate the next phase of analysis (Ary et al., 2006).

To establish dependability within my coding procedures, I implemented the qualitative practice of interrater agreement (Ary et al., 2006; Creswell, 2007). The procedure was done by randomly selecting one survey and one individual interview to have coded by a peer. The peer coder was instructed on the coding procedures that I established for this
study. As suggested by Ary et al. (2006), the peer coder was given access to the categories and themes that I developed through coding ventures in the study up to this point. The peer coder was encouraged to suggest additions or subtractions to the developed categories and themes (Ary et al., 2006).

**Classifying data.** Classifying of data involves the reorganizing of the categories of reduced data into larger meaning units (Creswell, 2007) while searching for patterns within the units (Ary et al., 2006). The purpose of classifying is to develop meaning units which represent meaningful statements from the participants (Creswell, 2007).

Steps from profile development was applied at this stage. Data was reduced by chunking into larger categories (Seidman, 2006). The resulting categories of meaning units were refined and grouped into themes (Seidman, 2006) according to developing patterns (Ary et al., 2006). Significant statements were sought in an effort to combine the voice of the participants into themes (Ary et al., 2006).

**Interpreting data.** Interpreting of all data gathered and gained during the analysis of the surveys, individual interviews, and focus groups was done after all coding and classifying procedures were finished. Ary et al. (2006) eloquently described this step in data analysis as the following:

In interpreting qualitative data you confirm what you already know is supported by the data, you question what you think you know and eliminate misconceptions, and you illuminate new insights and important things that you did not know but should have known. (p. 500)

It is with this spirit that I interpreted the data to report the essence of the phenomena experienced by the participants.
I interpreted the data in two phases. First I wrote an overview of the meaning units representing the combined experiences of the participants in first person using the developed themes (Seidman, 2006). Finally, I rewrote the essence of the thematic meaning units using my voice to recreate the described reduced experiences (Seidman, 2006). I used the following interpretation suggestions by Bogdan and Biklen (2007) in this phase of data analysis: (a) revisit all writing, (b) reread the literature review of this study, (c) evaluate the subjects and the phenomena being studied to gain a deeper understanding of my relationship to the events, (d) evaluate possible implications of the research, (e) speculate what assumptions future readers of the research might form, (f) tell the story, and (g) summarize material in a clear manner. An emphasis was placed on looking for textual descriptions (what participants have experienced) and structural descriptions (conditions or situations of the experiences of the participants) (Creswell, 2007). The “essence” of what early education directors have to say was the primary focus of the interpretation phase.

**Presenting data.** At this phase, data analysis material from the surveys, individual interviews, and focus groups was reviewed as a single unit to assist in forming additional connections. Additional discoveries were designed to be used as needed to form quasi-statistics, which would be presented in the form of graphs, tables, and charts (Ary et al., 2006; Creswell, 2007; Husserl, 1999a). Bogdan & Biklen (2007) said that descriptive statistics are often used in qualitative research to help deeper exploration of the topic being studied by asking what the numbers tell regarding the phenomena. While quasi-statistics were not designed to be taken at face value as recommended by Bogdan and
Biklen (2007), they were designed be used to explore the essence of the experiences of the participants (Ary et al., 2006; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

**Describing data.** The final step of data analysis was the synthesis of all information from data analysis into one overarching description of phenomena. This document was a composite of the essence of the experiences of the participants. Creswell (2007) described this phase as the writing of a long paragraph answering the questions of “what” and “how” the phenomena were experienced.

**Trustworthiness**

The term “trustworthiness” is an elusive term in research. It is often associated with the level of rigor within a study. Validity & reliability are quantitative terms (Ary et al., 2006) that refer to the rigor or trustworthiness of research. Unfortunately, these two terms are not consistently translated into qualitative practices. When studying qualitative research, a variety of terms are used in regards to trustworthiness. The terms have an array of definitions and supportive practices based on many perspectives of qualitative specialists (Creswell, 2007). In regards to inconsistent definitions and practices, Creswell (2007) said that “the standards vary within the qualitative community” (p. 211). One example of this conundrum is that qualitative research specialists Bogdan and Biklen (2007) used the word “reliability” instead of “validity” in their text while qualitative research specialist Creswell (2007) used the word “validation” to refer to quality in studies. Seidman astutely summarizes this situation in his following comment: “What are needed are not formulaic approaches to enhancing either validity or trustworthiness but understand of and respect for the issues that underlie those terms” (Seidman, 2006, p. 26). Creswell (2007) gave good insight when he said that “validation is a process rather than a
verification of trustworthiness” and that “there are many types of qualitative validation and that authors need to choose the types and terms in which they are comfortable” (p. 207)

It is with my gained understanding from reading the respectful works of qualitative specialists (Ary et al., 2006; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2007, Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002; Polkinghorne, 1989; Seidman, 2006; Tesch, 1990; Van Manen, 1990) that I addressed the trustworthiness of my research under the headings of credibility and dependability. Credibility and dependability are hallmarks of rigorous qualitative research and are of upmost importance to this study so that the voice of early educators will be taken seriously on the subject of requiring professionals to have degrees. In addition to the measures delineated below to insure that my research was credible and dependable, I instilled the following five components identified by Creswell (2007) as principles needed in establishing a trustworthy phenomenological qualitative study: the researcher understands the tenants of the method; a clear phenomenon is being studied; the researcher implements data analysis procedures from noted qualitative specialist; the overall essence and the context of the phenomena is expressed within the writings; the researcher reflexively participates in the study.

**Credibility.** Credibility is the qualitative equivalent to the quantitative rigorous standard of internal viability and is the practice of truthfulness or accuracy (Ary et al., 2006). I chose to take a variety of steps to insure that the voice of the participants in my study was accurately captured and described. While Creswell (2007) felt that not every study should have to be required to address validation issues, he suggested researchers engage in two of the following activities to reinforce validity: prolonged field
engagement; triangulation to corroborate evidence; peer review; negative case analysis; clarifying researcher bias at the beginning of a study; member checks; use rich and thick description; external audits. I engaged in valid research practices in this study through robust processes that focused on the development of credibility through triangulation (Ary et al., 2006; Creswell, 2007; Seidman, 2006, Tesch, 1990), face and content validity (Ary et al., 2006; Creswell, 2007, Seidman, 2006), control of bias (Ary et al., 2006; Creswell, 2007), and negative case analysis (Ary et al., 2006; Creswell, 2007; Seidman, 2006).

**Triangulation.** Ecclesiastes 3:1 (New International Version, 2010) says that a three strand cord is not easily broken. This biblical principle was applied to my research in the form of triangulation procedures in an effort to reinforce credibility and dependability. Triangulation, a process of using multiple tools to corroborate information (Ary et al., 2006; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2007; Seidman, 2006), and is a standard procedure used in research to construct higher quality data in qualitative research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

**Sample.** Sample triangulation (Ary et al., 2006; Creswell, 2007) was done through the following procedures: chain selection (Ary et al., 2006; Creswell; 2007) by seeking referrals for participants from at least three organizations, using practices of maximum variation (Ary et al., 2006; Creswell; 2007) or disconfirming cases (Creswell, 2007) by choosing equal numbers of degreed and non-degreed directors, seeking homogeneous (Ary et al., 2006; Creswell; 2007), and representative samples (Creswell; 2007) by choosing directors of accredited programs in Tarrant County, Texas.
Data triangulation (Ary et al., 2006; Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994) was done through the use of multiple collection instruments to see if there was a confirmation between methods (Ary et al., 2006; Seidman, 2006). This step reinforced the credibility of my study (Ary et al., 2006) and was achieved through the collection of data via surveys, live interviews, and focus groups.

Referential or interpretive adequacy. Triangulation of referential or interpretive adequacy was done with member checks (Ary et al., 2006; Creswell, 2007), using rich descriptions (Ary et al., 2006; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2007; Husserl, 1999a; Husserl, 1999b; Moustakas, 1994) during memoing procedures (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2007), and employing the use of many low-inference descriptors (Ary et al., 2006). When appropriate in the reporting portion of this study, low-inference descriptors were used (Ary et al., 2006). Member checks was done by emailing participants a transcription of their interviews and asking for a confirmation of accuracy and to see if the interview properly reflects their stance on the research topic (Ary et al., 2006; Creswell, 2007). Rich descriptors was used during memoing to aid in conveying the essence of the study so that readers can grasp the phenomena (Ary et al., 2006). Low-inference descriptors was included in the form of direct quotes from the participants to reinforce interpretive adequacy and help fully portray what has been experienced by the directors (Ary et al., 2006).

Face and content validity. Face and content validity was addressed in the data collection section of this study, but the topic warranted deeper discussion in regards to the establishment of the credibility of this research. All survey, interview, and focus group questions were developed with the assistance of early education professionals to
corroborate the face validity of the questions. The questions were then peer reviewed according to guidelines suggested by Ary et al. (2006) and Creswell (2007). Consensus on the face and content validity was obtained before a question was used in data collection (Ary et al., 2006; Creswell, 2007).

**Control of bias.** Control of bias is an important feature of a phenomenological study (Ary et al., 2006); therefore, I triangulated this area as well. The simple act of me working on my doctorate could have influenced the way that the participants answered questions in the interviews and focus groups. Therefore, I chose to take a variety of steps to insure that my biases were excluded from my study, especially during my conversations with participants in the data collection process. Specific steps to controlling of bias during the data collection and data analysis phases can be reviewed above.

The primary way that I planned to accomplish this task is through bracketing (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2007; Husserl, 1999a; Moustakas, 1994) supplemented by the transcendental measures of reduction and imaginative variation (Moustakas, 1994). The additional procedures of member checks (Ary et al., 2006; Creswell, 2007), peer review (Ary et al., 2006; Creswell, 2007), and a reflexivity log (Ary et al., 2006) were also implemented to control bias.

**Bracketing.** Preliminary bracketing procedures have been done via the inclusion of the section in this document called “Role of the Researcher” where I fully disclosed my intersection and reflections on the topic of this study. I printed out these documents and posted them in my work area to review before each step of data collection, analysis, and coding.
Member checks. Once the interviews were transcribed, the participants were emailed a copy of the document and asked to validate the information (Ary et al., 2006; Creswell, 2007). I also asked for the participants to check the essence of the content to insure that their discussions fully expressed their experiences (Creswell, 2007). In addition I asked for the participants to review their profile developed through the data analysis phase of the individual interviews to ensure that I had written an accurate account of their experiences. If a participant did not feel that their individual profile was a true reflection of their experiences, I solicited alternative language (Creswell, 2007) and made appropriate changes.

Peer review. The choice to address credibility issues through this type of review was done out of respect for the expertise of my peers and in an effort to produce a trustworthy study. Peer review procedures have been listed above.

Reflexivity log. I kept a reflexivity log with additional observations that I had during this study. Examples of memoing that I wrote in this log included observations made during the participant selection process, discussions with my interviewees, field notes at the locations of the interviews, and discussions with my peer review and peer coding partners. Memoing was done using rich and thick language to further establish credibility.

Negative case analysis. Due to the nature of this study, I implemented negative case analysis to compare directors who supported and did not support degree requirements for teachers (Ary et al., 2006). According to Ary et al. (2006), this step “provide[d] a counterbalance to a researcher’s tendency to hold on to first impressions or hunches” (p.
While I felt this process naturally occurred in my data coding, purposeful implementation of negative case analysis strengthened the credibility of my study.

**Dependability.** Dependability, or the concept of trustworthiness, is the practice used by qualitative researchers in place of reliability due to its variable nature (Ary et al., 2006). Creswell (2007) encouraged researchers to seek dependability instead of reliability, a procedure that accomplished through auditing measures. The category of dependability which is based in the concept of reliability was best described by Bogdan and Biklen (2007) as “a fit between what they record as data and what actually occurs in the setting under study, rather than the literal consistency across different observations” (p. 40).

The goal of producing a dependable study is to establish that methods are confirmable and can be reproduced in a consistent manner (Ary et al., 2006). I achieved dependability through the use of an audit trail, replication logic, data triangulation, and interrater agreement (Ary et al., 2006).

**Audit trail.** An audit trail is a means by which others can follow the decisions made during the research (Ary et al., 2006). It is a process of keeping detailed notes through memoing expanded beyond what has been noted in data collection and data analysis procedures (Ary et al., 2006). An audit trail is a developed system of files, notes, papers, and other materials that would allow a third party to audit the study to substantiate its dependability. An audit trail is also associated with accountability by providing a comprehensive chronological documentation of steps taken in a study (Creswell, 2007).
I wrote a summarized form of an audit trail regarding the steps I had taken from conception through the Internal Review Board’s acceptance of my proposal. Once data collection began, I did a comprehensive audit trail of my work.

**Replication logic.** This concept is used to establish dependability due to the establishment that data can be replicated (Ary et al., 2006). One method to establish replication logic is to conduct the data collection at multiple locations. The methodology design of this study met the criteria for establishing dependability using replication logic due to the fact that multiple locations and multiple groups were used in data collection.

**Data triangulation.** Corroboration of data through the usage of data triangulation establishes dependability (Ary et al., 2006). The use of multiple data types and sources enhances the reliability of qualitative research (Ary et al., 2006; Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). My study met this requirement by collecting data of three types: surveys, personal interviews, and focus groups. The original methodology design was to collect data from up to 20 directors representing different locations, further supporting corroboration of data.

**Interrater agreement.** To establish dependability in coding, I implemented a procedure by Ary et al. (2006) called “interrater agreement” (p. 510). Creswell (2007) supported the usage of this procedure to establish reliability and stresses that it is a flexible process must be tailored to the individual study. To meet the intent of this procedure, I randomly selected the transcript from one survey and one individual interview and had a peer code the document using my category and themes as suggested by Ary et al. (2006). Peer coding was modified from my coding methods due to the
complexity of my process and the connection to my memoing. Peer coding was not be
done in lieu of my coding, but was done to check the dependability of the procedures.

**Ethical Considerations**

The primary ethical element of this study that I addressed to the Internal Review
Board was to maintain the confidentiality of participation of the directors. A secondary
consideration stems from the phenomenological nature of this study. While the
researcher is upfront about what they are doing in a standard phenomenological study, I
did not want my pursuit of a doctorate affect the responses of the participants. Therefore,
I “played down” my educational status when contacting potential participants as
suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (2007) so that participants were not intimidated or
guarded in either their initial commitment to participate or in their subsequent
expressions (p. 86). Procedures were implemented with these considerations in mind to
insure my study is ethical.

**Summary of Methodology**

This transcendental phenomenological study was designed to release the voice of the
eyearly education directors by studiously searching for the answer to how early education
directors truly feel about degree requirements for preschool teachers. It was my hope that
information gained will aid in forming and/or reforming early education policy. A
phenomenological study with light transcendental applications was chosen due to my vast
experience in early education so that research procedures would reduce researcher bias.
The original methodology design featured collecting a purposeful sample of 14 – 20 early
education directors of accredited programs from the Tarrant County, Texas. Data
triangulation was obtained by the usage of surveys, individual interviews, and focus
groups as data collection methods. Themes of inquiry were applied to each of these stages as the questions are developed using current literature, expertise of the researcher, and coding of interviews. Face and content validity were done via peer review analysis. Interview guides and probing questions were used during the interviews to insure that rich experiences are released from the participants. Data analysis began promptly after each interview through the implementation of organizing, coding, classifying, interpreting, presenting, and describing of data. Memoing and constant comparative practices strengthened information acquisition while open coding and constant comparison procedures were used to inductively assess data. The interpretation of data followed precise steps to insure consistent results. Trustworthiness was addressed through procedures to establish credibility and dependability within the methodology of the study. Ethical considerations have been delineated.
Chapter Four: Research Results and Findings

Overview

As stated in Chapter One, this study is of a phenomenological nature with the purpose of discovering and ascribing meaning to how a selected group of Tarrant County, Texas early education directors feel credential requirements impact their programs. This chapter is organized into sections that correspond with the three types of interviews performed via the ascribed methodology. Each section reveals the participants’ voice to the primary research question regarding how early education directors describe their experiences regarding the effects of credential requirements while looking at secondary research questions as they relate to the themes of inquiry (Seidman, 2006). The first stage discussed in this chapter is the survey which was used to assist in participant selection. The theme of the survey focused on the topic of the life history of the nominees. Stage two featured individual interviews with the experiences of the participants as the theme of inquiry. Information gained in stage one and stage two was used to develop individual profiles of the participants before proceeding with stage three. The final stage, stage three, had a theme focused on reflection of the meaning of their experiences within their assigned focus group.

Participant Selection

The selection of participants was a more onerous task than anticipated. An extensive audit trail and reflection log documented the selection process along with steps taken throughout my research. My original literature review revealed 63 licensed and accredited early education programs in Tarrant County (TDPRS, 2010). Querying this
same list to access program information once I received IRB approval was done approximately six months later. The query showed that the list had dropped to 57 (TDPRS, 2011). Because of this drop in numbers, I decided to verify the accreditation of licensed early education programs in Tarrant County before proceeding with my research. I found that each accreditation agency had a list of their accredited programs on their website (ACSI, 2011; AMS, 2011; NAEYC, 2011; NACCP, 2011; NECPA, 2011; NLSA, 2011). I cross referenced the TDPRS list to these websites and found that only 15 were actually accredited with an additional 27 accredited programs in the county being studied in northeast Texas that were not listed. Five of these newly discovered programs are accredited by Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), an accreditation agency that I did not originally consider in my methodology. Of these 27 newly identified programs, only 18 are licensed and accredited, one of which is SACS accredited. Because of the good reputation of SACS, I decided to include SACS accredited programs in my research. This brought the total possible number of participants who are currently licensed and accredited directors to only 33, half of my original participant pool.

The next step of the selection of participants was the identification of key informants (Ary et al., 2006; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) in Tarrant County to nominate directors for participation in my research. Per the recommendation of qualitative researchers, I identified the Texas Licensed Child Care Association (TLCCA), Texas Baptist Church Weekday Education Association (TBCWEA), and the Texas Association of the Education of the Young Child (TAEYC) as primary early education association key informants (Ary et al., 2006; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The Texas Association of Child
Care Resource and Referral Agencies (TACCRA) is located in the region of Texas featured in this study and is a viable key informant. I also chose to use TDFPS as a key informant due to the fact that its licensing representatives visit all licensed early education programs within Texas at least annually and therefore have established relationships with program directors. In addition, I chose to contact accreditation agencies that have accredited programs within my research area to use as key informants. TAEYC’s president of their Fort Worth chapter doubled as the accreditation key informant for NAEYC due to the assistance in the accreditation process. The membership offices of NACCP and NECPA were identified as providing a key informant for each of these accreditation agencies.

Over a one week period, I worked on acquiring nominees from early education key informants. Contact was made with all of the identified key informants using the Participant Nominee Solicitation Phone Script that can be found in Appendix E except for NACCP. This organization did not respond to my emails, and they did not have a phone number on their website. A TDFPS licensing representative that has monitored programs in the area being researched for over ten years supplied me with 12 nominees. The NECPA representative could not offer any nominees because she was not familiar with any of the schools in the area being researched. The TBCWEA representative was not aware of any accredited programs that were in her organization and was not familiar with any currently accredited program in Tarrant County outside of one that had closed. The TLCCA representative was not certain of which programs were accredited in her organization, but offered some names for me to research. I could only locate one director that the TLCCA representative nominated. Over the seven day period, I spoke with two
representatives with TACCRA. They nominated seven names, four of which were duplicates of the representative from TSFPS. In the end, I had 16 unique nominees from five key informants from four organizations. To insure the obtainment of a homogeneous sample (Ary et al., 2006; Creswell; 2007), I eliminated nominees directing programs on college campuses, directors of non-licensed programs, and directors of non-accredited programs. This step resulted in the reduction of my list of positional participants to 12 names.

I made phone contact with the nominees using the Participant Participation Phone Script that can be found in Appendix E. Ten directors said they would participate, one director did not want to participate, and one director said she would like to participate, but needed approval from her supervisor. This last nominee never confirmed participation despite multiple contacts. My list of possible participants had dwindled to ten directors, less than my methodology has called for. Of these remaining directors, four did not have bachelor’s degree and six had bachelor’s degrees or higher. Upon sending out the survey via SurveyMonkey, one director emailed that she did not have time to participate and needed to drop out of the study. Nine directors participated in the first stage. This reduced number of possible participants proved to clearly be a limitation in my study that I will address in my final chapter.

I was concerned about the small number of survey participants from which to choose directors to take part in the last two stages of my research. I referred back to my chosen methodology to help guide my decisions. Sample triangulation was an important part of the credibility of my study. I knew that I needed half of the participants to be non-degreed and half to be degreed to uphold my choice of using disconfirming cases
(Creswell, 2007) and negative case analysis as suggested by Ary et al. (2006) and Seidman (2006). After reviewing the completed surveys, I had one degreed director whose program was not homogeneous (Ary et al., 2006; Creswell; 2007) or representative (Creswell; 2007) of the normative early education industry. Eliminating this director resulted in a pool of eight survey participants that all seemed to fit within the defined parameters of my study. This left me with a group of eight participants, four with bachelor’s degrees or higher and four non-degreed, for the final two stages of my research. A comprehensive list of all the credentials held by the participants can be viewed in Figure G1 of Appendix G. Upon review of recommended number of participants, Polkinghorne (1989) and Creswell (2007) support studies of this size that use individual interviews as part of the methodology. A limitation was found in the size of my focus groups. Ary et al. (2006) suggested six to 12 participants in focus groups and Bogdan and Biklen (2007) suggested a group size of seven to ten. My focus groups size of four fell short of these recommendations, a limitation to be noted. The advice of Bogdan and Biklen (2007) to “think small” (p. 56) was upheld in my research.

Credibility to my study was accomplished in the selection process of my research. Nominees were sought through chain selection (Ary et al., 2006; Creswell; 2007) by seeking referrals for participants from at least three organizations. By eliminating the two nominees of programs on college campuses I upheld my choice of seeking homogeneous (Ary et al., 2006; Creswell, 2007) or representative samples (Creswell; 2007). The elimination of a survey participant due to lack of being a representative sample further shored up the creditability of my choice of individual interview and focus group participants. Disconfirming cases (Creswell; 2007) and negative case sampling
(Ary et al., 2006; Seidman, 2006) was accomplished by choosing equal numbers of
degreed and non-degreed directors of accredited and licensed programs in Tarrant
County, Texas.

Stage One: History

The survey interview for stage one was created prior to the beginning of formal
research due to the need of approval from the IRB. It was also peer reviewed prior to
IRB submission to establish content and face validity (Ary et al., 2006; Creswell, 2007).
A slight bias was detected by peer reviewers in the tone of my questions with a heavy
bias detected in one particular question. Questions were re-written and the Likert scale
was changed to descend from five to one to eliminate researcher bias.

Survey interviews. After consent forms were received, participants were sent an
Internet interview survey to investigate the history of their experiences (Seidman, 2006).
Surveys were sent out over a five day period as consent forms were received. As surveys
were returned over a 12 day period, the answers to the ten Likert scaled questions were
entered into an Excel spreadsheet to begin organizing the data. This was also done to
create quasi-statistics as suggested by Creswell (2007, p. 148) and to be used in data
analysis of the surveys. You can find this the results of analysis of the Likert scaled
questions in Table H1 that can be found in the Appendix H.

Data coding and analysis. The data from the open-ended questions were organized
by color coding the text of the directors without degrees in red and the text from the
surveys of the directors with degrees in green. The written response portion of the survey
provided me with less text than expected. Nevertheless, the data was a valuable
contribution to my research and provided added depth to the historical aspect of my study

100
as suggested by Van Manen (1990, p. 11, 55). It was at this stage that I first noticed that many of the nominees had problems with the recruitment and retention of preschool teachers with bachelor’s degrees. One degreed nominee wrote the following regarding applicants with degrees: “If hired, they do not stay because they are looking for better pay, better benefits, and ‘a real job.’” Surprisingly, the list of arguments against hiring degreed teachers was longer than the list of arguments in favor of hiring degreed teachers. Another interesting point was that the degreed nominees wrote more negative comments regarding hiring degreed teachers than the non-degreed nominees. One degreed nominee wrote that many degreed preschool teachers feel “teaching in early education (child care) is just a job related to what they really want to do.”

My coding and classifying procedures used in the analysis of the surveys were done methodically according to my prescribed procedures. The categories and themes that developed from the open-ended questions can be found in Appendix D. Data was subsequently subjected to a procedure established by Ary et al. (2006) called “interrater agreement” (p. 510). This step was done in the form of a peer coding a randomly selected survey (Ary et al., 2006). Creswell (2007) said that this qualitative procedure establishes reliability. Peer coding did not reveal any addition categories or themes and supported my data coding and classifying. The development of quasi-statistics through the development of graphs, tables, and charts to aid in additional discoveries (Ary et al., 2006; Creswell, 2007; Husserl, 1999a) was limited in this phase to insure the confidentiality of the participants.

**Results.** Interpretation phases of survey interview data featured the implementation of the following two steps suggested by Seidman (2006, p. 121): first, write an overview
of the meaning units representing combined experience in first person using developed categories and resulting themes; second, write the essence of the thematic meaning units using my voice. The following vignette implements this second step through a depiction of the overall experience of the survey interview participants:

**Vignette of the survey interview participants.** The essence of the voice of the participants was neutral on the subject of bachelor’s degree requirements of preschool teachers. On the other hand, they strongly felt that their voice has not been heard, especially those without degrees. They were more satisfied with the length of employment of teachers with CDAs or with an associate’s degree compared to teachers with bachelor’s degrees or master’s degrees. The topic of complying with this requirement received the most negative response out of all the data. Recruitment and retention presented major problems to the directors. It would be difficult for the participants in this study to comply if they were required to only hire teachers with a bachelor’s degree due to pay limitations and to budget constraints of running a small business. The directors voiced that there were more arguments against hiring teachers with bachelor’s degrees than those without. The negatives center on the pay requirements of bachelor’s level teachers and the fact that many leave to teach in the public school due to dissatisfaction with pay and/or the wanting to teach in a “real school.” They had professional development plans in place, but these plans primarily specified working towards a CDA and the provision of additional training.

**Additional results.** Data analysis of this stage resulted in one table and two figures. The results of analysis of the Likert scaled questions are in Table H1 in Appendix H. A comprehensive list of all the credentials held by the participants was developed and can
be viewed in Figure G1 of Appendix G. The subquestion regarding what credentials do the preschool teachers hold within the programs of the nominees was asked in the survey. The acquired data regarding this question can be found in Figure G2 of Appendix G. The data revealed that most of the preschool teachers within the programs represented in this study had some form of credential. Because the directors were asked to check all credentials that their staff had, there is the possibility that multiple credentials were marked representing the same person. Dual category representation would affect data analysis resulting in tainted quasi-statistics. Therefore, I chose to limit data analysis of this information to figure G2.

**Stage Two: Experiences**

The individual interviews in this stage began two weeks after the last survey was received per the recommendation of Seidman (2006) to keep participants engaged in the topic. Data analysis from the survey interviews revealed additional history that I needed to know to fully understand the phenomena being researched. I needed to fully understand the history of the experiences of the participants, and I did not know their current hiring requirements regarding credentials of preschool teachers. I also felt that adding an additional opportunity where participants could participate in the qualitative practice of “member check” would add to the credibility of this stage of my research as well as validate the contribution of the participants so far in the research process. Member check is where the participant reviews the information that deals specifically about them and verifies that it accurately portrays their experience. The identified needs resulted in the addition of two pre-interview questions to go along with the five main questions. I chose to add the following statement and question to provide participants a
member check opportunity to insure that my general assessment of their survey interview was accurate:

With consideration of your answers to the open-ended questions and your Likert scale answers which averaged ______. I concluded that you lean towards having a (positive/neutral/negative) history of experiences concerning the topic of my research. Do you feel this is a fair summary?

The following question was added to gain additional information:

What are your hiring requirements regarding preschool teacher credentials and have your policies been effected by changes in regulatory requirements or accreditation policies?

A concluding question was also added to the interview guide to support the second stage of research. The resulting interview guide can be found in Appendix F. Data analysis up to this point revealed a distinct division in experiences between interfacing with teachers who have their CDA and teachers who have their bachelor’s degree. In order to draw out the deep experiences of the directors (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), I chose to focus my questions on bachelor’s degrees. This choice was also supported in my literature review. The resulting individual interview guide was reviewed by peer reviewers to control bias and insure high quality questions (Ary et al., 2006; Creswell, 2007). The peer reviewers provided minor constructive suggestions that primarily focusing on wording. These suggestions were taken into consideration and used to adjust the interview guide for stage two.

**Individual interviews.** Individual interviews were conducted over a seven day period using the interview guide. I also used an additional interview form that included a list to
assist me in documenting the details of the interview, remind me of details of the participant, and to remind me of interview techniques and probing statements (Ary et al., 2006) to be used during the individual interviews. The Individual Interview Form can be found in Appendix E.

All interviews were conducted in the office of the participants except one. Gina insisted in coming to my program due to her time constraints. I had been to the program which Gina directs in the past; therefore I had past structural information about her facility. I drove by the program directed by Gina to refresh my memories of her facility and to insure that my structural information was accurate. During my travels, I kept a detailed reflection log to document the structural experiences encountered during my interviews (Ary et al., 2006). I also decided to provide a consistent structural experience for the participants in my study by wearing clothing that was similar in nature, carrying the same bag, and using the same binder during the individual interviews. I consistently arrived on time for each of the interviews. These steps to provide a consistent experience for the participants were done in an effort to reduce the imaginative variation of the responses of the directors due to differences in structural experiences when interfacing with the researcher (Moustakas, 1994, p. 35). As recommended by Moustakas (1994), the questions were semi-scripted. I read the question and then found myself having to rephrase many of the questions to help some of the participants understand what was being asked. Two of the degreed directors required reframing more than the other participants.

Data coding and analysis. Downloading of the digital audio recording of each interview took place within six hours of the conclusion of the appointment while the
transcription of recording began no later than 48 hours after each interview. Voice transcription software was not used due to the inability of such programs to adapt easily to different voices. Three assistants were trained to assist with the transcription of the digital audio recordings (Seidman, 2006). Detailed notes were taken during the live individual interviews, a step recommended by Ary et al. (2006) that proved to be valuable during this stage of the research due to recording malfunctions during two of the eight interviews. The malfunctions were discovered within 6 hours after each of the interviews. In each of these cases, I promptly wrote detailed recollections of the interviews based on my fresh memory and interview notes before beginning a new interview. Member checks were done on the developed participant profiles to insure referential or interpretive adequacy within the study (Ary et al., 2006; Creswell, 2007). This procedure confirmed that I had captured the essence of the experiences of the six directors who had audio recorded interviews as well as the two directors who had non-audio recorded interviews. The following comments from the member check opportunity from the directors whose individual interview did not get recorded supports that I successfully documented their experiences: “That sounds exactly like me talking.”; “Very interesting – I think it does accurately reflect my thoughts.”

After all of the individual interviews were completed, I assigned each participant a pseudonym to replace their name and assigned a different color of paper on which transcriptions were printed to keep their identity confidential (Seidman, 2006).

Following are the final names and associated colors used in this research: Olivia, orange; Lindsey, lavender; Gina, gray; Petra, peach; Bonnie, blue; Tammy, tan; Paige, pink; Grace, green. Pseudonyms were assigned using a combination of a name that was
respectful of their individual traits (Seidman, 2006) in conjunction with a prominent color observed during the interviews. The individual interview data of non-degreed directors was printed using red ink and the individual interview data of degreed directors was printed using green ink as prescribed.

The data from the eight individual interviews were then subjected to data coding and classification procedures per the prescribed methodology. The result was a comprehensive list of categories and themes that can be found in Appendix D. Interrater agreement was again established through the use of peer coding in my study (Ary et al., 2006, p. 510). One individual interview was randomly drawn and given to a peer reviewer for peer coding to establish reliability (Creswell, 2007) through interrater agreement using the developed categories and themes (Ary et al., 2006). The selected individual interview was one of the audio recorded interviews. The peer coder was asked for suggestions of additional categories and themes, but none were offered. The coding by my selected peer corresponded with my coding of the same individual interview thus reinforcing the dependability of my study. After the interviews were analyzed for common categories and themes, a vignette of the overall voice of the experiences was written (Seidman, 2006). The development of graphs, tables, and charts to aid in additional discoveries and form quasi-statistics (Ary et al., 2006; Creswell, 2007; Husserl, 1999a) was deemed not appropriate for this stage of research.

The next step was the development of an individual profile of each director (Seidman, 2006). To begin this task, each interview was read and then re-read before memoing procedures were implemented. Memo notes were used to develop preliminary categories and themes (Ary et al., 2006). The paper individual interview was then cut into chunks
of information that was categorized and studied for additional categories and themes. A vignette of the experiences of each participant was initially written in first person (Seidman 2006). This vignette was then translated into a profile of the participant using my voice to recreate the experiences of the director (Seidman, 2006). Each profile was completed before another one was begun (Seidman, 2006).

Results. Data analysis of the individual interviews resulted in three types of documentation: description of the participant pool; a vignette of the common voice expressed by the participants; personal participant profiles. In an effort to keep the identity of the participants confidential, I have chosen not to develop quasi-statistics to describe the directors nor provide deep descriptive information within the personal participant profiles.

Description of the participants. Due to the low number of participants, it would be easy to identify the individual participants if I used a structured chart to delineate participant demographics or traits. As prescribed in the methodology of this study, all participants were from licensed programs in a Tarrant County, Texas. While the preference was for all participants to be currently directing accredited programs, one is directing a program whose accreditation with one accrediting organization has lapsed. Her program is currently in the process of obtaining accreditation from a different accrediting organization. The choice to include this director falls within the paradigms of my written methodology.

From structural clues, indirect data during the interviews, and informal conversations before and/or after the interviews, I formed a description of the pool of participants. I surmised that two of the directors were in their thirties, three were in their forties, and
three were in their early fifties. Two of the directors were Black women while the rest were Caucasian women. One participant was an owner-director, two participants were directors of non-profit programs that were church-based, two directed for-profit programs run by a national chain, one directed a for-profit corporate program, and the other two directors worked for a large corporation that provided non-profit programs for large corporate businesses. Two directors had their CDA certifications, one had her associate’s degree, one had her bachelor’s degree, three had their master’s degrees, and one had college hours that did not culminate in a degree or a credential. It was apparent from structural observations of the interior and exterior physical buildings and playgrounds that six of the eight programs were affluent. Two programs were older demographic areas and in older buildings that were less modern than the others. All eight of the directors dressed in a neat and professional manner.

**Common voice expressed by the participants.** Data coding and analysis of the individual interviews was done to find the common voice expressed by the participants (Creswell, 2007). I also referred to the information gained from the survey interviews to add a layer of formative information to the analysis in order to develop a rich understanding of the voice of the participants.

The most common thread of opinion expressed by the participants dealt with the difficulty of recruitment and retention of teachers with a bachelor’s degree. A degreed director said the following: “When I hire BA’s…their heart isn’t there, they are temporary. They come in wanting something for a short time.” The statement was representative of comments made from all of the degreed and non-degreed directors. It was loudly expressed that most teachers with bachelor’s degrees leave for the higher
paying positions in public schools or for administrative positions in early education. One non-degreed director described the problem in the following incisive comment: “if they were going through the time and the money and get their bachelor’s they are probably going to want to go and teach public school and not here [if] they can have higher salary and the benefits.” Non-profit programs, corporate supported programs, and programs in affluent demographics have a financial advantage and have better success at recruitment and retention. Budget is the primary restriction of having more teachers with a bachelor’s due to the increase in pay to secure and retain this group. A comment made by a degreed director during her individual interview highlights the budgetary impact of hiring preschool teachers with degrees. She said “I have to pay them more; much more, which is hard, and I really can’t pay all my staff what a degreed staff should get.”

All of the programs in this study have some sort of tuition assistance program to support the higher education interests of their teachers. This detail showed the directors support for higher education. One director with her Master’s degree shared that she has “passion for degrees.” One non-degreed director stated the following: “Definitely the more education anybody has is great…I think the education part is wonderful.” Unfortunately almost all of the directors voiced that teachers with bachelor’s degrees did not want to stay in an early education classroom. A non-degreed director summarized the problem succinctly when she said that those with bachelor’s degrees “have goals to move out of the classroom.”

Retention of teachers with bachelor’s degrees was discussed often during the interviews as being very difficult in early education. A normative pattern found in the interviews was that preschool teachers with bachelor’s degrees do not stay in the early
education classroom. Many teachers with bachelor’s degrees use early education as a “stop gap while they find something better” or “to get some experience to put on their resume.” Even the salaries of the highest paying programs do not prevent a high rate of exodus. Positions in public school system and in early education administration consistently provide higher salaries than teaching positions in early education classrooms.

Participants in this study felt that bachelor’s courses provide a good education the majority of the time. But, they did not feel that programs as a whole prepare teachers to do the work of early education. It was shared that graduates often need extensive additional training to learn best practices regarding developmentally appropriate instruction and care of young children. Many directors have had teachers with bachelor’s degrees take the CDA courses to provide the information lacking in bachelor’s coursework. A common voice expressed by the directors was that teachers holding bachelor’s degrees need experience, a component missing in degree plans. Three directors shared that the realities of working in early education was not what graduates with bachelor’s degrees expected. They made comments such as “it doesn’t fit with …expectations…there is a little bit of conflict there,” “[it is] a far stretch from what they anticipated while they were in the class or what they learned in the coursework that they did,” and “it's really not what they thought it was going to be.” One non-degreed director bluntly said the following: “it takes a long time for those people to be able to come to terms with what they expected for their four years and what reality is, and it is different.” They expressed that practical experience must be added to higher education degree plans to produce well-rounded early education teachers. Without prior practice or experience, these teachers are not able to apply what they have learned. It was expressed that if a
practicum where students actually worked with young children was built into the early coursework of bachelor’s degree programs, tenure of teachers with bachelor’s degrees within the classroom would increase.

The majority of the positive comments about teachers with bachelor’s degrees centered on the higher level of professionalism associated with the graduates. The essence of the discussions equated the trait of professionalism to the ability to communicate in written and in oral language more effectively than those without degrees. A comment on this topic from one degreed director succinctly represented statements made by half of the participants when she said the following: “the most measurable place is that communication piece.” This same participant directly connected “higher quality written communication” with “the practice you get in college.” Other comments by the participants regarding the quality of the communication skills of those with bachelor’s degrees are as follows: “great conversation when it came to parents,” “they are good at sharing info with parents,” and “better at written and oral communications.” The ability to communicate effectively with parents was a coveted trait of the participants in this study and deemed a leading benefit of having teachers with a bachelor’s degree in their programs.

Despite the higher level of professionalism associated with teachers who have earned bachelor’s degrees, the participants felt that early education teachers with bachelor’s degrees had a negative perception of early education programs. They felt that they did not view the field as a professional venture, but associated the job with mere babysitting with the burden of changing diapers without consideration to the educational value of taking care of the whole young child. One degreed director said “…what teacher who’s
degree wants to change a diaper? OK, they’re gonna tell us they didn’t go to school for that.” A non-degreed director said “I think that’s a drawback to attracting people with bachelor’s degrees and master’s degrees to this field because people say ‘so you just do daycare’ and that’s a negative for lots of people.” This same director went on to say the following: “So, we have to change the perception that there is more to this field than just watching kids, and that it is essential, that it is important, that it is the foundation for everything that is going to follow in the educational system.”

The subjects of preconceived ideas, misconceptions, and dashed expectations were expressed by the participants as a common denominator of teachers in early education with bachelor’s degrees. A common opinion of the participants was that the realities of an early education classroom were “a far stretch from what they anticipated while they were in class.” The directors felt that new teachers with bachelor’s degrees were quickly disenchanted with the position because “this is not what they thought they would be doing with a degree.” It was noted that an attitude of superiority, resistance to help, and offense to suggestions for improvement was commonly witnessed by the participants.

I was surprised by the response I received when asked about changes that a requirement of having preschool teachers with bachelor’s degrees would have on their program. One degreed participant that has many degreed preschool teachers said “we have a high quality of a preschool program, but I don’t necessarily attribute that to the degrees.” Half of the participants said in their individual interviews that they did not feel that it would cause any changes. The primary reason stated for the lack of effect was that they have a corporate curriculum that would not change based on the teacher having a degree. One non-degreed director said the following: “I feel very strongly that the
curriculum that we use…is extensive and it’s designed to meet the needs of the children, so I don’t think that just because we had a bachelor’s degreed [teacher] implementing the curriculum that we’d have…changes.” It was commonly expressed that the new teachers with bachelor’s degrees would not know how to apply what they had learned, thus resulting in a lower quality the program. Regarding this topic, one degreed director said “I wouldn’t trade anyone of those [non-degreed] teachers for a bachelor’s degree if one walked in the door.” This sentiment was of similar nature to the expressions that was commonly voiced within the individual interviews.

There was an obvious conundrum with two distinct sides voiced during the individual interviews. Bachelor’s degrees bring a higher level of professionalism to the field, but the cost impact prohibits implementation. The desire to professionalize the early education field was great, and higher education was voiced as a way to reach that goal. The problem is how the goal can be funded when parents cannot pay much more tuition than what they are already paying. There is a strong support for higher education within early education directors of accredited programs in Tarrant County and the passion and professionalism that it brings to the classroom.

**Individual profiles of participants.**

*Bonnie.* Bonnie is a non-degreed director of a corporate program. She has had a more negative experience with B.A. requirements of preschool teachers than positive. She required the minimum of a CDA for preschool teachers to teach in her program. She felt it would be very difficult to hire only bachelor’s degrees preschool teachers due to payroll increase needed to pay degreed teachers. She also stated that it would be difficult to replace her non-degreed preschool teachers with equally competent, degreed staff.
Bonnie felt the financial burden of securing degreed teachers would have to be passed on to the parents in the form of tuition increases. She was very satisfied with the performance level and tenure of her teachers with a CDA while she was dissatisfied with the length of tenure of teachers with bachelor’s degrees.

Bonnie fully supported higher education, but did not feel that teachers with B.A. degrees brought more positive factors to her program than those who have a natural ability to work with children. She felt there was a “lack of a connection between the value of having the actual experience and the value of having the academic and making them both work together.” In her survey interview and in her individual interview she cited many more negative aspects that teachers with bachelor’s degrees brought to her program than positive. Negatives included not being prepared for the classroom, lack of experience in conflict with book knowledge, lack of ability to teach in a hand-on manner, lack of understanding of behaviors of children, conflict between expectations and reality, feelings of superiority due to degree, resistance to assistance, offensive attitude to correction, and lack of retention. The positives were associated to good coursework, but applications were limited to the following: head knowledge of concepts, understanding of theory, and better lesson plans.

She felt that the retention portion of hiring bachelor’s degree teachers is the most difficult component of this potential requirement. Her experience was that they do not want to stay in the early education classroom because they want to move into leadership or into the public school system. She felt that the lack of seeing early childhood as a professional career in conjunction with poor compensation as the primary reason for lack of retention in the field.
Overall, she was supportive of higher education, but felt that the funding issues coupled with the problem of retention due to lack of experience and unrealistic expectations as her primary concern regarding the requirement of bachelor’s degrees of preschool teachers. While Bonnie felt that she has had many opportunities to voice her opinion on this topic at directors meetings, open licensing forums, and with peers, she felt that her voice is not being heard.

_Gina._ Gina is the director of a for-profit program that is part of a national chain. She is degreed and has had a slightly negative experience regarding the topic of bachelor’s degrees for preschool teachers. She felt it would be very difficult to comply with requiring all her preschool teachers to have degrees and admits that she is very satisfied with the tenure of teachers with a CDA and/or an associate’s degree. She has not had good experiences at keeping teachers with their bachelor’s degree and even less luck at keeping teachers if they have their master’s. She has not felt that her voice has been heard much on the subject of this study.

Gina has seen an increase in applicants with a bachelor’s degree, but stated that when they are hired she often sees that their heart is not in their work. She finds that they only want to be in an early education classroom for a short time before they move into management or a public school position. She was frustrated with the fact that they do not want to stay in the classroom. Gina felt that moving into management was a way for someone with a bachelor’s to feel like they were getting worth out of their degree.

When asked about the quality of early education degree programs, she saw high quality in the college coursework. She noted that there is a big problem in that the graduates do not have best practices experience and tend to teach in the abstract. Gina
stated that they do not know how to apply what they know nor how to teach through active learning. Her biggest frustration was that teachers with bachelor’s degrees “do not see themselves as a teacher in child care and that causes them to want to do something different…more.” On a positive note, she strongly felt that they are more professional and have pride that shows in the way they dress.

Budget was noted by Gina as being a stumbling block when hiring staff with degrees. She noted that they come in with high expectations regarding pay, which she cannot fulfill. She does pay degreed teachers more than non-degreed teachers. She noted that as her payroll goes up, tuition costs to parents go up, and her “families just can’t keep taking on the added cost it takes to have teachers with B.A. degrees, our poor families.”

Gina shared her opinion of degree requirements of preschool teachers in many different informal ways. She has wanted the practical aspect of the topic to be heard. She has spoken up many times when NAEYC was making changes in accreditation protocol. Gina was torn between the practical side which is based in budget issues that make support degrees in this field almost impossible and her passionate side for higher education. She comes from a long linage of family members that have degrees and is passionate about what higher education can do for people and society. She found it difficult to rectify being in a field that is teaching children at such an important age and parents not being able to financially support degreed teachers.

Grace. Grace is the director of a small child care center that is a part of a large national chain. Her program resided in a poorer demographic area and is a for-profit center. She has her CDA and has been with this corporation for many years. She has had slightly negative experiences regarding degree requirements of preschool teachers and is
neutral regarding how she felt about supporting such a requirement. She felt it would be extremely difficult for her to comply with a standard such as having preschool teachers have bachelor’s degrees. She has been very satisfied with the tenure of teachers with a CDA, but has had negative experiences with teachers who have their associate’s and bachelor’s degrees. However, she has been satisfied with the tenure of her past staff with graduate degrees. She was neutral regarding how she feels about her voice being heard on the subject of this study.

The corporation that Grace works in has been trying to recruit teachers with degrees, but once they get into the early education setting they find out that it is “really not what they thought it was gonna be.” Grace feels they do not realize what the position involves and resents parts of the job such as changing diapers. She reported that some teachers with bachelor’s stay, but many leave. The reason she attributes to them leaving is primarily due to the pay being lower than expectations.

It has been the experience of Grace that teachers who are working on their degrees do not stay once they have obtained it. She said that they “move on to bigger and better things…some of them start their own programs.” She commented that they often get jobs in the school system. She feels that many times her program is a convenient place to work until something better comes along. Grace understands that they need a place to work, but is frustrated with the non-commitment to the kids in her program. She remembers one teacher that worked for her while she was going to school. She was good with kids, but as soon as she got her bachelor’s degree she left for more money.

Grace feels the quality of college training is good, but that is does not prepare students to go into the field and work hands-on with kids. She noted that most of the expectations
of the graduates are higher than they should be for the children in their classrooms. She said that they expect children to do more for themselves and to retain more without having to be told often what to do.

Grace said that more money should be put in child care, “because it’s pretty much the lowest paid job there is.” Her budget has been affected a lot regarding hiring teachers with bachelor’s degrees because she has to pay them at a higher wage. She said that it would be very hard for her to hire five teachers with bachelor’s degrees in her community. She felt that other communities could support teachers with bachelor’s degrees, but the demographics in her community could not support the added tuition needed to cover the cost. Grace was slightly discouraged that teachers with bachelors in other areas make as much as she does as a director.

As far as higher education, Grace thinks experience is valuable. She has voiced her opinion to local congresspersons. Her voice was that teachers should want to be in early education for the right reasons and not for the money. While many people think education requirements should increase, Grace felt that more money should go into educating parents about good early education programs.

Lindsey. Lindsey is a degreed executive director and owner of a for-profit program. She felt it would be very difficult to comply with having all her preschool teachers to have a bachelor’s degree. She supported this trend due to her love of higher education and the experiences she has had with staff with degrees, but did not see her budget being able to support such a requirement.

As a small business owner, budget was her primary concern regarding acquiring preschool teachers with bachelor’s degrees. She expressed that “as a for profit center, I
don’t have as much money to work with as non-profits.” Increasing her budget to pay the salaries associated with the recruitment and retention of degreed teachers would not be possible. The little increases in salary that she is currently able to provide still are not enough of a financial reward to secure degreed staff like she wants.

Lindsey felt very strongly that staff with degrees are more professional. She felt that they have better ideas and are excited to be in her school which creates ownership and a deeper investment in the classroom. She felt they are great at talking with parents and share information in better ways than teachers without degrees. Lindsey thought that the quality of college training was good.

As an overseer of a for-profit program, she did not feel her voice was really being heard on the subject of the impact of degree requirements on small businesses. She has talked to directors of variety types of programs in her community and in local meetings with directors, but does not think they know what the answer is either. She commented that people associated with accreditation do not want to engage in the subject while directors of non-profit programs are loudly speaking positively for degrees of preschool teachers. She would like more opportunities to dialogue on the subject from a for-profit point of view, but felt there were no opportunities.

Olivia. Olivia is a director of a non-profit corporate center that serves a large local business. Her hiring policies were adjusted recently as NAEYC changed its stand on credential requirements of teachers. She now wants staff to have an AA or higher, but allows teachers to have a CDA if they are working on higher credentials. She fully supported the advancement of the field of education through increased credentials and reported neutral experiences regarding bachelor’s degree requirements of preschool
teachers primarily due to the difficulty that it would be to actually comply. She has been very satisfied with the tenure of staff with a CDA and an associate’s degree, neutral regarding the tenure of staff with a BA, and slightly negative regarding the tenure of staff with a master’s degree. She was outspoken on the subject of degree requirements of preschool teachers and felt neutral regarding the level that her voice has been heard.

She felt that recruitment and retention are industry issues regarding degree requirements of preschool teachers. She has been able to access a number of degreed applicants through the corporate recruiting center and felt that her program attracted more degreed applicants than typical programs due to higher pay and tuition reimbursement opportunities which were available due to being non-profit. She felt that the poor economy and recessed job market has caused an increase of early education applicants that have a bachelor’s degree. Her challenge is finding applicants that have their bachelor’s degree and experience in the early education classroom.

She supported higher education and felt that there are many benefits to having preschool teachers with degrees. This biggest benefit she reported was a higher level of professionalism displayed primarily in good oral and written communication skills. She expressed that there is huge disparity between the qualities of degree programs involving young children. She strongly felt that higher education was not providing students with applicable experience in early education. This lack of experience then causes problems with retention because teachers new to the early education environment become disenchanted and do not stay. She confessed in her individual interview that she felt that being required to have preschool teachers with bachelor’s degrees would not increase the quality of her program, but it is a way to professionalize the field. Her two strongest
teachers only have associate’s degrees. She voiced that “requiring a degree is the right way to go to elevate that position to a professional position, not a job.” Olivia realized that her full support of the professionalization of the field of early education through the requirement of bachelor’s degrees was controversial, and she has found many opportunities to voice her opinion.

Paige. Paige is the director of a church-based, non-profit program that serves children on a part-time basis. She has had a slightly negative experience with the topic being studied and does not support being required to only hire preschool teachers with degrees. She strongly felt that it would be difficult to comply despite the fact that she pays her teachers substantially more than the industry rate. She was satisfied with the tenure of her staff with a CDA and an associate’s degree and was neutral about how she feels regarding the tenure of teachers with higher degrees. She did not feel that her voice is being heard on the subject.

She has had two main frustrations when it comes to hiring teachers with degrees. The first was that they usually only hire on while their child is in her program. Once their children have graduated, they have left to go back to teaching in public schools. The second frustration to Paige was that few teachers have degrees in early education. While she felt that the courses in early childhood education seemed to be good quality, she has fund that graduates do not understand where preschool children are developmentally. She noted that the teachers who have elementary education degrees feel that they can teach preschoolers, but she has had to re-train them to function in a classroom for young children because often their expectations are too high and not appropriate. As a result, she has had to allot more money to her budget to cover the additional training needs of
her degree teachers. She has had them take the CDA courses so that all her teachers are
teaching at the same level. Paige has found that teachers who have bachelor’s degrees
sometimes get offended when she suggests that they do not have the right kind of training
for early childhood education. She strongly felt that “just because a teacher has an
education degree [did] not mean that they have the skills they need to work with young
children.”

Paige has seen two types of teachers. One type are those that went to school and got
their degree, but they do not desire to stay in early education. The other type are the
ones that are natural at teaching young children. She commented that her best teachers
do not have a degree, but are naturals with young children and are teachable to learn how
to best meet their needs. Paige’s goal is to help her “natural” teachers get some kind of
credential so that they can get the respect that they deserve.

Paige was vocal about her opinions on the subject of degrees and preschool teachers,
but she did not feel she has had many opportunities to express her voice. She has
developed a little directors group in her area that functions as her main outlet to express
herself.

*Petra.* Petra is a director of a child care program in a corporate facility that is
overseen by a large child care corporation. It is an affluent program that has financial
backing of the corporate sponsor. As a result, the sponsoring business requires for her
teachers to have degrees and financially backs the acquisition of higher education. Petra
has had a positive experience regarding degree requirements of preschool teachers and
felt it would be easy for her to comply with standards requiring all of her teachers to have
bachelor’s degrees under her current work situation. She has been satisfied with the
length of tenure of all of her credentialed teachers, but was neutral regarding the length of employment of teachers with master’s degrees. She was neutral regarding how she felt about her voice being heard on the subject of requiring preschool teachers to have bachelor’s degrees.

This director felt that upgrading requirement of preschool teacher’s credentials to that of bachelor’s degrees would not affect her program. She attributed her predictions based on the fact that she paid a higher salary than most early education programs and pays for higher education tuition. As a result, Petra said that she does not have staff turnover. Because these items are already built into her budget, her program would not be affected much due to corporate support. She did not think that being required to have degreed teachers would change her program because it already has a culture for higher credentials. The corporation that she works for has an on-line university and a nice training budget. One drawback she stated was that it would be financially “impossible for me to have all my staff go through it at one time.”

Petra recognized that her program is unique to the industry because of the provision of a wonderful salary and benefit package. She noted that there are still drawbacks to working in early education that loom over the industry despite financial issues. She commented that “what teacher who’s degreed wants to change a diaper?” She has seen degreed teachers be resistant to doing all that early education requires to teach and care for young children.

Supporting higher education is a passion for Petra because she has seen a difference in performance levels between degreed and non-degreed teachers. She has seen a higher level of professionalism in degreed teachers which has been primarily displayed in better
communications with parents. She noted that one drawback is that graduates try to work from head knowledge and work from a “textbook” angle. She has had to provide additional training to degreed teachers so that they actually know how to apply what they learned in college. Petra said that it takes time for degreed teachers to transition. She said that for one teacher in particular “it was a shock for her in the beginning.”

Petra supports higher education, but sees the financial challenges for staff and directors. She said she is sensitive to both sides, but commented that she is ultimately “a guru when it comes to school.” She firmly “believes that people should educate themselves to better themselves.” She expressed the “point blank” opinion that time and money are the obstacles to preschool teachers obtaining degrees. Despite these obstacles, she felt that there are many programs available to help teacher pay for higher education and felt that money and time issues are excuses. She felt that it was “extremely important” for teachers to “feel they can do it and achieve it.”

This director has “been pretty active in advocacy” regarding early education teachers obtaining higher education and has had “no problems speaking for it.” She has been “very comfortable telling people [she] thinks it’s a benefit for anybody who works in early childhood.” She has spoken on the topic during educational forum opportunities in Austin. She stated that many directors do not agree with her enthusiasm on the subject “because of the fact that it is costly” to pay staff with degrees and to provide financial tuition support.

*Tammy.* Tammy is a non-degreed director of a non-profit, part-time program. She attributed her non-profit status as the reason for keeping her tuition low while paying higher pay rates for her teachers. She has had a negative experience with bachelor’s
requirements of preschool teachers. She required all of her teachers to obtain 12 college hours or their CDA, a credential not required by her accrediting agency. Her survey interview indicated that she did not support the requirement of bachelor’s degrees of preschool teachers, but she listed the availability of tuition reimbursement of early education courses indicating her support of higher education. She was very satisfied with the tenure of her CDA and Associate degree teachers, neutral about the tenure of her teachers with bachelor’s degrees, and very dissatisfied with the tenure of teachers with graduate degrees.

Tammy felt that the requirement of her teachers to have a bachelor’s degree would negatively affect her program by resulting in the loss of the preponderance of her staff. She cited the reason to be that her staff are “not at a point in their life where they would go back to school.” She stated that if they went back to college that they would probably leave to teach in the public schools after obtaining their degree because of the benefits and the higher salary.

Overall, she supported higher education, but felt corporate funded facilities are better equipped to help teachers go back to school. She stated that she required all her teachers with bachelor’s degrees not in early childhood/early elementary education to get their CDA so that her program has the “quality I need across the board.” Tammy felt that a preschool teacher that has obtained a CDA can be just as effective in the classroom and can provide a quality education for her students just as well as a teacher with a bachelor’s degree. Tammy did not feel that she has had any outlets to express her voice on the subject of bachelor’s degree requirements of preschool teachers.
Stage Three: Reflection of Meaning

The focus groups in stage three began 13 days after the last individual interview with a degreed director was completed. Because the first focus group was with non-degreed directors, there was a span of 14 days to 20 days between the participation of directors in stage two and stage three. This timeline fit within the recommendation of Seidman to keep interviews two to three weeks apart to insure engagement of participants (2006).

A restaurant with a party room at a centralized location was chosen for the focus groups. Participants were sent an email disclosing the chosen restaurant and the assigned date for their group. An additional email was sent this day that provided meal choices for their dinner. The decision to secure meal choices in advance was made so that I could have the food arrive at the same time as the participants. Doing so would reduce waiting time and allow us to quickly get into the interviews.

Focus group. The focus group questions were developed using the data acquired during the first two stages of this study. The theme of this stage of research, reflection of meaning (Seidman, 2006), and the research questions developed for this study were used to guide focus group question development. The result was the development of five focus group questions that were appropriate to use in my prescribed negative sampling. The questions were peer reviewed using the “Guidelines for Good Questions: Focus Group” (Ary et al., 2006) that can be found in Appendix D. Peer reviewers concurred that the questions were viable. One peer reviewer suggested the inclusion of an extra word in one question. The recommendation was applied and the question was adjusted. An interview guide was developed for this stage of research and can be found in Appendix E.
The focus groups were successful and resulted in the acquirement of valuable data. I followed the prescribed methodology developed for this stage of my research. To substantiate the structural integrity of the two focus groups, similar clothing was worn each night by my audio/visual recording assistant and me. In addition, the room arrangement and my recording materials were reproduced each night to provide consistency between the two events.

The first focus group was with the non-degreed directors. Unfortunately, two of the participants contacted me approximately one hour before the scheduled time of the focus group to inform me that they could not attend the event, one due health and one due to her parent being taken to hospice. I could not reschedule the focus group due to the fact that the other participants were already on their way to the event.

The focus group with two non-degreed directors lasted from 7:01 pm to 8:20 pm. Both participants equally contributed to the discussions on the five questions. Audio and visual recording were successful and resulted in 34 minutes of taped discussions. The total time of this focus group, 79 minutes, fell within recommendations of Seidman (2006). As recommended by Moustakas (1994), the questions were semi-scripted. During the interview, I read the question and rephrased the questions to highlight the important data. As the participants engaged in discussions, I held back my desire to ask detailed questions to further extend specific areas the conversations due to the fact that I wanted to control my bias. Instead, I reframed questions and repeated information that was discussed to assist in accessing deeper meaning of the conversations. For example, Grace freely shared her frustrations regarding having to increase tuition to pay for degreed teachers. She said that parents want degreed teachers, “but they don’t want to
pay for it.” I followed up with the subsequent reframed question: “It’s an interesting point that you brought up that parents would like degreed teachers, but they don’t understand that it is coupled with increased tuition. Do you see any other option besides increase in tuition?” Her response was the following: “It’s kind of like your hands are tied. You only have so much so you have to work with what you have.” Tammy added the answer of my reframed question by saying the following:

Well, it’s a little frustrating, it’s like you say, the parents sometimes feel like ‘I really want that teacher, if she has a degree; she’s bound to be good.’ But, you can have degreed teachers that are not. And you can have someone who has a CDA or associate’s and they are excellent teachers. Their kids are getting a quality just like the higher degreed.

Reframing questions and repeating discussed information as well as the inclusion of prompts facilitated a deeper release in the voice of the directors thus allowing me to gain more information.

The focus group with the four degreed directors lasted from 7:02 pm to 9:48 pm. Two participants with master’s degrees from the affluent programs in this study spoke more than the other participants, one of which had her master’s degree and one of which had her bachelor’s degree. The participant with her bachelor’s degree contributed the least to the discussions. I applied the same practices as during the first focus group of rephrasing the primary questions, reframing questions within conversations, and repeating gained information to deepen the discussions. Audio and visual recording was successful. The total time of this focus group, 105 minutes, exceeded the 90 minute time recommendation by Seidman (2006). The extended time was due to one participants showing up 32
minutes late, delaying the question phase. The recorded question phase of this focus group was 58 minutes.

During the focus group interview with the degreed directors, reframing of questions and repeating gained information from the participants was again successful in extracting deeper expressions from their experiences. Olivia made the following comment about preschool teachers with bachelor’s degrees: “And the hardest thing is that they are not going to be there long.” This was a strong comment, but she had concluded her thought and had stopped talking. I wanted to know more, so I followed up her statement by reframing her comment by saying “You said they are not going to be there long.” She expanded her statement by saying the following:

They are not going to be there long, and we’re going to see in the upcoming months, especially in the DFW area, if the school systems are doing major cuts that they are talking about doing, my regional manager was talking about, you need to be preparing to hire some of those people coming out of the school district, and I was like, really? Because we are going to invest all this money into them. Because it’s a process when you work for [the company I work for], it’s a process. Five or six months down the line when they decide to hire them back, I’m stuck because I’ve spent all this money, you took away some of my budget and now I have to start this process all over again. And I’ve got parents upset because I’ve got turnover, and the children are upset because there was a connection there, a relationship.

A simple repeated comment incited Olivia to continue to translate her encounters into interpretive projections based on the history of her experiences.
Due to the loss of half of the participants in the non-degreed focus group, I reflectively compared the quality and quantity of the data of the two groups. It was interesting to note that the conversations of the focus group of four participants was almost twice as long as the group of two participants. Fortunately there were participants in the study representing similar programs of the directors who could not attend their focus group. Therefore, I assessed that the voice representing the essence of the programs of the missing directors was represented. The extent of the representations cannot be known and will be noted as a limitation in the concluding chapter of this study.

**Data coding and analysis.** Downloading of the digital audio recording of each of the focus groups began the morning following each event. Two of the same transcribers used during the individual interviews were used during this phase to provide structural consistency. The audio recording provided the necessary data for this phase; therefore the video recordings were not used, but were stored in locked research files.

The transcribed data from the two focus groups were printed in a way that assisted me in in-depth analysis. The data from the non-degreed directors was printed on gold paper with red ink and the data from the degreed directors was printed on yellow paper with green ink.

The data from the two focus groups were then subjected to data coding and classification procedures per the prescribed methodology. The result was a comprehensive list of categories and themes that can be found in Appendix D. This list was coded with notations indicating when an item was only mentioned by one focus group. Because the prescribed methodology called for finding the common voice of the participants during this phase (Ary et al., 2006; Moustakas, 1994), categories not
discussed by both groups were coded in a way that it could be easily separated when writing the final narrative representing the voice of the group. The usage of color coded ink and paper facilitated easy assessments during my analysis procedures. For example, I could easily tell that both the degreed and non-degreed directors felt that hiring preschool teachers with bachelor’s degrees would cause an increase of tuition because there was almost an equal distribution of green and red ink when I grouped like statements on this topic. As a result, I could easily see the following comments from the degreed directors: “if you can’t afford it…it’s not going to happen,” “who bears that? The parent,” and “there is only so much you can charge for the service.” The non-degreed had similar comments in their focus group such as “it boiled down to more money,” “then we start raising tuition,” and “you have to increase your tuition.”

The next step was the analysis of data from each focus group. To begin this step, I read and reread the data from each focus group and wrote a vignette of the overall experience of each of the groups (Seidman, 2006) using my voice. Measures were taken to insure that the voice of the group was represented instead of one person within the group (Ary et al., 2006; Moustakas, 1994).

I next combined the two sets of data to develop a narrative that represents the common voice of the entire pool of participants. There were a few categories where the themes of the contributions discovered during data analysis of the focus group conversations were dominated by one group or the other. This was expected due to the nature of the focus group interview phase. Topics not discussed by both groups were not included in the procedure of combining the voices. This final process in developing a narrative for the whole group focused on describing the voice of the early education directors on the
primary research question as well as the subquestions identified at the beginning of this study. I found a limited need for the development of graphs, tables, and charts to aid in additional discoveries (Ary et al., 2006; Creswell, 2007; Husserl, 1999a) in this stage of my research. Table H2 was developed to assist in visualizing the credential requirements and professional development assistance of the programs represented in this study. This table is discussed in the summary of the findings for this stage of research and can be found in Appendix H.

**Results.** Bringing the voice of the two focus groups together reinforced that early education directors have strong threads of commonality regarding their experiences. For example, it could be assumed that non-degreed directors were biased against teachers with degrees when comments were made such as the following:

> With me it has a big impact, because they come in and the children get used to them and you’re put so much into them being there and they start doing a great job with the kids and all the sudden the school says, ‘OK, I can make you an offer,’ and it’s like, ‘OK, I’m gone.’ No notice or anything, they just up and they just leave.

When the above comment was compared to statements by degreed directors on the same topic, perceived biases were reduced. Following were comments from the degreed directors on the topic of the length of employment of preschool teachers with bachelor’s degrees: “we are going to invest all this money into them,” “five or six months down the line, when they decide to hire them back, I’m stuck because I’ve spent all this money,” “they are not going to be there long,” “this is not a career for them, it’s a job until the career can get started,” and “you took away some of my budget and now I have to start
this process all over again.” This is an obvious example of how comparing the two expressions of the groups strengthened the voice of the whole pool.

Another example of how the expressions of individual groups were strengthened when combined together was in the area of the perceived quality of higher education programs. Participants in the non-degreed focus group made the following comments on this topic: “I think they need to be more educated in early childhood and working more hands-on with that,” “I’m all for degreed teachers, but I think the focus shouldn’t be so much on elementary education, more on the early childhood field,” “she said when she graduated, ‘they really didn’t teach me [about young children] when I was in college.” The participants in the degreed focus group made the following comments in regards to this topic: “they are not doing a good job at the university level,” “means that we [higher education organizations] don’t know how to manage degrees yet,” “if they have an EC-4 degree on their resume, that is a red flag to me and that is hard you know because they are not going to make it,” and “they are not equipped to go into a child development center and be effective.” These two voices combined bring a deeper perspective which is richer and stronger in breadth and depth.

The following vignettes from the focus groups of the non-degreed directors and the degreed directors isolated the reduced voices. But, strength in the expressions came when the expressions from the two groups were combined into one common voice.

**Vignette of the non-degreed directors.** The non-degreed directors felt that budget constraints were the primary difficulty in securing preschool teachers with bachelor’s degrees. They expressed that the type and location of the early education program has a lot to do with the financial ability to require degrees of preschool teachers. They both
described programs different from theirs as being better able to fund a higher payroll to support hiring teachers with bachelor’s degrees. They stated that the only way they could afford teachers with bachelor’s degrees was to pass the added payroll expense on to their parents in the form of tuition increases. They felt that hiring degreed teachers was not an option because their parents would not pay the added tuition needed to support the increase in payroll. It was stated that some of the parents could not afford resulting tuition increases. They felt that other parents would not see increase in credentials as a benefit worth paying more tuition. The non-degreed directors voiced that parents would “want it, but they do not want to pay for it.” There was a strong voice in the focus group of the non-degreed directors who parents do not understand the benefits of having degreed preschool teachers.

The topic of benefits of preschool teachers with bachelor’s degrees boiled down to discussions on the performance of preschool teachers with a CDA and the performance of preschool teachers with a bachelor’s degree. The participants stated that their teachers with a CDA have done a great job, were excellent teachers, have had proper expectations, were patient, and where open to continuing their education. These comments are opposite from how they described preschool teachers with bachelor’s degrees. They described them as being frustrated with young children, expecting too much from children, not being able to apply what they learned in college, and being resistant to training opportunities. Overall, the participants described pleasant experiences when working with teachers who have their CDA. Communication skills with parents was noted as a positive trait associated with preschool teachers with bachelor’s degrees. But,
the participants felt that college curriculum did not support the students learning how to properly communicate with children.

The loudest voice on this topic was that preschool teachers with bachelor’s degrees were not committed to providing a developmentally appropriate classroom nor committed to staying in early education. The participants expressed that they had experienced teachers with bachelor’s degrees leave their programs with no notice. It was felt that early education was used as a temporary job for teachers with bachelor’s degrees while they waited for positions that paid more money. They shared that they had similar experiences regarding past teachers with bachelor’s degrees reported that their public school teaching benefited from being in early education. One participant shared that two of her past teachers with a bachelor’s degree went on to earn the title of “Teacher of the Year” shortly after leaving her program.

The overall experiences of the non-degreed directors resulted in a voice that having teachers with bachelor’s degrees was not predisposed to being positive for their programs. Instead, they voiced that higher education is good for the individual person and good for the professionalism of the field, but a CDA provided a better foundation for their preschool teachers, thus being more positive for their programs.

**Vignette of the degreed directors.** The following topics related to the research questions received a lot of discussion time during this focus group: the reality of tuition limits as it applies to being a business; the realities of the perception of parents regarding the early education industry; the perceptions of early education from preschool teachers with bachelor’s degrees; teachers with bachelor’s degrees do not stay in early education; universities do not fully prepare students for a career in early education; benefits of
preschool teachers with CDA credentials; validation of the CDA credential as a suitable requirement of preschool teachers. The overall voice of each topic will be relayed in a succinct manner.

The cost piece of requiring bachelor’s degrees of early education programs was discussed at length. The degreed directors voiced that the business aspects of early education must be faced and that there was a limit to what parents will and can pay for services. It was agreed that parents are the primary vehicle from which money will come from to support the budget needed to hire preschool teachers with degrees. The primary voice of the group was that most parents are not in a position or willing to pay more for early education services. While the business practice of marketing was noted as being deficient, it was felt that accreditation organizations and early education programs are poor at promoting the benefits of quality programs and degreed teachers.

The degreed directors felt early education was not considered a learning environment to parents. They felt that this situation was a major holdup regarding the professionalization of the early education field. They expressed increased marketing from accreditation agencies as well as from directors on the topic of the benefits of high quality early education would add to the professionalization of the field.

Along the lines of perception of the professional aspects of early education, the directors of this focus group discussed how teachers with bachelor’s degrees do not see themselves as real teachers. They felt that the low hourly pay was a primary contributing factor to this perception. The hourly pay of preschool teachers versus salaried pay of public and Montessori teachers was discussed. It was felt that simply allowing the early education industry to pay preschool teachers a salary rate instead of an hourly rate would
be a major factor in professionalizing the field. The degreed directors shared that preschool teachers with bachelor’s degrees do not consider early education an honorable profession or a true career due to pay and benefit issues. This situation was identified as the main reason for a high rate of turnover. The degreed directors concurred that degreed teachers have not stayed long in their programs.

Robust discussions revolved around the topic of the quality of the work of preschool teachers with bachelor’s degrees. When asked to make meaning of their expressed experiences regarding teachers with bachelor’s degrees not knowing early education best practices while it was expressed that teachers with CDA’s know how to apply “best practices,” one participant said that it “means that we do not know how to manage degrees yet.” This group felt that there was great disparity between the instruction at different universities as well as degree plans. It was voiced that graduates with degrees based in child development, not early childhood with a focus on teaching elementary school, were more proficient in the early education classroom. The value of early education experience was discussed as it related to degree plans at institutions of higher learning. It was noted by this group that there is a lack of exposure to in-field experiences in most degree plans. This lack was deemed a major stumbling block to graduates being successful in early education programs.

The discussion of the inability of teachers with bachelor’s degrees to work effectively in early education classrooms spun off to discussions about the benefits of teachers with their CDA. The discussions featured dialogue regarding how those with CDA’s make great early education teachers because their training was focused on teaching children from birth to 5 years of age. The degreed directors voiced that they felt teachers with
their CDA were full of confidence and passion for the field, and they usually continued their education.

Final discussions of this focus group revolved around credential requirement options. Creating differentiating standards was discussed followed by the complete consensus of the group that a CDA is a viable basic requirement to help professionalize the field of early education. On-line CDA programs were discouraged due to the lack of interactive experiences deemed necessary in quality instructional programming.

**Common voice expressed by the participants.** When given the opportunity to express their experiences regarding the effects of credential requirement, the participants have a variety of views. They value higher education. The focus of this stage of research was to make meaning of what has been expressed during the first two stages of research. The participants see the requirement of a bachelor’s degree of preschool teachers as a way to professionalize the field of early education, but they feel that this requirement is not possible under the current financial paradigms of the industry. They recognize that budget issues are the primary obstacle to implementing this requirement. All of the participants voiced that their program cannot compete with what public schools pay degreed teachers. Without comparable pay and benefits, degreed teachers who are hired into early education are not committed to stay and leave once a public school position comes open. Most of the directors felt that programs different from theirs have better resources to pay teachers more.

The directors expressed that raising tuition was the only option they had to support the budget needed to secure and pay preschool teachers with bachelor’s degrees. They felt that raising tuition enough to competitively compensate degreed teachers was not realistic
because the budget of parents could not bear the related increase. They expressed that parents need to be educated on the value of having degreed teachers in preschool classrooms so that they will understand the value associated with tuition increases. It was voiced that many parents would not be willing to pay extra tuition associated with increases needed to support degree teachers.

There was a strong voice expressed during the individual interviews that there was a high level of satisfaction with teachers who have their CDA regarding the implementation of best practices and a low level of satisfaction with teachers who have their bachelor’s degree regarding the implementation of “best practices.” When asked to make meaning of this voice, discussions featured observations that higher education does not know how to manage degrees supporting early education. While it was discussed that some institutions of higher learning are proficient at equipping teachers to work in early education, it was strongly voiced that most do a poor job. It was expressed that there is a lack of instruction geared towards working with children ages birth through five years, and that most degree plans lack providing hands-on experiences. The result is that most graduates with bachelor’s degrees that work in early education do not understand the industry or how to effectively teach young children. The participants voiced a major consequence of improperly equipped graduates was that they lack commitment to the programs in which they are hired.

The directors loudly voiced that degreed teachers do not stay. They expressed that early education is a temporary position until the degreed teacher can get hired into a public school setting. There was frustration expressed in knowing that degreed teachers hire in with a lack of commitment to the organization and the field of early education.
Discussion surrounding the satisfaction with preschool teachers with a CDA had a tone opposite of the discussions about preschool teachers with a bachelor’s degree. The participants were pleased with the commitment of preschool teachers with a CDA and felt they provided quality early education learning environments. It was even voiced that teachers with a CDA can be as effective as a degreed teacher. They felt that CDA programs taught applicable child development for young children and helped increase the professionalism of the students. It was expressed that teachers who have their CDA’s usually continue on taking higher education courses.

Overall, the directors value higher education, but felt that the requirement of preschool teachers having their CDA was a viable and healthy option for the early education industry. It was voiced that the CDA provides a perfect balance between payroll issues and quality early education classrooms. They felt that the requirement of a CDA was a step in the right direction. Differentiated standards could be created for programs that have the budget to choosing higher educational standards of their preschool teachers.

Summary of Findings

Data received during each of the three stages of research were consistent. The voices of the degreed directors did not vary much from the non-degreed directors. The biggest factor associated to variance in voice of the participants was the financial position of the program. The directors of the most affluent programs in the focus groups voiced more support for the requirement of bachelor’s degrees for preschool teachers. It must be noted that the directors of the more affluent programs were requiring higher credentials of their preschool teachers with the goal of all their preschool teachers having their bachelor’s degree, and that their sponsoring corporation provided free on-line university
courses. Even with the financial support of a corporation, the directors of affluent programs concurred with the overall voice that requiring CDA credentials of preschool teachers is viable and a more practical option for the early education industry than requiring bachelor’s degrees. The narrative describing the common voice expressed by the participants during the third stage of research provides the reader of this document with how the participants answered the central question to this study.

Subquestions developed at the beginning of this study were answered as the research proceeded thorough the stages. The answer to what were the credentials of the participants can be found in Figure G1, and the credentials of the current teachers within the programs of the participants can be found in Figure G2. The answer to what professional development plans were in place at the program was identified in the first survey stage of this study is reflected in Table H2. All of the directors had professional development plans in place for their teachers, and all of the directors offer some sort of tuition assistance. The question, “What are the credential requirements of preschool teachers by the program directors?” was added to the second stage of inquiry. Table H2 delineates the results of this question. The answers to the subquestion, “What experiences do directors have associated with credential requirements?” were vast and relate back to the whole context of the discussions.

The formative nature of the three stages of research allowed the voice of the participants to be refined as the study progressed. While reflecting upon the literature review of this study (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007) and on the answers of the survey interviews, it became apparent that last two stages of this study needed to focus on the requirement of a bachelor’s degree of preschool teachers. It is interesting to note that
there were no negative aspects of teachers having their CDA mentioned during the focus groups while there were many negative aspects mentioned regarding the hiring of preschool teachers with their bachelor’s degree.

When looking for a divergence between written and expressed experiences, an obvious difference was apparent. The participants rated their satisfaction with the length of employment or tenure of teachers with bachelor’s degree more positively than they expressed during personal interviews. This revelation was especially true with the degreed directors and was consistent during individual interviews as well as the focus group interviews. Their satisfaction with the length of employment or tenure of teachers with a CDA was reported as being high in the surveys and remained positive during the individual interviews as well as the focus group interviews. It is my assessment that the positive feelings of the participants for higher education as a whole effected the survey interview, but when faced with reflective questioning, the deeper realities regarding the retention and work performance of preschool teachers with a bachelor’s degree surfaced in their voice.

The revelation of the contexts and thought about the experiences of the participants was deemed important in the formative stages of this study. During the individual interviews an apparent conundrum surfaced. The participants felt that bachelor’s degrees brought a higher level of professionalism to the field, but the cost impact prohibited implementation. When the participants were faced with questions that were written based on expressions during the first two stages of research, an obscure voice began to surface. Upon reflection of all three stages of research, this obscure voice was present within the deep context, but unobtrusive. A deep context was expressed by the
participants regarding why preschool teachers with bachelor’s degrees are not ideal employees under the current paradigms of the early education industry. The participants also put into context the benefits of securing preschool teachers with their CDA. The resulting expressions were valuable to understanding the complexity of the subject. The resulting overall essence of the experience of the group was that while they are passionate for higher education, securing preschool teachers with bachelor’s degrees was not possible within the current paradigms of the early education industry. There was a unified voice that said that requiring preschool teachers to have a minimum of a CDA would benefit the early education field.
Chapter Five: Summary and Discussion

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this phenomenological research project was to close the gap between research and practice by engaging preschool directors in expressing and making meaning of their practical experiences on the topic of credential requirements of teachers. Specifically, I desired that this study would discover and ascribe meaning to how a select group of early education directors in Tarrant County, Texas felt credential requirements impacted the accredited programs they oversaw. This study was designed to provide a voice to a silenced group of educators. By allowing the directors to become full collaborators in discussions, the gap between research and practice would narrow (Silverstein & Auerbach, 2009). The desired end was to release the voice of the early education directors while providing a practical focus on the subject (Korthagen, 2007).

The primary problem that led to this study was the discovery of a gap between research and practice in education (Biesta, 2007; Broekkamp & van Hout-Wolters, 2007; Korthagen, 2007; Miretzky, 2007), and a review of literature confirmed a void between research and practice regarding the practicality of implementing credentialing requirements of early educators. In addition, literature was discovered challenging the legitimacy of prior research on the subject. Reducing the gap between research and practice in early education was seen as an honorable quest and therefore chosen to be the primary focus of this study.

The method used to gather this information emphasized data triangulation and featured three stages of interviews using a group of early education directors of
accredited programs from a county in Tarrant County. Rigorous steps, with a focus on triangulation, were taken to insure the trustworthiness of the study in an effort to properly authenticate the unheard voice of early education directors (Ary et al., 2006; Jacobs & Razavieh, 2006; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2007; Tesch, 1990). Survey interviews, individual interviews, and focus group interviews were written into the methodology to reinforce the credibility of the study.

At the beginning of my research, the participants expressed that their voice had not been heard on the topic of credential requirements of preschool teachers. The resounding voice that surfaced from this study was that the directors felt that the requirement of bachelor’s degrees of preschool teachers would help professionalize the early education field, but parents could not take on the tuition increases need to get the graduates to commit to a career in early education. All eight participants shared a passion for higher education, but reported experiencing limited benefits of having preschool teachers with bachelor’s degrees in their programs.

Disappointment with hiring preschool teachers with bachelor’s degrees stemmed from the graduates inability to implement early education best practices in the classroom and a lack of commitment to staying in the programs. There was a strong voice expressed that graduates with bachelor’s degrees accept positions in early education until something better comes along in the public schools.

Data in this study became richer as the stages progressed. The participants opened up as they processed their experiences and put them into words. At the end of the last stage, focus groups, the directors communicated a high level of satisfaction with the work performance and commitment of preschool teachers with CDA certifications. As a result
of verbalizing their experiences regarding graduates within their programs, the essence that was expressed was that preschool teachers with a CDA were better employees and teachers in early education than those with bachelor’s degrees. In the end, a unified voice was expressed in the research for this study despite the fact that all eight participants were never in the same location. The title of this study, *Releasing the Voice of Early Education Directors: Degree Requirements*, was fulfilled.

The primary research question of how early education directors were affected, or felt they would be affected, by credential requirements was answered. The participants clearly voiced that their budget would not support the payroll needed to recruit and retain preschool teachers with bachelor’s degrees. The voiced consensus was that the requirement of preschool teachers having a CDA was a viable alternative that could be supported in their current budgets. They did not feel that the hiring of preschool teachers with bachelor’s degrees would greatly change their programs outside of budgetary issues. This sentiment was expressed specifically in conjunction with curriculum implementation. They felt that their current curriculums were strong enough to provide the same outcomes with or without degreed teachers.

The research subquestions were also answered through the prescribed methodology. All questions focused on gathering information to support the themes of inquiry and establish history, experiences, and the meaning of experiences of the participants. To answer the subquestion, “What credentials do participants and their teachers currently hold?,” data was collected during the survey stage. The results can be found in Figure G1 and G2 in Appendix G. The information gained regarding the current credentials of the staff reinforced that the programs represented in this study were functioning at a higher
standard than is required in Texas. The answer to the second subquestion, “What professional development plans are in place at the program?,” was also collected during the survey stage via an open-ended question. All of the participants responded that they had professional development plans established in their programs. While this study did not assess the quality of the professional development plans, it did answer the question regarding if the participants had plans in place. The last subquestion of this study featured the exploration of experiences of the participants with credential requirements. The experiences of the participants regarding requiring bachelor’s degrees developed into the focus of this study while their experiences with teachers with CDA credentials was given secondary attention. The explicit findings of this subquestion tied directly into the primary research question. In summary, the participants felt that teachers with bachelor’s degrees were not prepared to effectively teach young children at institutions of higher learning. The participants did feel that the requirement of a CDA of preschool teachers was the best option to balance budgetary restrictions with the provision of a quality early education classroom.

One additional question was added through emergent qualitative practices to scaffold the acquisition of the primary and subquestions. To help understand the dynamics of the programs of the directors, their hiring requirements needed to be known. While most of the directors voiced support of hiring teachers with bachelor’s degrees, only one had the goal of hiring only teachers with this credential. The remaining directors followed the credential requirements of their accrediting agencies.

Elements of transcendental phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994) were used in a non-metaphysical way to insure that my biases did not affect the research. I chose to refrain
from implementing some of the deeper metaphysical elements associated with a
transcendental design, due to its associations being in conflict with my biblical
worldview. I purposefully did not include transcendental data analysis measures, but
implemented the basic elements of transcendental phenomenology to control biases
within my research. Doing so insured that my beliefs, existing knowledge, experience,
and any other preexisting traits did not present a bias during my research (Moustakas,
1994). One way I controlled my bias was that I posted the sections “Intersection with the
topic” and “Reflection on the topic” from Chapter Three by my computer screen to
review while doing my research. This step assisted me in giving my story a prominent
place in the study to expose my perspective and reinforce transcendental practices. In
addition, I implemented the methodology practices suggested by Moustakas (1994) of
episode or bracketing (p. 33) by refraining from judgment while performing my research
steps, reduction (p. 34) by looking at the topic as if I were encountering it for the first
time, and imaginative variation (p. 35) where I looked for structural experiences. I found
these actions complimented my biblical worldview while honoring the intent of
transcendental phenomenology.

Transcendental underpinnings used in my methodology implemented through
bracketing measures were so successful that I was actually surprised when I realized that
the final narrative of the participants resulting from data analysis sounded like my own
personal vignette. The counterstory of the participants that was revealed by my research
was my story as a director of an accredited and licensed early education program. The
experiential story expressed by the participants in this study is one that I had been waiting
to tell. I took extreme measures within this study to insure that it was trustworthy so that
my story would not be heard, but that the practical story of early education directors that work with young children every day could be revealed.

**Discussion**

The three stages of research for this study proved to be effective in helping the participants find their voice. As the study progressed and the directors were given the opportunity to be heard on the subject of credential requirements of preschool teachers, they expressed deeper textual and structural descriptions of their experiences. Each stage led to deeper revelation not only to me, but to the participants themselves. This point was evident to me at the focus group when one participant told me that she could not believe what she shared with me at the individual interview. In stage one this director rated the level of her voice being heard in the past as a two on a five point Likert scale. The comment on her return email from her “member check” on her individual interview stated the following: “Very interesting – I think it does accurately reflect my thoughts.” The opportunity for her to express her experiences on the subject of this study had allowed her to process her textural and structural experiences and find her voice.

Applying recommendations by Creswell (2007) and Seidman (2006) to use multiple techniques in my phenomenological study allowed me to guide the participants in compiling their experiences to strengthen their voice through experience triangulation (Ary et al., 2006; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2007; Seidman, 2006).

The primary finding in this study can be summed up in the final expression of the directors that the requirement of a CDA credential for preschool teachers is a viable credential that is not only practical to implement, but beneficial to their early education classrooms. A secondary finding is that the directors felt that graduates with bachelor’s
degrees are not committed to working and staying in early education nor do they have the ability to implement best practices into the classrooms.

**Implications.** The literature review and the two findings of this study have major implications to the early education industry. The old “party line” in education has been that preschool teachers need to have a bachelor’s degree to insure quality education for young children. This mantra is now being challenged in new studies and was further challenged in my study. This research shed light on the practical experiences that early education directors have when it comes to hiring and employing preschool teachers with bachelor’s degrees.

The common voice of the directors shared that graduates with bachelor’s degrees are not ideal employees. While there is prestige associated with hiring teachers with degrees, preschool teachers with bachelor’s degrees are not committed to the field nor properly prepared to do the work required of early educators. The participants in this study provided a long list of negative aspects associated with hiring preschool teachers with bachelor’s degrees that overshadowed the slim list of positive aspects. The voice of the directors implied that having a passion for higher education and hiring teachers with bachelor’s degrees does not substantially improve their programs.

A secondary implication along this line is that the budgets of early education programs cannot support the higher payroll needed to pay and support teachers with bachelor’s degrees. Because many teachers with bachelor’s degrees do not understand how to apply what they have learned, additional training is needed. Any increase associated with hiring degreed teachers has to be passed on to the parents. The investment of training dollars and the increase in payroll need to support teachers with bachelor’s degrees often
is wasted when they leave on short notice to teach in public schools. In the financial environment of our country, substantially raising tuition fees to cover increases in budget due to higher salaries is neither feasible nor sensible.

The data in this study strongly implies that most degree plans of institutions of higher learning have not prepared graduates to function within a developmentally appropriate learning environment for young children. There is an obvious element of experiential learning that is missing. This lack of experiential learning was voiced as being the major cause of graduates being unable to apply what they have learned. Knowing that this train of thought was loudly spoken by the participants, it can be postulated that the desire to hire preschool teachers with bachelor’s degrees is done to honor the institution of higher education, not to provide the best teachers possible to teach young children.

This study revealed that the CDA credential provides a viable option to requiring higher credentials of preschool teachers. Coursework taught to support this credential provides teachers with practical knowledge and experiential learning needed to be a successful early education teacher. Preschool teachers with CDA credentials are paid slightly more than those without a credential. The increase in payroll can easily be absorbed in the budget of most early education programs through expenditure adjustments or minor tuition increases. The added benefit of securing teachers with their CDA greatly outweighs the benefits of hiring teachers with bachelor’s degrees. It is important to note that it was lightly voiced that on-line CDA programs are not as viable as live CDA classes due to the lack of experiential learning.

It must be delineated at this place in the implication of findings that the participants have had some great experiences surrounding hiring teachers with bachelor’s degrees.
Higher education was greatly valued by the directors. But, when faced with the practical realities of managing and improving their programs, the voice of the directors clearly supported the requirement of CDA credentials of preschool teachers over the requirement of bachelor’s degrees.

**Literature**

There is a lack of current research in literature on the effects of degrees on early education. This statement was substantiated by the fact that most literature on this topic was based on studies done before 2005. A surge of research challenging prior studies has begun to surface in the past five years. The challenge questioning past research has not been taken lightly as researchers grapple with the topic. Many new studies have placed little weight on preschool teachers with bachelor’s degrees as being the primary reason for positive results in the academic gains of young children. Literature revealed a large cost impact and the lower availability of teachers in the early education industry if bachelor’s degrees were required of preschool teachers. A review of literature also revealed that institutions of higher learning were not able to implement proper early education coursework with qualified leadership to support the field of early education. Information gained during literature research did not support that bachelor’s degrees would conclusively improve the early education industry. The data collected in this study closely aligns with what was discovered in the review of literature for this study.

Literature found on the topic of teacher education of early educators proved to be under-researched (Kelley & Camilli, 2007). The following statement was posed in Chapter Two regarding this topic: “The obvious questions are what educational requirements are minimally required for teachers in early childhood education and
whether bachelor’s degrees consistently improve early learning over Child Development Associate (CDA) credentials or associate’s degrees in early childhood.” The asking of the question in this statement was supported in discovered literature by Bryant et al. (2005). The voice expressed by the participants in this study resoundingly said that a bachelor’s degree did not consistently improve the learning environment over the learning environment provided by teachers with a CDA. In this same section in the literature review of this study, it was established that “most parents cannot afford the cost that the private sector will have to charge to acquire and keep degreed teachers.” This statement was also found to be voiced by the participants in this study. Following are comments expressed by the participants on this subject: “there is kind of a gap there between what parents really know about what they want and what they can afford,” “[parents] don’t want to pay the price for degreed teachers,” and “it’s not something that they are willing to pay more for.” The financial paradigm of parents mentioned in the literature regarding the inability to afford tuition needed to fund the recruitment and retention of degreed preschool teachers was supported in the data acquisition of this study.

Through a review of current literature, it was concluded that there was a clear disparity among early education researchers because some embraced higher qualifications while others questioned the value. This statement was mainly supported on the writings of Whitebook et al. (2009). It is interesting to note that the participants in this study both embraced higher education and questioned the value, a point that was found in a review of literature for this study. One non-degreed director said the following: “Just like we’ve talked, there are some benefits to it and there are some
drawbacks from it. So, I think it’s good that we have degreed teachers and more educated teachers.” A degreed participant said the following: “I support the requirement for degrees. I think for all child care professionals to have to have a degree might be a little far.” At the conclusion of both focus group discussions, the participants came to interesting conclusions when asked how their experiences translated to normative early education programs. One degreed director said “I’d like to see us go to a basic requirement of a CDA for everyone who’s going to be in a classroom.” Another degreed director said “CDA – It’s really the perfect balance of the requirement with the pay.” One non-degreed director said the following: “Well, I don’t know if it comes down to maybe you have not necessarily a degree but some sort of certification for teachers in early childhood being pre-school.” A concluding comment by a degreed director succinctly summarized the voice of both groups. She said the following: “We can’t require a bachelor’s degree when we don’t even require a CDA first. You have to start somewhere. I think that baby steps with CDA, we all know it be quality; we know it…, if it’s through the right program.”

One caveat of requiring degrees of preschool teachers was discovered during the review of literature. This caveat was best described by Bueno, Darling-Hammond, & Gonzales (2010) when they said the following: “Several recent studies indicate that a bachelor’s degree and specialized training in early childhood education and development may better prepare teachers to provide high-quality classroom environments and promote academic achievement” (p. 2). The caveat suggested a need for specialized training in early childhood education. Data acquired from both degreed and non-degreed participants supported this admonition by revealing the voice that a degree is not enough
when it comes to providing a high quality early learning environment. While academic outcomes of children was not a topic in the research phase of this study, the literature reviewed clearly challenged the validity of the connection between early education teachers’ degrees to classroom quality and academic gains of young children.

A review of literature on the topic of classroom quality and degrees of teachers resulted in the discovery of some weak links between the two variables. The research in this study did not provide data linking classroom quality to teachers with bachelor’s degrees. In fact, the opposite was discovered especially during the individual interview phase. Paige commented that she “often finds that they (degreed teachers) do not understand where preschool children are developmentally” and that she has to “almost re-train them from what they’ve been taught.” Grace commented that “the training that they were prepared with in college did not …prepare them to go into the (early education) work field.” Gina discussed the lack of practical experience needed to provide a quality early education classroom. She said the following about graduates with bachelor’s degrees that come to work in her program: “They don’t have ‘best practices’ experiences. They don’t understand that aspect of what is required…. Early childhood is all about active learning. They don’t know what it is or how to do it.” Gina also commented that she “sees those with elementary BA’s come in, and they don’t know how to apply what they know [to young children].” Olivia bluntly stated that “universities have got to do a better job at ensuring that students have more practical experience.” Comments such as these were the preponderance of the discussions regarding the classroom quality of bachelor’s degree graduates that have worked in early education programs of the participants in this study.
Teacher-child relationships, a topic lightly reviewed in Chapter Two of this study, was not highly discussed during any of the three interview phases. The literature review cited work by Howes et al. (2008), Jacobson (2008), and Pianta et al. (2008) that connected teacher-child relationships to the academic gains of young children. Data collected in the study at hand suggested that it was hard to establish teacher-child relationships because teachers with bachelor’s degrees did not stay long in early childhood classrooms. Seven out of the eight participants mentioned during their individual interviews that there was poor retention of preschool teachers with bachelor’s degrees. The eighth participant spent most of her discussion time on the topic of recruitment and retention on the successful recruitment and training programs of her supporting corporation. Comments were made such as “oh, they leave,” “I can’t keep them ’cause they want more pay,” and “they don’t stay.” The lack of experiences with prolonged relationships between preschool teachers with bachelor’s degrees and young children in this study made the topic of academic gains found in the literature review a moot point.

The participants provided limited data regarding the response of parents to having preschool teachers with bachelor’s degrees in the classroom. While a study in 2008 by Rose & Elicker showed that the warmth of the caregiver was of higher value than the education level, the overall review of literature on this topic for this study resulted in ambiguity from parents on this topic. The general consensus of the focus groups was that parents need to be more educated on the value of higher education as it relates to the care and education of young children. The comments of one degreed director succinctly described the problem when she said the following:
Unfortunately, where as we all want the quality (in the programs of institutions of higher learning) we see how valuable it is. I don’t think that it is as valuable to parents either. Yes, it is necessary, but it is not – it’s not something that they (parents) are willing to pay for.

While the literature review for this study comprehensively addressed the unheard voice of early educators, little time was spent on actual discussions on the topic. Instead, the focus of the research was to release the voice of the directors, a task that was successfully fulfilled. One question of the survey interview asked for the nominees to rank how they felt their voice has been heard on the subject of requiring early education teachers to have bachelor’s degrees. On a five point Likert scale, the average score of the directors was 2.1. During the individual interviews, the directors stated that they shared their voice whenever they could. They made comments such as “I’m pretty vocal about it,” “I talk all the time…I really want them to have the practical aspect of it,” and “I want opportunities, but there aren’t any.” This response from practitioners working day-to-day with young children strongly indicated that they did not feel that their voice had been heard. This finding was in congruence with the literature found on this subject.

While only one degreed director seemed to have a variety of opportunities to share her voice on the subject of degree requirement of preschool teachers, the majority of the participants individually voiced few venues where they could be hear. Venues included talking with legislators, “open forums for the Minimum Standards for Texas,” “discussion with my peers,” NAEYC, accreditation protocol forums, director meetings, and Campfire. The list of venues seems to be vast, but there appeared to be a lack of opportunities dedicated to open discussion of the topic of this study.
The subject of professionalization of preschool teachers was researched in the literature review. The conclusion of the research in this area was that raising the educational levels of early educators in the area of professional development did not require the acquisition of a costly degree. It was suggested during the literature review that other affordable options such as a CDA was viable. This conclusion in the literature review was the same conclusion that the participants voiced during this research and specifically at the end of the focus groups. A CDA was a feasible credential for the early education field. Not only is a CDA affordable, but it provides attendees with practical experiences while raising the levels of professionalism of the student. In the focus groups both degreed and non-degreed directors mentioned that many of their teachers that have acquired a CDA have gone on to take more college courses. One degreed director said that a CDA “builds their confidence; it does build in their professionalism.”

The literature review in Chapter Two comprehensively revealed the plight regarding low wages in the field of early education. The research in this study closely corresponded with the literature review discoveries in this area. Bueno et al. (2010) reported that early educators fall into the category of the working poor. A comment made by a non-degreed reinforced the information reported by Bueno et al. (2010) when she said that there “should be more money put into childcare, because it’s pretty much the lowest paid job there is.” Low wages were described by the participants as being the main reason teachers with bachelor’s degrees do not stay in preschool classrooms. As directors of accredited programs, the participants in this study represented the highest quality programs in Tarrant County, Texas. Six of the eight participants were assessed to be in affluent programs. Many of the directors reported paying higher wages to their
preschool teachers than other programs within the county. Despite the higher pay, seven out of the eight directors stated that they have problems with teacher retention. A degreed director, stated the following in her individual interview: “Recruitment? Retention? It is difficult – raises, payroll. I pay my staff with degrees much more…I don’t see how I can do it with paying all my staff that rate…I just can’t do it. There isn’t enough money.”

The literature review of this study and the voice of the participants expressed the same sediments on the topic of degree requirements of early education teachers. The methodology of this study was done to find the unified voice of the participants. This researcher found herself concerned that the positive experiences of the directors were fragmented without unity and were therefore overshadowed by a unified voice that described difficulty in the recruitment and retention of degreed preschool teachers as well as negativity regarding the quality of the performance by teachers with bachelor’s degrees. To bring balance back to discussions, it is important to note here that the participants were unified in their voice supporting higher education. They felt that higher education was valuable. The following quote from a degreed director in her focus group effectively summed up the quandary of the participants:

The reality of our industry is that there is only so much you can charge for the service [of early education] because it has to balance with what parents make at their jobs and [with] what their cost of living is. This isn’t a luxury item. This is a necessary item. So when you talk about requiring a degree and then paying someone what is necessary for that degree, you have to pass that cost onto your customer, and there is only so much that a customer can bear. Whenever we want
to elevate the industry, we want to make it a professional industry. I don’t think anyone would dispute that it is better to be respected as professionals and have degrees…you must have certain knowledge and education in order to be high quality and successful, but we do have to be able to compensate when we require that. And that is really difficult to do when you can’t raise the price of your product.

**Theoretical Framework**

As noted in Chapter Two, literature used in the theoretical/conceptual framework of this study was crucial in establishing the tone for the study. Critical theory proved appropriate due to the fact that the participants in this study expressed that they did not feel that their voice has been heard on the topic of degree requirements of preschool teachers. They also provided large amounts of data on the topic of being under-resourced and the inability to pay degreed teachers honorable wages to secure and maintain their commitment to teaching young children. Critical race theory also proved appropriate in this study. The participants voiced the lack of opportunities to participate in discussions regarding degree requirements of preschool teachers, an important topic in their profession. This study provided an opportunity for a counterstory to be told. As a result, a multidimensional picture has now been shared that challenges older literature on the topic. The application of sociocultural theory was validated because the participants were engaged in making meaning of their experiences in the third stage of the research during their assigned focus group. As a result, the release of the voice of the participants supported by critical theory, critical race theory, and sociocultural theory brought clarity to discoveries found in recent research through the revelation of practical experiences.
Limitations

Reviewing the limitations of this study was done in a spirit of transparency to provide an honest effort to substantiate this research in light of its weaknesses. The areas of design, analysis, and sample were analyzed for limitations and weaknesses. Procedures to established trustworthiness in the areas of credibility, dependability, and transferability were also critically evaluated for effectiveness.

Design. The primary weakness in this study fell into the area of study design. Unbeknownst to me during the proposal development stage of this study, the website of TDFPS did not have accurate information regarding the number of accredited preschools. As a result, when choosing the area to study I was under the assumption that the participant pool was greater than it actually was. The consequence was a small pool of directors for the key informants to nominate as possible participants in my research. In the end, I had a small group of participants.

While the small number of the group fell within the recommendations for the survey interview phase and the individual interview phase (Polkinghorne, 1989; Creswell, 2007; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007), the size of my focus groups fell short of advised sizes (Ary et al., 2006; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The focus group size limitation was further exacerbated when two non-degreed directors could not attend their focus group with short notice. Canceling the focus group and scheduling another date was not an option due to the fact that the two remaining participants were on their way to the event.

Another limitation revealed within the research documentation was failed audio recording during two of the eight individual interviews. Taking detailed notes and quick discovery of the problem allowed me to replicate the conversations from memory. While
implementing “member check” procedures verified that I had effectively captured the voice of the two directors whose individual interviews were not captured on audio recordings, there could have been a loss of rich and thick descriptions from their experiences.

**Analysis.** The modified data analysis framework suggested by Creswell (2007, p. 156-157) proved to be effective in this study. The first limitation was found as a result of the low group size of participants. Presenting data using visual representations to establish quasi-statistics (Ary et al., 2006; Creswell, 2007; Husserl, 1999a) while keeping the identity of the participants confidential was found to be difficult. A second minor limitation revolved around a recommendation by Creswell (2007) to describe final data analysis using a long paragraph, information noted in the methodology section of this study. I found that more information needed to be included in the describing of data than could be summarized in one paragraph. While the writing of only one paragraph to describe data was not formally written into my methodology, discussions surrounding this topic were included.

**Sample.** Weaknesses were detected in the final sample used in this study. Due to the low pool of possible participants, I was not able to selectively choose who would and would not participate. Only nine directors were involved in the survey interview phase. To be selective I would have had to reduce the group size to six participants, an option that would further reduce the viability of the focus group interview phase. The four non-degreed directors fit the profile of a good participant, but the surveys of three of the five degreed directors revealed that they had a louder positive voice than the other six directors. The loudest voiced director was eliminated from participation due to the fact
that her program did not fit the profile of a traditional preschool. Following the recommendation of Seidman (2006) to not include radical voices that could sway data might have been compromised. I purposefully used the word “might” because while two directors with loud voices revolving around a positive history of degree requirements of preschool teachers were included in this research, the findings were not positive towards degree requirements.

A second weakness is a result of the low participant pool. Maximum variation sampling (Seidman, 2006) was compromised. The first compromise was in the area of accreditation representation. It was desired to have two representatives from each accrediting organization represented in this study. This goal was skewed with half of the participants being from NAEYC accredited programs. Of the remaining programs, two were NACCP accredited, and one was SACS accredited. The last program was NAEYC accredited and is currently being taken through NACCP accreditation. The second area of compromise was discovered during the individual interviews. It was revealed to me during discussions that three of the affluent programs were from the same parent corporation. While each of these three programs was distinctly different from the others, the root philosophy and corporate infrastructure was the same.

A final consideration of limitations in this study must include discussions involving the fact that the preponderance of the programs in this study was subsidized by a large business/organization or were non-profit. The type of financial structure of the programs in this study is important to understand because they are not normative of the industry as a whole. As a result of the financial structure, five of the program directors commented that they pay well for the industry. Even with this advantage, these directors rated their
ability to comply with the requirement of a bachelor’s degree of preschool teachers low. Their average score was a 1.8 on a five point scale with five being easy to comply.

**Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness was of upmost importance to this study so that the voice of early educators would be taken seriously on the subject of credential requirements of preschool teachers. To insure trustworthiness, my prescribed methodology stated that I would abide by the following five components identified by Creswell (2007) as principles needed to establish a trustworthy phenomenological qualitative study:

1. The researcher must understand the tenants of the method.
2. The researcher will choose a clear phenomenon to be studied.
3. The researcher will implement data analysis procedures from noted qualitative specialists.
4. The researcher will express the overall essence and the context of the phenomena being studied.
5. The researcher will participate in a reflexive manner while doing research. (p. 215-216)

All five of these components were met in my study. I became a student of phenomenological transcendental methodology and researched the history of the field. As a result, I found my German heritage identifying with the context in which Husserl developed the founding principles of phenomenological research. I chose a clear phenomenon to study which is expressed in the title of this document. Data analysis procedures followed the recommendations of notable qualitative specialists such as Ary, Bogdan, Biklen, Creswell, Husserl, Moustakas, Seidman, and Van Manen. The overall
essence and context of the phenomena being studied was thoroughly expressed through vignettes, profiles, and narratives. My study was written in a reflexive manner, and proof can be found in my extensive journaling of researcher comments in my audit trail and writing in a reflection log. All five of the components stated by Creswell to establish a trustworthy study were met.

**Credibility.** Research components to insure the credibility of my study were identified in my explorations of phenomenological research and were comprehensively planned for and implemented during this study. Triangulation was identified early in the development of my methodology as being a valuable procedure to establish credibility, therefore I was rigorous in this area. My desire was to accurately capture and describe the voice of the participants in a credible manner to bring honor to their experiences.

I established sample triangulation through the successful implementation of chain selection of nominees to participate in the study, I secured referrals for participants from more than three organizations, I used the technique of disconfirming cases by using equal parts of degreed and non-degreed directors, and I used a homogeneous sample by only choosing directors who have accredited programs or have directed accredited programs in the past. Data triangulation was accomplished as well. I used three tools to gather data; survey interviews, individual interviews, and focus group interviews. I strongly feel that this aspect of my study was invaluable to the quality of my findings. The three tools were based on a set of themes that built upon each other resulting in the acquisition of in-depth experiences. The depth and credibility of my findings could not have been obtained in only one or two interview stages. The successful implementation of member checks, the inclusion of rich descriptions during memoing procedures, and the capturing
of many low-inference descriptors provided triangulation credibility in the area referential or interpretive adequacy.

To further address credibility issues, face and content validly were successfully established with the corroboration of early education professionals. The questions of all three stages of the research were subjected to peer review using guidelines suggested by Ary et al. (2006) and Creswell (2007). Peer reviewers did not collectively suggest any major changes; therefore consensus was not needed as prescribed. Minor suggestions were made by the peer reviewers and implemented.

Control of bias was the area of credibility that I knew I needed to focus my attention on during the research of my study. My passion for providing quality early education in a practical manner coupled with my passion of higher education as evidenced in my pursuit of my doctorate degree were obvious biases that I carried into this study. My choice of triangulating this area of my research to insure credibility was wise and successful. To achieve the concept in phenomenological research known as bracketing (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2007; Husserl, 1999a; Moustakas, 1994), I thoroughly documented my role as a researcher in the methodology section of this study. This document included my personal intersections and reflections with the topic and was posted by my computer screen for reflection during my research. Member checks, peer review, and a reflexivity log comprised of the other steps taken to triangulate the control of my bias. During the stages of research and subsequent data analysis and data documentation, I found myself often stopping to check my bias. While it is understood that the researcher can never fully remove him or herself from their work, I feel that I was successfully in controlling my biases.
Dependability. Auditing measures were used to establish dependability in my study (Creswell, 2007). I had a goal of producing a consistent, confirmable, and reproducible study (Ary et al., 2006). This goal was achieved through the implementation of a comprehensive audit trail, replication logic, data triangulation, and interrater agreement. The complexities of my study and the decisions I made to carry out my study can be followed in my audit trail. I kept detailed notes with the addition of memoing in the form of “researcher comment” on the entire process of my study. To achieve the desired ends, I wrote a summarized audit trail of the steps I took prior to receiving permission from the IRB to begin my study. Replication logic was established through my audit trail, reflection log, and file system. The use of multiple locations to perform the interviews in my research design also established replication logic in my study. Interviews were done in the personal space of the director, at the offices of the directors, and in a party room of a restaurant. Steps taken to triangulate data were discussed in the above section on credibility. Interrat Agree was implemented to establish dependability within the coding of data (Ary et al. 2006). A fellow early education professional that has a critical eye for detail as well as a high level of work ethics partnered with me in establishing interrater agreement. She was asked to peer code one randomly selected survey and one individual interview using the categories and themes that I had discovered during data analysis (Ary et al., 2006). Dependability was established in this phase due to the peer coder agreeing with my coding of the two documents.

Transferability. The possibility of transferability of these results of this study to another context within the early education in Texas is great. It can be assumed that there would be a high transferability rate in other states as well, but the level of transferability
is hard to determine. It is important to note here that programs that become accredited agree to follow a higher set of industry standards. Meeting a higher standard regarding teacher credentials is included the protocol of most accreditation programs. Because the participants of this study were from accredited schools that have met higher standards, it is important to note that half of the directors had already agreed to follow higher hiring standards. Because the participants spoke highly for the CDA, a low level credential, it is plausible that other directors would agree also.

**Recommendations for future research.** Further study should be done using non-accredited programs to determine if their voice is in agreement with directors of accredited program. It would also be wise to replicate this study in another area in Texas to establish a deeper level of dependability. To broaden the scope of this study, it is recommended that this research also be done in various states to see how the results compare and contrast based on differing state regulations and regional cultures.

**Recommendations in light of limitations.** All of the limitations identified in this study centered on the small participant pool except for audio recording failure. The primary recommendation for future research in light of the revealed limitations centers around the need to take the sample from a larger area to insure a larger number of accredited program. A larger sample will allow the selection of more diverse types of programs while reaching the goal of including two programs from each of the accrediting agencies. The step of widening the sample area will greatly reduce limitations identified in this study. The use of two audio recording devices within the individual interviews would be a minor recommendation.
Conclusion

This study is significant in that it provided an opportunity for an unheard people group, early education directors, to tell their counterstory and voice their thoughts based on their practical experiences. The primary finding in this study was that the requirement of a CDA credential for preschool teachers is a viable credential that is not only feasible to implement, but beneficial to their early education classrooms. Coupled with this finding was that the directors felt that graduates with bachelor’s degrees are not committed to working and staying in early education nor do they have the ability to implement best practices into the classrooms. A surprising discovery was that the voices of the non-degreed directors did not vary much from the voices of the degreed directors. This research substantiated the new research found in the review of literature that challenges the findings of older studies. May my research spurn others on to release the voice of those committed their lives to serving in the early education field.
References


Dukakis, K., Bellm, D., Seer, N., & Lee, Y. (2007). *Chutes or ladders? Creating support services to help early childhood students succeed in higher education.* Berkeley,


Ryan, S., & Ackerman, D.J. (2004). *Creating a qualified preschool teaching workforce Part I: Getting qualified: A report on the efforts of preschool teachers in New*


doi:10.1080/13575270802267994


Appendix A

Participant Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

Releasing the Voice of Early Education Directors: Degree Requirements

Director Participation

Kristi Martin, Principal Investigator

Liberty University

Department of Education

You are invited to be in a research study to discover how directors of accredited preschools feel about accreditation standards requiring early education professionals to have degrees. Of specific interest is how early education directors describe their experiences regarding the effects of accreditation credential requirements. This study is being done to hear the voice of the participants in an effort to let applicable experiences on the topic be used in forming or reforming early education policy. You were selected as a possible participant because you direct an accredited early education program and were referred by someone within a major early education organization as a person who would be a good fit for this study. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Kristi Martin, from Liberty University

Background Information

The purpose of this study is to discover how a selected group of early education directors in Tarrant County, Texas feel degree requirements impact the accredited programs they oversee. This study will provide a voice to a silenced group of educators which will reduce the gap between research and practice.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things: 1. Fill out an on-line survey. 2. If selected out of the survey group, you will participate in an individual interview and a focus group with four early education directors of accredited early education programs in Tarrant County, Texas.
The survey will be done via SurveyMonkey and consist of 10 Likert scale questions and 3 open-ended questions. The individual interview will be conducted at your program, will be audio recorded, and will last approximately 60 minutes. The focus group will be conducted with a group of four directors from a local restaurant with a private room, will be audio and video recorded, and consist of discussion of five to eight questions. The focus group dinner and dialogue session will last approximately two hours.

**Risks and Benefits of being in the Study**

The study has minimal risks. Any risks will be less than participant would encounter discussing the topic at a training or organizational event. If during the study information is revealed that requires mandatory reporting due to suspected child abuse and/or child neglect, such action will be taken.

The benefit to participation is that your voice will be heard regarding how you feel on the topic. Participation will provide the early education industry with a deeper understanding of the effects of credential/degree requirements of teachers on early education programs, thus possibly aiding in your directing duties.

**Compensation:**

You will receive compensation for participation in the interview and focus group in the form of dinner at the focus group and a gift certificate for a chair massage to be done at your home, office, or the office of the massage therapists.

**Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept private. I will take steps to present information in a manner that will prevent the identification of you as a participant in any report that is published. In an effort to provide confidentiality, each participant will be given an individual identifier to be used in transcribing procedures and data reporting. Consent forms and research records will be kept/stored in two separate cabinets that are securely locked at the residence of the researcher. The keys will be kept in a different location from the cabinets. Only the researcher will have access to the records.

Future usage of data will be limited to paper documentation; audio and video data will not be released for any future projects unless an additional release is obtained. Disposal of paper data will be done via cross-cut shredding when determined by the researcher that access to the data is no longer needed. Audio and video data will be disposed five years after the publication of the dissertation using a professional disposal company.

Due to the nature of focus groups, the researcher cannot assure that other participants will maintain other participants’ confidentiality and privacy. All participants will be asked to keep all communications confidential.
Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Kristi Martin. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact the researcher at 817-538-3412, kmartin10@liberty.edu. The researcher’s dissertation advisor is Dr. Connie McDonald at Liberty University and can be contacted through email at cmcdonald2@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, Dr. Fernando Garzon, Chair, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 2400, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at fgarzon@liberty.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature:____________________________________________ Date: __________________

Signature of parent or guardian:__________________________ Date: ________________
(If minors are involved)

Signature of Investigator:_______________________________ Date: __________________
## Research Budget

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APPLICATION TO USE HUMAN RESEARCH SUBJECTS

Liberty University

Committee On The Use of Human Research Subjects

1. Project Title: Releasing the Voice of Early Education Directors: Degree Requirements

2. Full Review ☐ Expedited Review ☐

3. Funding Source (State N/A if not applicable): n/a

4. Principal Investigator:
   Kristi Martin, A.B.D. 817-538-3412, kmartin10@liberty.edu
   5033 Glenscape Trail, Fort Worth, TX 76137

5. Faculty Sponsor (if student is PI), also list co-investigators below Faculty Sponsor, and key personnel:

   Dr. Connie McDonald, Program Specialist Coord. School of Education,
   434-592-4365, Cmcdonald2@liberty.edu

6. Non-key personnel: N/A

7. Consultants: N/A
8. The principal investigator agrees to carry out the proposed project as stated in the application and to promptly report to the Human Subjects Committee any proposed changes and/or unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others participating in approved project in accordance with the Liberty Way and the Confidentiality Statement. The principal investigator has access to copies of 45 CFR 46 and the Belmont Report. The principal investigator agrees to inform the Human Subjects Committee and complete all necessary reports should the principal investigator terminate University association. Additionally s/he agrees to maintain records and keep informed consent documents for three years after completion of the project even if the principal investigator terminates association with the University.

________________________________________
Principal Investigator Signature Date

________________________________________
Faculty Sponsor (If applicable) Date

Submit the original request to: Liberty University Institutional Review Board, CN Suite 1582, 1971 University Blvd., Lynchburg, VA 24502. Submit also via email to irb@liberty.edu

APPLICATION TO USE HUMAN RESEARCH SUBJECTS

10. This project will be conducted at the following location(s): (please indicate city & state)

☐ Liberty University Campus
☐ Other (Specify): Subject’s office & local restaurant’s private room

11. This project will involve the following subject types: (check-mark types to be studied)

☐ Normal Volunteers (Age 18-65) ☐ Subjects Incapable Of Giving Consent
☐ In Patients ☐ Prisoners Or Institutionalized Individuals
☐ Out Patients ☐ Minors (Under Age 18)
☐ Patient Controls ☐ Over Age 65
☐ Fetuses ☐ University Students (PSYC Dept. subject pool ___)
12. Do you intend to use LU students, staff or faculty as participants in your study? If you do not intend to use LU participants in your study, please check “no” and proceed directly to item 13.

YES ☐   NO ☐

If so, please list the department and/or classes you hope to enlist and the number of participants you would like to enroll.

In order to process your request to use LU subjects, we must ensure that you have contacted the appropriate department and gained permission to collect data from them.

___________________________________                    ____________________________
Signature of Department Chair:                            Date

___________________________________                    ____________________________
Department Chair Signature(s)                             Date

13. Estimated number of subjects to be enrolled in this protocol: 42 survey subjects, 14-24 interview/focus group subjects

14. Does this project call for: (check-mark all that apply to this study)

☐ Use of Voice, Video, Digital, or Image Recordings?
☐ Subject Compensation? Patients $____   Volunteers $____

Participant Payment Disclosure Form

☐ Advertising For Subjects?                    ☐ More Than Minimal Risk?
☐ More Than Minimal Psychological Stress?    ☐ Alcohol Consumption?
☐ Confidential Material (questionnaires, photos, etc.)? ☐ Waiver of Informed Consent?
☐ Extra Costs To The Subjects (tests, hospitalization, etc.)?  ☐ VO2 Max Exercise?
☐ The Exclusion of Pregnant Women?
☐ The Use of Blood?                           Total Amount of Blood_____  
                                            Over Time Period (days)____

☐ The Use of rDNA or Biohazardous materials?
☐ The Use of Human Tissue or Cell Lines?
☐ The Use of Other Fluids that Could Mask the Presence of Blood (Including Urine and Feces)?
☐ The Use of Protected Health Information (Obtained from Healthcare Practitioners or Institutions)?
15. This project involves the use of an Investigational New Drug (IND) or an Approved Drug For An Unapproved Use.
   □ YES    □ NO

16. This project involves the use of an Investigational Medical Device or an Approved Medical Device For An Unapproved Use.
   □ YES    □ NO

17. The project involves the use of Radiation or Radioisotopes:
   □ YES    □ NO

18. Does investigator or key personnel have a potential conflict of interest in this study?
   □ YES    □ NO

EXPEDITED/FULL REVIEW APPLICATION NARRATIVE

A. PROPOSED RESEARCH RATIONALE

The credentials of those who work with young children have come under investigation as it relates to the provision of quality early education. The purpose of this qualitative study is to look at the imposed challenges facing early educators regarding degree requirements via phenomenological methodology in an effort to hear the voice of early educators on the subject. This study is needed to investigate the gap between research and practice regarding the practicality of implementing credentialing requirements of early educators. Directors must be allowed to share their experiences and voice their opinion on the subject to provide a dimensional look at early education credential requirements.

B. SPECIFIC PROCEDURES TO BE FOLLOWED

- Data Collection - I will be using the following three forms of interviewing as my method of data collection:
  - Surveys using SurveyMonkey

196
• The developed survey will be sent out to directors of accredited early education programs within Tarrant County, Texas.
• I have developed 13 structured questions based on information gained in the review of literature and my years of early education experience. The questions were checked for face/content validity using peer review/feedback.
• Questions have been written according to a substantive theoretical framework using carefully chosen phrases and/or adjectives in order to draw out experiences.
• The intent is to learn the basic history of possible participants and draw out the experiences to use in the selection of 14 to 20 participants in the next two interview stages.
  o First 10 questions use a Likert scale
  o Last three questions are open ended

- Individual interviews (phone script to secure individual interview appointments is attached)
  • Questions will be written using data gained from the surveys, literature, and my experience.
  • Questions will be written according to a substantive theoretical framework using carefully chosen phrases and/or adjectives in order to draw out experiences.
  • There will be approximately five semi-structured questions that will be peer reviewed for face and content validity.
  • An interview guide will be used and individual interviews will be audio recorded.
  • Individual interviews will begin two to three weeks after the survey interviews.
  • The interviews in this phase will last 60 to 90 minutes and will be done at the office of each participant.
  • I will personally conduct all interviews.

- Focus Groups (phone scripts to secure focus group appointments are attached)
  • Two focus groups will be done. One with directors with degrees and one with directors who do not have degrees.
  • Questions will be written data gained from the individual interviews, literature, and my experience.
• Questions will be written according to a substantive theoretical framework using carefully chosen phrases and/or adjectives in order to draw out experiences.
• There will be approximately five semi-structured questions that will be peer reviewed for face and content validity.
• Both groups will receive similar questions.
• An interview guide will be used and individual interviews will be audio recorded as well as video recorded.
• Focus group interviews will begin two to three weeks after the individual interviews.
• The interviews in this phase will last 90 minutes and will be done in a party room of a local restaurant.
• I will personally conduct the focus group interviews.

○ Data Analysis
  ▪ Transcription will begin within 12 to 48 hours after each interview stage has finished.
    • I will use transcriptions software.
    • I will use one to four volunteer transcription assistants.
    • I will spot inspect transcriptions to actual tape recordings to insure accuracy.
  ▪ Control of bias will be dealt with through the use of the following:
    • Negative case analysis
    • Bracketing
    • Reduction
  ▪ Data Analysis will proceed along the following format:
    • Organizing - The first phase of data analysis will begin by the organization of files. All transcription files will be organized through the use of the numbering of pages, paragraphs, and sentences as well as the use of colored inks and paper using the computer program Microsoft Word. I will assign pseudonyms after the individual interviews. Each participant will be given a pseudonym that is fitting to their experience and demographics while being cautious not to attach a name that will cause a stereotypical distortion of the discussions. The focus group transcriptions will be printed on two colors of paper not used in organizing the individual interview transcriptions.
Organization of data will continue through the development of paper files and computer files. Computer files will not be kept on a hard drive, but instead, files will be stored in the password protected Dropbox account of the researcher. Dropbox is a secure Internet file management system that provides access from any computer. Backup copies will be put on a flash drive and kept in a locked cabinet at the residence of the researcher.

- Coding - The coding of data will feature the reduction of data into small units via identification of categories and refinement of themes and constant comparative practices to strengthen the information gained from the coding of data. Open coding will be used on data collection procedures with an emphasis placed on finding the common voice of the participants. Initial coding discoveries from memoing will used as a foundation in the process. Constant comparison methodology will be used in coding to inductively compare data simultaneously in an effort to discover the voice of the participants.
  - To establish dependability within my coding procedures, I will implement the qualitative practice of interrater agreement. The procedure will be done by randomly selecting one survey and one individual interview to have coded by a peer. The peer coder will be instructed on the coding procedures that I have established for this study.

- Classifying – During this phase of data analysis, I will focus on reorganizing of the categories of reduced data into larger meaning units while searching for patterns within the units.
  - Steps from profile development will be applied at this stage. Data will be reduced by chunking into larger categories. The resulting categories of meaning units will be refined and grouped into themes according to developing patterns. Significant statements will be sought in an effort to combine the voice of the participants into themes.

- Interpreting - Interpreting of all data gathered and gained during the analysis of the surveys, individual interviews, and focus groups will be done after all coding and classifying procedures have been finished. I will interpret
the data in two phases. First I will write an overview of the meaning units representing the combined experiences of the participants in first person using the developed theme). Finally, I will rewrite the essence of the thematic meaning units using my voice to recreate the described reduced experiences. I will use the following interpretation suggestions by Bogdan and Biklen (2007) in this phase of data analysis: 1) revisit all writing, 2) reread the literature review of this study, 3) evaluate the subjects and the phenomena being studied to gain a deeper understanding of my relationship to the events, 4) evaluate possible implications of the research, 5) speculate what assumptions future readers of the research might form, 6) tell the story, and 7) summarize material in a clear manner. An emphasis will be placed on looking for textual descriptions (what participants have experienced) and structural descriptions (conditions or situations of the experiences of the participants). The “essence” of what early education directors have to say will be the primary focus of the interpretation phase.

- Presenting of data - At this phase, data analysis material from the surveys, individual interviews, and focus groups will be reviewed as a single unit to assist in forming additional connections.
  - Additional discoveries may be used to form quasi-statistics, which will be presented in the form of graphs, tables, and charts. While quasi-statistics will not be taken at face value, they will be used to explore the essence of the experiences of the participants.

- Describing of data - The final step of data analysis will be synthesis of all information from data analysis into one overarching description of phenomena. This document will be a composite of the essence of the experiences of the participants.

- Trustworthiness
  - Credibility
  - Triangulation
    - Sample
    - Data
    - Referential or interpretive adequacy
      - Rich descriptions during memoing
      - Use of low-inference descriptors

200
• Member checks
• Rich descriptors

• Face and content validity
  o Peer review
  o Peer consensus

• Control of bias
  o Bracketing
  o Reduction
  o Imaginative variation
  o Member checks
  o Peer review
  o Reflexivity log

• Negative case analysis

• Dependability
  • Audit trail
  • Replication logic
  • Data triangulation
  • Interrater agreement

C. SUBJECTS

• The inclusion criteria for the subject populations include directing of an accredited early education program from a variety of organization affiliation backgrounds. The choice of using directors of accredited programs is insure subjects of similar directing background. The choice of choosing subjects from a variety of organization affiliations is to insure that I hear the voices representing all directors.

• The exclusion criteria for each subject will be the following: no access to Internet to complete on-line survey; directing a non-accredited program; submitting an incomplete survey; lack of information contributed on open ended questions.

• I seek approval to use 14 to 20 subjects. This group size is based on the recommendation for phenomenological studies by qualitative researchers.

D. RECRUITMENT OF SUBJECTS AND OBTAINING INFORMED CONSENT

• I will solicit subject nominees via phone conversations from representatives within accreditation organizations, regulating agencies, and professional early education organizations of Tarrant County, Texas. A script for these phone conversations is
attached to this submittal and is labeled *Participant Nominee Solicitation Phone Script*.

- I will contact each nominee via telephone for possible participation. A script for these phone conversations is attached to this submittal and is labeled *Participant Participation Phone Script*.
- A consent form will be emailed or faxed at or directly after the time of the phone call. Participation will be recognized via receipt of emailed or faxed completed consent form.
- Confirmation of participation in the survey will be done by emailing nominees the date the survey will be sent out.
- Confirmation of participation in the interview and a focus group will be done by calling the subjects to secure an interview date.

**E. PROCEDURES FOR PAYMENT OF SUBJECTS**

- Subjects will receive a certificate for a massage at the time of the focus group.

**F. CONFIDENTIALITY**

- Confidentiality of each subject will be done primarily through the assignment of an individual identifier.
- Storage of research records, data, etc. will be done so that they may be used in future research projects as deemed by the researcher.
- Research records, data, etc. will be stored in a locked cabinet at the home office of the researcher until it is deemed that the access to such information is no longer needed. Only the researcher will have access to the research records. All record will be kept a minimum of three years after completion of the study per federal guidelines.
- Consent forms will be kept in a separate locked cabinet at the residence of the researcher.
- The keys to the two locked cabinets will be kept at the work office of the researcher.
- Audio and video records will be disposed of using a professional disposal business after five years from the publication of the study.
- Paper records will disposed of using a cross-cut shredder.

**G. POTENTIAL RISKS TO SUBJECTS**

- There is minimal risk to the each subject of this study.
- Any risk will be less than subject would encounter discussing the topic at a training or organization event.
• Subjects will be advised to keep all discussions confidential at the time of the focus group.
• If during the study information is revealed that requires mandatory reporting due to suspected child abuse and/or child neglect, such action will be taken.

H. BENEFITS TO BE GAINED BY THE INDIVIDUAL AND/OR SOCIETY

• The benefit to participation is that the voice of the subject will be heard regarding how they feel concerning how degree requirements of preschool teachers affect their program.
• Participation will provide the early education industry with a deeper understanding of the effects of credential/degree requirements of teachers on early education programs, thus aiding in the directing duties of the subject.

I. INVESTIGATOR’S EVALUATION OF THE RISK-BENEFIT RATIO

I believe that the voice of early educators must be heard on this topic which outweigh the minimal risks

J. WRITTEN INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Attached

K. WAIVER OF INFORMED CONSENT OR SIGNED CONSENT

N/A

L. SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

Survey questions attached

M. COPIES:

For investigators requesting Expedited Review or Full Review, email the application along with all supporting materials to the IRB (irb@liberty.edu). Submit
one hard copy with all supporting documents as well to the Liberty University Institutional Review Board, Campus North Suite 1582, 1971 University Blvd., Lynchburg, VA 24502.
Appendix D

Face and Content Validity Assessment Tool

Guidelines for Good Questions: Survey

Please use the below questions to assess the survey. Please notate under each question any question’s numbers that need adjustment. Additional feedback is appreciated.

1) Are questions should be short, simple, and direct?
2) Are questions phrased so that they can be understood by a variety of educational levels of early education directors?
3) Will any questions elicit unambiguous answers? (Words such as “often” and “sometimes” mean different things to different people.)
4) Are any of the questions bias?
5) Are any questions misleading due to unstated assumptions?
6) Are any questions leading?
7) Will any questions cause embarrassment, suspicion or hostility from the respondent?
8) Are any questions “double-barreled” (ask two questions at once)?
9) Do multiple choice questions offer all possible alternatives?
10) Do you feel this questionnaire meets the qualification of being brief?
11) Do you feel that all early education directors can answer these questions?

Reference

Guidelines for Good Questions: Individual Interviews

Please use the below questions to assess the Interview Guide. Please notate under each question any question’s numbers that need adjustment. Additional feedback is appreciated.

1. Are questions should be short, simple, and direct?
2. Are questions phrased so that they can be understood by a variety of educational levels of early education directors?
3. Are any of the questions bias?
4. Are any questions misleading due to unstated assumptions?
5. Are any questions leading?
6. Will any questions cause embarrassment, suspicion or hostility from the respondent?
7. Do you feel that all early education directors can answer these questions?

Reference

Categories/Themes of the Surveys

1) Quantity of degree teachers currently in program
2) Hiring requirements
3) Problems with requiring degrees
   a. Recruitment
   b. Retention
      i. Leave
         1. Why they leave
         2. Effect of loss
4) Problems regarding getting a degree
5) Credential assistance
   a. Degree
   b. CDA
6) Has a Professional Development Plan
   a. Generic
   b. College degree
   c. CDA
   d. Additional training – non-credential
7) Non-degreed teachers
   a. Pros
   b. Cons
8) Degreed teachers
   a. Pros
   b. Cons
Categories/Themes of the Individual Interviews

1) Recruitment and retention of teachers with bachelor’s degrees are difficult
   a. Budget issues
      i. Pay
         1. Have to pay bachelor’s more
            a. Tuition increases for parents
         2. We pay more than industry
            a. Program type effects ability to support staff with bachelor’s degrees
      ii. College Tuition assistance

2) Staff with bachelor’s degrees do not stay as teachers in early education programs
   a. Leave because of pay
   b. Go to public school system
   c. Want to be administration

3) Quality of bachelor’s programs
   a. Courses good
   b. Not prepared
      i. Need experience
         1. Inability to apply what they know
         2. Lack of ability to do “hands-on” instruction
      ii. Need more training
         1. Lack of knowledge of “best practices”
            a. CDA provided needed knowledge
      iii. Need a degree of natural ability

4) Traits of teachers with bachelor’s degree
   a. More professional
   b. Good communication skills
   c. Negative perception of child care/early education
   d. Unrealistic expectations
      i. Work environment
      ii. Children
      iii. Offended by correction

5) Bachelor’s requirement would NOT change my program

6) Two-sided conundrum
   a. Education = professionalization
      i. Support higher education
   b. Cost impact = prohibitive for most programs

7) Expressing voice on subject
   a. Opportunities
      i. Variety
      ii. Some vocal
      iii. Some do not have opportunities
   b. Not heard – indicated in survey
Categories/Themes of the Focus Groups

1) Early education is a business (from degreed directors only)
2) The concept of having degreed preschool teachers is good
3) Other programs can afford hiring teachers with bachelor’s degrees
4) Parents need to be educated on benefits/limitations of degreed teachers
5) Quality of teachers with bachelor’s degrees (from non-degreed directors only)
   i. Good communications and interactions with parents
   ii. Poor communications and interactions with children
   iii. Expectations of children
       1. Too high
       2. Not developmentally appropriate
   b. Importance of experiences (from degreed directors only)
      i. Reveal passion
      ii. Reveal nature of the work
      iii. On-line courses do not promote valuable experiences
6) Quality of higher education programs
   a. Universities do not know how to manage degrees
      i. Lack hands-on
      ii. Lack child development for 0-5 years
      iii. Some degrees better served in early education
          1. Bachelor’s in EC-4 found inefficient
          2. Bachelor’s in child development found efficient
7) Most persons with bachelor’s degrees do not understand early education
   a. Early education does not pay like other teaching positions
   b. Early education does not have the same dynamics as K-12 grade
      i. No desk
      ii. Longer days of service
      iii. Fewer holidays and vacation days when school is closed
      iv. Fewer or no breaks
8) Persons with bachelor’s degrees view early education as a temporary job
   a. Job until something else comes along
      i. Higher pay
      ii. More prestigious career
         1. Public school teacher
         2. Administration in early education
   b. Negative impact on early education programs
      i. Turn over
         1. Relationships broken with children
         2. Relationships broken with parents
         3. Training money investments lost
   c. Lack of commitment
9) Resists attending required trainings (from non-degreed directors only)
10) Quality of persons with a CDA
    a. Good teachers
    b. Perform job well
c. Effective at teaching young children
   d. Committed
   e. Passionate

11) Quality of CDA programs
   a. Teaches development of children 0-5 years
   b. Teaches appropriate expectations of children
   c. Builds professionalism
   d. Helps with parent communications
   e. High cost to benefit ratio
   f. Leads to desire of furthering their education

12) Problems of paying early education teachers hourly (from degreed directors only)
   a. Considered less professional positions when paid hourly
      i. Results in less ownership
      ii. Results in less pride
   b. Parents treat hourly paid staff like they are less valuable

13) Benefits of early education experience to those with bachelor’s (from non-degreed directors only)
   a. Better teachers when they go into public school
   b. Often become public school “Teacher of the Year”

14) Conclusions resulting from discussions
   a. Quality in early education is not primarily associated with teachers who have a bachelor’s degree
   b. A CDA is a viable option to requiring bachelor’s degrees of preschool teachers
      i. Enhances the quality of early education teachers
      ii. Low turnover
      iii. Pay requirements of CDA teachers fits into early education budgets
   c. Allow programs to determine the quality level they want for their own program
Appendix E

Interview Tools

Participant Nominee Solicitation Phone Script

The following phone script will be used when soliciting nominees for participation in my study. Phone conversations will be succinct, but provide enough information to solicit qualified nominees to ensure that researcher bias does not affect the process.

1. Introduction
   a. “My name is Kristi Martin and I am a student at Liberty University. I am doing my research for my Doctorate of Education in Leadership. I need your assistance in identifying qualified candidates to participate in my study. Do you have a moment to talk with me?”

2. Summarize my research
   a. “I am doing a qualitative study to look at the challenges facing early educators regarding degree requirements of preschool teachers. This study is needed to investigate the gap between research and practice regarding implementing credentialing requirements of early educators. I want directors of accredited early education programs to share their experiences and voice their opinion on the subject to provide a dimensional look at early education credential requirements.”

3. Ask for general assistance
   a. “To do my research I am depending on key informants such as you to recommend directors for me to contact to participate in my study. Once I gather referred names, I will contact the directors and provide them with a Liberty University Internal Review Board approved consent form that summarizes my study. Can you assist me in this phase of my research?”
      i. (if yes) – “Thank you so much, let me review the participant qualifications.”
      ii. (if no) – “Can you recommend a key person to assist me?”

4. Give participant qualifications
   a. “Following are the three qualifications for directors to participate:
      i. Director of a licensed early education program
      ii. Program must be accredited
      iii. Program must be in Tarrant County
   b. “I need directors with and without degrees.”
   c. “Ethnicity and economic status of participants are not part considered in this study.”

5. Ask for referrals
   a. “Whom do you feel would be good for my study?”
   b. “Thank you so much for these referrals. If you think of anyone else that would be a good participant, would you please email me their name? My email address is kmartin10@liberty.edu.”

6. Close
a. “Thank you so much for assisting me in this important study.”
Participant Participation Phone Script

The following phone script will be used when asking nominees to participate in my study. Phone conversations will be succinct, but provide enough information to secure participants while ensuring that researcher bias does not affect the process.

1. Introduction
   a. “My name is Kristi Martin and I am a student at Liberty University. I am doing my research for my Doctorate of Education in Leadership. You have been nominated as a qualified person to participate in my study. Do you have a quick moment to talk?”

2. Summarize my research
   a. “Because I am also a director of a preschool, I have a passion for in-field research. I am doing a qualitative study to look at the challenges facing early educators regarding degree requirements of preschool teachers. This study is needed to investigate the gap between research and practice regarding implementing credentialing requirements of early educators. I want directors of accredited early education programs to share their experiences and voice their opinion on the subject to provide a dimensional look at early education credential requirements. To do this research I need the help from directors of accredited preschools. I have a consent form for all participants to review and sign that lays out all of the particulars of the project. Do you have an email address that I could send it to you right now?”

3. Summarize their obligation
   a. I know the time constraints of directors of early education programs; therefore I have designed my study to easily fit with a director’s busy schedule with a limited time committed. There are three interview phases. The first is an on-line survey that will take approximately 30 minutes. The answers from the surveys will be used to choose 14-20 directors to participate in two additional interviews. This first interview will be done at your office and will consist of approximately five questions. The second interview will be a focus group where I will pay for a nice dinner at a local restaurant with a party room and we will discuss approximately five more questions as a group. I want to limit each of the two interviews, the one at your office and the focus group, to no more than 90 minutes. As a thank you for your participation you will be given a certificate for a 30 minute chair massage that can be done at your office or the massage office of the massage therapist.

4. Ask for participation
   a. Will you assist me in my research?”
      i. (if yes) – “Thank you so much, let me review the participant qualifications.”
      ii. (if no) – “I want to thank you for giving me your time.”

5. Review participant qualifications
   a. “Following are the three qualifications for directors to participate:
i. Director of a licensed early education program
ii. Program must be accredited
iii. Program must be in Tarrant County

2. Close
   a. “Thank you so much for assisting me in this important study.”
   b. (if yes)
      i. Please sign the consent form and return to me. I would like an electronic copy as soon as possible either by fax or a scanned email file followed by the paper copy in the mail.
      ii. I will be sending out the email survey in approximately two weeks and I will contact those participants selected for the live interview phases within two weeks after the on-line survey.
      iii. Thank you again for volunteering to assist me in what I feel is a very significant study.
Participant Selection Confirmation and Individual Interview Appointment Phone Script

The following phone script will be used to inform each nominee that they have been selected for the study and to secure an individual interview appointment. The purpose of the phone call is to secure a date for the individual interview, therefore the conversation with the participant will be succinct to ensure that researcher bias does not affect the process.

1. Introduction
   a. “(Name of participant), this is Kristi Martin. I want to thank you for your participation in my research by doing the Internet survey and congratulate you in being selected to participate in the remaining two phases of my study. Do you have about two minutes to select a time for me to come to your program to do your individual interview?”

2. Body
   a. (if yes) – “I will be doing individual interviews the week of ____________. What day of the week and what time of the day works best for you? Would (suggest a day and time) or would (suggest a second day and time) work better for you? I have entered your day and time in my calendar. Do you mind if I email you a reminder?
      i. (if yes) – “I have your email address as ______________. Is this correct?”
      ii. (if no) – “I understand, I receive too many emails myself.”
   b. (if no) – “When would be a better time to call?”

3. Conclusion
   a. (if an appointment was set) – “I am looking forward to talking with you in person. There is nothing you need to prepare, I will have around five open-ended questions, I want to hear what you have to say on the subject of degree requirements of preschool teachers. I will see you on (date/time), goodbye.”
   b. (if no appointment was set) – “I will call back then, goodbye.”
**Focus Group Appointment Phone Scripts**

The following phone script will be used to secure a date and time for the focus group interviews. The purpose of the phone calls are to secure a date for the focus group, therefore the conversation with the participant will be succinct to ensure that researcher bias does not affect the process.

**Phone call #1:**

1. **Introduction**
   a. “(Name of participant), this is Kristi Martin. I feel our interview was productive. Thank you for taking the time out of your day. I am now working on finding a date for the focus group interview with (directors with degrees/directors without degrees). Do you have about two minutes to discuss a time for this last phase of my study?”

2. **Body**
   a. (if yes) – “I have secured a party room at (name of restaurant and location). It is looking like (1st date/time) is the first preference for this event and (2nd date/time) is the second preference. Are these dates open for you? Which one works the best? I have noted this information.”
      i. (if no) – “When would be a better time to call?”

3. **Conclusion**
   a. (if the participant had time to talk) – “I will call you back in the next few days to let you know the final date and time, goodbye.”
   b. (if no appointment was set) – “When would be a better time? I will call back then, goodbye.”

**Phone call #2:**

1. **Introduction**
   a. “(Name of participant), this is Kristi Martin.”

2. **Body**
   a. (if yes) – “The focus group with (directors with degrees/directors without degrees) has been scheduled for (date/time). Once again, there is nothing you need to do to prepare. I will have around five questions for the group to discuss. This will be a semi-casual event, so do not feel like you have to dress up. Feel free to wear what you wear to work at your program. Do you mind if I email you a reminder?”
      i. (if yes) – “I have your email address as ______________. Is this correct?”
      ii. (if no) – “I understand, I receive too many emails myself.”

3. **Conclusion**
   a. “I am looking forward to this event. Thank you again for volunteering to participate in what I feel is a significant study for our field. Goodbye.”

216
Probing Statements

Possible Interview and/or Focus Group Statements

- Can you tell me more?
- Can you give me an example?
- How did that make you feel?
- I’m not sure I understand?
- What was the result?
- I would like to know more.
- What was accomplished?
- What was the effect?
- Tell me more about this point?

Possible Focus Group Statements

- Does anyone else have an example?
- Has anyone else experienced this?
- Has anyone else had different experiences?
- Has anyone else had similar results?
Individual Interview Form

Participant ______________________

Date _______________________

Beginning Time ________________

Ending Time _________________

Accreditation: NAEYC  NACCP  SACS

Credential _________________________

Average Likert Score ____________

My Conclusion:  Positive  Neutral  Negative

Member Check:  Positive  Neutral  Negative

Interview Techniques

Ask
Pause
Eye contact
Smile
“Check” my bias

Probing Statements

Can you tell me more?
Can you give me an example?
How did that make you feel?
I’m not sure I understand?
What was the result?
I would like to know more.
What was accomplished?
What was the effect?
Tell me more about this point?
Focus Group Interview Form

Group ______________________
Date ______________________
Beginning Time ______________
Ending Time ________________

Interview Techniques
Ask
Pause
Eye contact
Smile

Probing Statements
Can you tell me more?
Can you give me an example?
How did that make you feel?
I’m not sure I understand?
What was the result?
I would like to know more.
What was accomplished?
What was the effect?
Tell me more about this point?

Possible Focus Group Statements
Does anyone else have an example?
Has anyone else experienced this?
Has anyone else had different experiences?
Has anyone else had similar results?
Appendix F

Instruments

Survey Questions
The first three questions are multiple choice. Please mark all that apply.

1. What organization is your program accredited by?
   a. National Association of the Education of Young Children
   b. Association of Christian Schools International
   c. American Montessori Society
   d. National Association of Child Care Professionals
   e. National Early Childhood Program Accreditation
   f. National Lutheran School Accreditation
   g. If other, please list

2. What credential(s) do you carry? Please mark all of the following apply.
   a. An administrator’s credential such as the National Administrator’s Credential (NAC)
   b. Child Development Associate (CDA) credential
   c. Associate’s degree
   d. Associate’s degree in education
   e. Associate’s degree in early education (preschool)
   f. Associate’s degree in early childhood education (pre-k-elementary)
   g. Bachelor’s degree
   h. Bachelor’s degree in education
   i. Bachelor’s degree in early education (preschool)
   j. Bachelor’s degree in early childhood education (pre-k-elementary)
   k. Master’s degree
   l. Master’s degree in education
   m. Master’s degree in early education (preschool)
   n. Master’s degree in early childhood education (pre-k-elementary)
   o. Doctorate degree
   p. Doctorate in education
   q. Doctorate in early education (preschool)
   r. Doctorate in early childhood education (pre-k-elementary)
   s. If the training you have received is not listed above, please provide that information here:

3. What credential(s) does your teaching staff carry? Please mark all of the following apply to teachers you have on staff.
   a. None
   b. 20 college hours, not yet culminating in a degree
   c. An administrator’s credential such as the National Administrator’s Credential (NAC)
   d. Child Development Associate (CDA) credential
e. Associate’s degree
f. Associate’s degree in education
g. Associate’s degree in early education (preschool)
h. Associate’s degree in early childhood education (pre-k-elementary)
i. Bachelor’s degree
j. Bachelor’s degree in education
k. Bachelor’s degree in early education (preschool)
l. Bachelor’s degree in early childhood education (pre-k-elementary)
m. Master’s degree
n. Master’s degree in education
o. Master’s degree in early education (preschool)
p. Master’s degree in early childhood education (pre-k-elementary)
q. Doctorate degree
r. Doctorate in education
s. Doctorate in early education (preschool)
t. Doctorate in early childhood education (pre-k-elementary)
u. If other, please list

Next seven questions you will rate using a Likert scale. The number 1 is the lowest rating, 3 is a middle or neutral rating, and 5 is the highest rating.

4. Rate how you feel regarding the requirement of a bachelor’s degree for teachers in your program. Choosing the number 5 indicates that you support this requirement while choosing the number 1 shows the lowest support.
   1   2   3   4   5

5. Rate the difficulty it is or would be to comply with requiring your teachers to have a bachelor’s degree.
   1   2   3   4   5

6. Rate the satisfaction of the length of employment or tenure of teachers with CDA or equivalent.
   1   2   3   4   5

7. Rate the satisfaction of the length of employment or tenure of teachers with associate’s degrees.
   1   2   3   4   5

8. Rate the satisfaction of the length of employment or tenure of teachers with bachelor’s degrees.
   1   2   3   4   5

9. Rate the satisfaction of the length of employment or tenure of teachers with graduate degrees.
   1   2   3   4   5
10. Rate the level you feel your voice has been heard in the past on the subject of requiring early education teachers to have bachelor’s degrees.
   1  2  3  4  5

11. The following three questions are open-ended. Please voice your opinion.

12. What have been the effects of requiring early education teachers to have degrees?

13. What are your experiences regarding the subject of requiring early education teachers to have degrees?

14. Describe the professional development plans and/or system you have in place at your program to facility staff in obtaining higher credentials and/or degrees?

Thank you for your participation in expressing your voice in this survey,

Kristi Martin

If you are selected to participate in the next phases of this research, you will be contacted in the next two weeks by phone.
Interview Guide: Individual Interviews

Preliminary Discussion
"I will be asking you five central questions designed to focus on the details of your experiences regarding the effects of credential requirements of preschool teachers with a specific emphasis on B.A. degree requirements. The reason there is an emphasis on B.A. degree requirements is because my literature review for my dissertation revealed that a B.A. credential for preschool teachers is being required by more regulators and agencies."

Member Check: Survey Data Analysis
"Before I begin I would like to get your opinion if my general assessment of your survey is accurate. With consideration of your answers to the open-ended questions and your Likert scale answers which averaged ______. I concluded that you lean towards you having a (positive/negative) history of experiences concerning the topic of my research. Do you feel this is a fair summary?"

Survey Follow Up Question
“The first question that I would like to ask you is to fill in a hole I discovered while analyzing the surveys:”
“What are your hiring requirements regarding preschool teacher credentials and have your policies been effected by changes in regulatory requirements or accreditation policies?

Questions
The following questions will be asked in the order in which the conversation best leads, therefore providing a semi-scripted environment.
1) “What have been your experiences regarding recruitment and retention of staff with a B.A.?”

2) “What have been your experiences regarding the quality of staff with a B.A. and the quality of their college training?”

3) “How has your budget been affected regarding the recruitment and retention of staff with a B.A. degree?”

4) “What types of changes in your program do you associate with degree requirements of your preschool teachers?”

5) “Describe your experiences regarding the subject of sharing your thoughts on the topic of B.A. degree requirements of preschool teachers?”

Wrap Up
"Have you shared all that is significant with reverence to what you have experienced regarding B.A. degree requirements of preschool teachers?"

"Thank you so much for your time today."
Interview Guide: Focus Groups

Preliminary Discussion
"I will be asking you five central questions designed to focus on the MEANING of your experiences regarding the effects of credential requirements of preschool teachers."

Questions
The following questions will be asked in the order in which the conversation best leads, therefore providing a semi-scripted environment.

1) “In the individual interviews, budget constraints were strongly associated with teachers having bachelor’s degrees in early education. What does this mean to the early education industry?”

2) “There was a strong voice expressed in the individual interviews that teachers with bachelor’s degrees usually do not stay long in early education classrooms. The voice of the group expressed that when they leave it is typically to teach in the public schools or to go into early education administration. Applying your experiences, what does this situation indicate?”

3) “It was stated directly or indirectly by most directors in the individual interviews that there is a high level of satisfaction with teachers who have their CDA regarding the implementation of “best practices” and a low level of satisfaction with teachers who have their bachelor’s degree regarding the implementation of “best practices.” What this means to early education?”

4) “During the individual interviews I heard a loud voice that there is a high level of professionalism associated with teachers who have their bachelor’s degrees, especially in the area of communication. But, I also heard a loud voice regarding the lack of bachelor’s program’s ability to prepare the teachers to implement what they learned. How do the benefits of professionalism supported in good communication skills compare to graduates not being prepared and able to implement what they learned?”

5) Only 6.9% of the early education programs in Texas are accredited. As a director of an accredited program, you all represent the top programs in our area. How do your experiences translate to normative programs in Tarrant County?

Wrap Up
"Thank you so much for your time today."
Appendix G: Figures

Figure G1. Credentials of Directors

Figure G1. The directors were asked to report all of the credentials which they hold. The “Other” categories include the directors having some college credits as well as specific credentials not listed on the chart.
Figure G2. The directors were asked to report all of the credentials which their preschool teachers hold.
### Appendix H: Tables

#### Table H1: Survey Responses to Likert Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Likert Questions</th>
<th>Non-degreed Directors</th>
<th>Question Averages</th>
<th>Degreed Directors</th>
<th>Question Averages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4. Rate how you feel regarding the requirement of a bachelor’s degree for teachers in your program. Choosing the number 5 indicates that you support this requirement while choosing the number 1 shows the lowest support.</td>
<td>Bonnie: 2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Rate the difficulty it is or would be to comply with requiring your teachers to have a bachelor’s degree.</td>
<td>Grace: 1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Rate the satisfaction of the length of employment or tenure of teachers with CDA or equivalent.</td>
<td>KP: 5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Rate the satisfaction of the length of employment or tenure of teachers with associate’s degrees.</td>
<td>JT: 5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Rate the satisfaction of the length of employment or tenure of teachers with bachelor’s degrees.</td>
<td>Non-degreed Directors: 2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Rate the satisfaction of the length of employment or tenure of teachers with graduate degrees.</td>
<td>Non-degreed Directors: 1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Rate the level you feel your voice has been heard in the past on the subject of requiring early education teachers to have bachelor’s degrees.</td>
<td>Non-degreed Directors: 2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Response Averages</strong></td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table H2: Program Credential Requirements and Assistance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Program credential requirements of preschool teachers</th>
<th>Type of credential assistance offered by their program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bonnie</td>
<td>CDA</td>
<td>Tuition reimbursement for college or CDA; Company offers access to their on-line university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>High school diploma or GED</td>
<td>Education Assistance Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paige</td>
<td>A combination of credential, training, and experience is considered to meet NAEYC's accreditation requirements.</td>
<td>Offer free on-site CDA training every other year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tammy</td>
<td>CDA or 12 college hours in early childhood education or child development</td>
<td>Reimburse $100 per course in child development/early childhood education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gina</td>
<td>High school diploma or GED</td>
<td>Tuition reimbursement for college or CDA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lindsey</td>
<td>Lead teachers must work on obtaining their CDA</td>
<td>Tuition reimbursement for college or CDA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olivia</td>
<td>Associate's degree</td>
<td>Tuition reimbursement for college or CDA; Company offers access to their on-line university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petra</td>
<td>CDA</td>
<td>Tuition reimbursement for college or CDA; Company offers access to their on-line university</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The names in the black boxes represent non-degreed directors and the names in the white boxes represent degreed directors.