

THE NATURE OF GROUP TIME IN AN EARLY
CHILDHOOD CONSTRUCTIVIST
CURRICULUM

By

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PREFACE

The purpose of this study was to examine the nature of group time in an early childhood constructivist curriculum. Group time in a constructivist kindergarten classroom was observed in order to understand how children make sense of their world through daily life experiences. The method used in the study was hermeneutic phenomenology which included observations, audio taping and teacher interviews in order to document group time and its transitions. Seven themes emerged as part of this phenomenological study and included: *community, consideration for the individual child, content, chaos and conflict, consistency and continuity*. These themes revealed that group time in a constructivist curriculum is an essential and meaningful part of the daily life experience of the young child.

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Chapter I

Introduction

On a daily basis, children participate in many experiences within their early childhood programs. Some examples include: free play, outdoor play, lunch and snack time, and general interactions with each other and their teachers. An early childhood program is also where children first begin to participate in group time. Group time, or circle time, is the joining of students as a whole group (Sutherland, 1993) for the following planned (or possibly unplanned) purposes: singing songs; reading books; discussing daily activities; resolving conflicts and problems; addressing new problems or issues; content germane and pertinent to the daily/weekly theme or unit and sharing stories (McAfee, 1984). In reality, on a yearly basis children accumulate hours of their time experiencing this activity. Of interest, however, is the fact that most parents and even many educators and administrators fail to notice its significance with respect to the early childhood curriculum. Whereas much is written and spoken in regard to the free play component in the classroom, group time remains frequently overlooked in the educational community. Research and professional literature are lacking with respect to examining group time as an important, perhaps vital aspect within the curriculum. In particular, the literature is lacking, also, with regard to the role of group time in a constructivist classroom (one which promotes constructivist principles). Therefore, this study is intended to add and contribute to the existing knowledge of constructivist teaching and its

impact on group time within the classroom.

Decisions regarding curriculum should be based on theory and research (Katz, 1994). Constructivist theory was formulated by Jean Piaget, a genetic epistemologist. His work investigated children's construction of knowledge. This process, according to Piaget, occurs within the self and from interaction with the environment. From a constructivist perspective, the aims and purposes of group time should be based on the foundations of knowledge construction (Kamii, 1984). A quality group time experience for children can be tremendously successful for both long and short term learning, in the same way an inadequate group time can be detrimental or futile to curriculum goals.

Questions of the Study

An understanding of group time in a constructivist setting can be achieved by exploring its purposes and the roles of the teacher and child. Questions for study include: What is the nature of group time in a constructivist program? What do the students experience? Why? How is group time practiced before, during, and after the activity? Where do the children sit? Where does the teacher sit? How long is group time? Are the children active participants or merely listeners and observers? Is the teacher a leader, group member, or both? How are conflicts resolved during group time? Finally, what components of child development are being enhanced (i.e.: language, social/emotional, motor, cognitive skills)? These questions will be explored in order to better understand group time in the constructivist environment.

Statement of the Problem/Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the nature of group time within an early childhood constructivist curriculum, in which constructivism is defined as a child-centered educational approach for children in the classroom in contrast to traditional teacher-directed instruction (Zahorick, 1995, p.8, refer to "Chapter II-Constance Kamii" for the role of autonomy in a constructivist classroom). At the core of this definition is the word "child-centered". The heart of a child-centered curriculum focuses and emphasizes the child as opposed to the teacher, activities, materials being used or administrators who are involved. Child-centered education embraces the individual child -- interests, cultural background, personality, preferences, as well as his/her "specialness" and unique developmental milestones.

Definition of Terms

Constructivist teaching is based on the idea that children (indeed, all human beings) construct their own knowledge. Children do not reproduce the knowledge of others. Constructivist advocates believe that students in a constructivist curriculum become thinkers, problem-solvers, and self-directed individuals (Zahorick, 1995). The term *curriculum* in the history of education has many definitions. John Dewey (1916), defined curriculum as education existing to provide the teaching of communication as societies increase in complexity and resources. Other educational theorists defined curriculum as learning experiences planned and directed by the school in order to achieve educational goals (Tyler, 1949). This study will refer to the definition of curriculum as

the sense which children make of their schooling experiences (Castle, 1996). This child-centered definition, which focuses primarily on the experiences of each individual child, is both appropriate and applicable to constructivism. Foremost consideration is given to the sense and understanding which children make from their world. As such, the curriculum of group time in constructivist education will be studied. The research will focus on *early childhood education*: "early" referring to the "beginning", (in this case the beginning of childhood), "education" referring to gaining knowledge, learning, instruction, or teaching. In this case, we are referring to the education of children in the beginning of childhood: birth through eight years of age (NAEYC, 1987).

The primary aim in a constructivist classroom, according to Kamii (1982), is autonomy. *Autonomy* is defined as the ability to be a self-governing, or critical thinker. Referring to an "aim" and not a "goal" differentiates between the fact that an aim is defined in the Scribner-Bantam English Dictionary (1979) as an endeavor (to strive hard), whereas a goal has a target or an end. The opposite of autonomy is *heteronomy*: being governed by others due to the inability to think autonomously (Kamii, 1994). On the basis of autonomy, authors also use the words self-regulating and decentering. According to DeVries & Zan (1994), *self-regulating* is defined as the child's internal system of thought and action. *Decentering* is defined as the child's ability to become aware of other's perspectives. Children become decentered through cooperation. *Cooperation*, according to DeVries & Kohlberg (1987), is the reciprocity of an exchange which is intrinsically motivated and leads away from egocentrism. *Egocentrism* refers to viewing the world

from one point of view: his/her own (Piaget, 1965). In addition, the *socio-moral atmosphere* in a classroom is defined as all interactions which occur in the classroom. Thus, all activities, the physical environment, and areas of development, are rooted in these concepts.

The purpose of this study is to analyze group time and its activities. *Group time* is also known as circle time, meeting time, or story time. As previously stated, it is the joining of students as a whole group (Sutherland, 1993). At this time the children and teacher come together for the following purposes: greeting each other in the early morning; discussion of daily activities and/or new events (for example, a new dramatic play theme for the week); singing songs; reading stories and story extensions; sharing and discussing content germane and pertinent to the daily/weekly theme or unit; addressing or resolving a specific problem in the classroom (for example cleaning up the classroom or the treatment of books) and sharing stories from home. The length of group time considers the ages of the children. For example, younger children may sit for shorter periods of time as opposed to older children (McAfee, 1984). Therefore, two to three year old children may sit during group time for approximately ten to fifteen minutes; four to five year old children may participate in group time ten to twenty minutes and five to six years old children will sit for longer periods of approximately ten to thirty minutes (1984). *Transitions*, according to McAfee, are the influence of activities immediately preceding and following group time (or other activity times). *Phenomenology* will be the method used to study group time. Phenomenology, according to van Manen (1990), is the

science of phenomena. It is the study of *essence*; examining the nature or the meaning of something. *Hermeneutics (hermeneutic phenomenology)* is the interpretive description of the phenomena. *Human science*, as opposed to natural science, seeks meaning in the fields of humanities, philosophy, education or psychology.

Significance of the Study

Through observing, interpreting, and writing about the nature of group time in an early childhood constructivist classroom, the meaning of constructivist group time will be explored to provide a deeper understanding of this phenomena. A deeper understanding of constructivist group time will inform current practice, with the possibility of positive outcomes and results.

Chapter II

Review of the Literature

Elements and Background of Constructivist Teaching

Constructivist teaching evolved in recent years primarily as researchers gained a deeper, more knowledgeable understanding of how children learn and view their world and questioned the limitations of direct-teaching methods. Direct instructional methods are found in teacher-controlled environments. Children interact and socialize with each other less when the teacher dominates the interactions. Questions initiated by the teacher are inclined to be closed, one-answer inquiries which are responded to by the children with "correct" answers. In contrast, a constructivist program encourages mistakes/trial and error as an acceptable and appropriate learning method. In teacher-controlled settings, the teacher determines the goals, purposes, activities of the curriculum. Constructivist programs, on the other hand, invite the child to help create, contribute to and participate within that which we call the curriculum: areas of interest/experiences/discussions, etc. The characteristics of direct-teaching also include: readings, instruction, checking, practice, and review. Studies of direct-instruction curriculum were based mainly on the works of Stallings & Kaskowitz (1974), Good & Grouws (1979), and Hunter (1982) (Zahorick, 1995). Performance was based on standardized tests (Zahorick, 1995).

The limitations of such a curriculum, cited by all of the main constructivist authors involve the encouragement of heteronomy and the hindrance of autonomy. Heteronomy,

according to Kamii (1979), is governing from the outside; the opposite of autonomy. The goals of instruction in a heteronomous classroom are reproduction and repetition of ready-made facts, while fostering autonomy results in cognitive thinking, understanding, and creativity (Zahorick, 1995). Constructivist teaching aims to foster autonomy, individual thinking, and meaningful knowledge construction, according to Zahorick (1995); Each year there is a significant increase in the number of articles regarding constructivist theory and how it can be applied to meet the demanding need for school reform within our changing society. The research of such authors as Piaget (1926;1927;1932;1948; 1953;1960;1965;1967;1974;1977), DeVries (1986;1987;1991;1992;1994;1995), and Kamii (1978;1979;1980;1981;1982;1984;1985;1986;1989;1990;1991;1994), have tremendously contributed to the field. As pioneers, these authors and some educators as well, give us a clear understanding of constructivist teaching.

Jean Piaget

Piaget's contribution to the field of constructivist education encompasses his early works in the 1920's and 1930's (in addition to certain works put forth prior to these decades). The construction of knowledge begins with young children. Young children think and interact with their environment and are not blobs, blank slates, or senseless robots waiting for the adult to teach them. Young children are active; they reason, they interact with objects. Young children try to make sense of their world through thinking about relationships. Adaptation of knowledge is a process of assimilation and accommodation where equilibrium is achieved. Piaget defined assimilation as the bringing

in of new things in the mind in order to make sense of older things already existing. Accommodation works to change the existing structures for understanding. Both assimilation and accommodation work together to create equilibrium or balance, as opposed to disequilibrium as a state of confusion. The purpose of this process is to make sense of the world. Piaget also said that constructing knowledge occurred from two types of action: physical experiences (actions with objects achieve construction) and logico-mathematical experiences (actions with objects possessing traits they do not already have into the child's ideas of the objects). These actions evolve at the following levels: sensorimotor period (observing objects and their relationships to cause and effect); preoperational period that leads to concrete operations which develop from physical to logico-mathematical understanding; and the formal operational period which, according to Piaget, occurs as the development of logical deductions and knowledge increases.

In later works, Piaget explored the elements of knowledge construction in terms of interest and play. The role of interest and play are significant when the child is exposed to and given the opportunity to play and experiment with ideas or objects which interest him/her. The result is knowledge construction. "The constructivist view leads to educational methods for young children that include a large component of play" (DeVries & Kohlberg, 1987, p.28). In addition, Piaget's work in 1948 raised the elements of experimentation, erroneous answers, and conflicts as aspects of knowledge construction. Piaget also investigated moral and social issues and knowledge construction in his early research. This included the child's process from egocentrism to decentering through

cooperation. Piaget explored autonomy versus heteronomy and its influence on the child. He stated in 1932 that schools use verbal instruction methods as opposed to experimentation, an unfavorable method in a learning atmosphere. Social life among children and its impact on development was researched by Piaget in 1951/1963/1963. Social life includes issues such as rule-creating, pretend play, group games, conflicts, conflict resolutions, perspective-taking, and respect. Finally, in Piaget's later works, he concludes that the contribution of his theories and research to the field of education is that of "finding a method of teaching in accordance with 'constructivism' which is the fundamental principle of our interpretation of intellectual development." (p.vii). (all works on "Jean Piaget" section have been documented by: DeVries & Kohlberg, 1987).

Rheta DeVries

The research and writings of Rheta DeVries examine and expand Piaget's research and theories by viewing the manner in which his work impacts socio-moral development and constructivist curriculum in the classroom. DeVries's writings focus on implementing and applying research of constructivist theorists such as Piaget and Kamii for purposes of application to today's classrooms. For example, the first page of DeVries and Zan's book, Moral Classrooms, Moral Children (1994), states: "Readers of the first author's previous books will not be surprised to learn that our work on socio-moral atmosphere is grounded in the research and theory of Jean Piaget.....In this book we try to follow the direction indicated by Piaget (1954;1981) when he hypothesized parallel structures and functions for the child's construction of knowledge of the physical and social world" (p.1). DeVries

also conducted her own research in this field. For example, one kindergarten study (1991) compared the socio-moral atmosphere in three different approaches: direct-instruction, eclectic, and constructivist. The study found constructivist classrooms had higher levels of interpersonal understanding based on Selman's levels of interpersonal understanding. In addition, DeVries sees development as the aim of education. Therefore, her research (as cited above) explored the question: Does constructivist teaching accomplish developmental goals? Her research findings support that it does.

Constance Kamii

Kamii's work is based on the theories and research of Piaget. Kamii's research on mathematical knowledge construction has been significant to the constructivist curriculum. Her work in the 1980's has examined children's natural logic in mathematical knowledge. Many educators, she claims, teach children mathematics against their natural logic. For example, algorithms are taught to children despite the fact that often problems occur when algorithms run counter to children's thinking processes.

Kamii affirms in almost all of her writings that autonomy is the aim of education. She examines Piaget's distinctions between moral and intellectual autonomy in terms of mathematics (1981). "If a child says that $4+2=5$, the best reaction is to refrain from correcting him and ask him instead, 'How did you get 5?' Children often correct themselves autonomously as they try to explain their reasoning to someone else." (p.80).

In much of her work, Kamii discusses the way in which a constructivist curriculum can impact education. She firmly states that educators need to be educated with respect

to how children construct knowledge, and to apply these findings to curriculum change. Kamii (1994) argues that the education taught in classrooms today needs reform because educators lack this knowledge. Many educational goals are contradictory to the manner in which children learn, specifically the role of heteronomy in schools and the lack (or disappearance) of autonomy. Both DeVries and Kamii affirm that Piaget's theories need to expand to "real classrooms, real schools" (Kamii, 1979, p.31).

Aspects of Group Time

Group time has numerous purposes in an early childhood constructivist classroom. It is a gathering of the students and teacher for a period of time during the school day to enhance and promote the development of the whole child. As in any quality child-centered program, these areas of development include cognitive and socio-moral skills (Forman & Hill, 1984). In a constructivist group time, the socio-moral atmosphere promotes moral and intellectual development, two aims of constructivist theory (DeVries, et al., 1994). DeVries categorizes two objectives for group time which are sociomoral and cognitive goals. The sociomoral objectives aim to form cohesion and a sense of community and belonging among the group's members. Activities during group time aim to develop and increase the sociomoral objective. Examples which DeVries offers are the singing of group songs and working on a group project. Cognitive objectives aim to foster reasoning, intelligence and knowledge construction. Examples of activities which strengthen and develop these goals are: attention to features on a calendar, attendance taking and voting. In addition, DeVries states that the role of the teacher should include

proper planning of activities and being both a leader as well as group member. The content of group time involves issues of rule making, group discussions, voting, raising problems and solutions dealing with classroom difficulties, celebrations, and group projects. All objectives, activities, content and the manner in which group time is conducted facilitate and mirror the practice of constructivist theories.

Chapter III

Methodology

Participants

“An autonomous teacher can conceptualize his or her own objectives each day and each week on the basis of a scientific theory of how children acquire knowledge. An autonomous teacher can also plan appropriate activities from day to day, without depending on a workbook or a curriculum guide. In addition, an autonomous teacher can evaluate classroom activities on the basis of a scientific theory of how children acquire knowledge” (Kamii, 1985, p.3).

The researcher focused on locating a classroom whose teacher implements a constructivist curriculum. Identifying a constructivist classroom was based on the reputation of the teacher as suggested by early childhood professionals knowledgeable in the theory and practice of constructivism.

A half-day kindergarten class was ultimately selected, with children ranging from five to six years of age. Subjects included the children and a teacher who implemented constructivist practices. Neither the age, gender, socio-economic status or ethnicity of children were relevant to this study; the study is intended to develop an understanding of

how any and all subjects experience group time in an early childhood constructivist curriculum. In regard to the selection of this classroom, it should be pointed out that group time activities took place on a daily basis, and were quite important to the daily experiences of the children because much of their time was spent participating in group activities (there were three group times during a three hour morning).

The teacher and classroom were selected according to the criteria of constructivism. Among these criteria are: the promoting of autonomy in group time (as opposed to heteronomy); opportunities for children's choice and decision-making; activities developing problem-solving, critical thinking, reflecting; offering questions which were open-ended to foster these developmental goals; promoting a socio-moral atmosphere based on positive interaction among children and the teacher; creating an environment whereby knowledge construction was achieved through play; meeting the children's interests as a group as well as individually to promote learning and development; fostering the socio-moral atmosphere through a child-centered approach; facilitating the development of the whole child through group time activities and transitions.

Kindergarten Teacher

The classroom teacher, Stacey * holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in elementary education from a university located in a western state. Stacey also has earned credits from a local university and has participated in numerous workshops and seminars. In addition, she holds a degree certificate for early childhood education. Stacey has taught second grade and preschool and has raised four children of her own. She has taught kindergarten for six years and is very comfortable with the early childhood position she currently holds. She is a person with a calming voice; her style is direct, honest, sincere and approachable.

Setting

The public elementary school cited in this study is located in a small neighborhood a short distance from a local university, the city's largest employer. This midwestern city, sixty five miles from a large urban area of a mid-west state has six elementary schools housing grades K-5. In 1995 the population of the city was 37,640 (Chamber of Commerce, 1995). There are eighty kindergarten students in four sections enrolled in the public school with two kindergarten teachers. The school, erected in the early 1950's has a new wing for the kindergarten and first grade classrooms. There are approximately four hundred students enrolled in the school belonging to families who are in the medium to lower income bracket.

*All names have been changed for purposes of confidentiality.

Twenty-one teachers at the school hold either masters degrees or are currently enrolled students in masters programs at the local university. Approximately half of the students in the school are either from single parent or blended families. Families at the school are transitory. The school functions in the manner of a small community with teachers helping each other when needed. The principal, of seven years tenure, walks the hallways in the early morning greeting the children. Upon entering the building a person is readily greeted by children's art work which decorates the walls and hangs from the ceiling as one enters the building. Many teachers have their doors open contributing to the welcoming, congenial atmosphere.

The classroom is large, open and inviting. Children's art work is displayed on every wall available. There is a small table that greets the children as they enter containing the sign-in chart and other information. There is carpeting and many windows. There are areas for dramatic play, reading, art/language, manipulatives, blocks, sensory activities, a sink and refrigerator, cubbies, storage, water table, four tables and one smaller table, and a large area for group time consisting of space, a teacher's chair, record player, easel with books on it, tape player, television, videocassette player, records, and a large blackboard covered with the calendar, number charts, days of the week and other decorations. The classroom is connected to the neighboring kindergarten class by two bathrooms and a teacher's area shared by both teachers and one assistant. The schedule consisted of:

8:15-9:00	signing in and starting areas
9:00-9:10	group time

9:10-10:10	choice time
10:10-10:30	group time
10:30-10:45	snack
10:45-11:10	outside time
11:10-11:30	group time
11:30	home

It should be noted that there was flexibility with these time slots. For example, children often decided how long group time would be (long or short) because the environment offered autonomous experiences. There were three times during the morning session when the children participated together as a group. The doors of the classroom are always open.

Procedures

"Gaining entry into a possible site is an endeavor that must be well planned.....The keys to access any setting are in the hands of certain gatekeepers, or those who have the authority to allow one to enter their world" (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993, p.56). Selecting the location for the research study was based on the "gatekeeper" method, or referrals, from individuals who are knowledgeable in the geography of the state and city in question and who possess professional expertise in the area of early childhood constructivist teaching. Among these referral sources were: the researcher's advisor, professors from the Curriculum and Instruction Department, professor's referrals, local teachers, local administrators and colleagues or peers of the researcher.

The researcher then contacted the school district which provided consent for further communication with the teacher. The teacher was contacted by telephone and expressed her interest in participating. After a preliminary visit to the classroom, the teacher was asked to sign a consent form (see appendix B). Following her written consent, the teacher was asked to send consent forms to all of the children's parents or guardians for permission to participate in the research study (see appendix C). Parent/guardian consent forms were sent back to the teacher and subsequently to the researcher indicating their responses. The researcher did not include any information in the written results about any child whose parent did not permit participation. Any child or children not participating remained in the group and classroom at all times. Children who did not participate were not removed from any activities in the classroom. Response rate to the consent forms was one hundred percent. Twenty children were enrolled in the morning class, one guardian responded "no" and nineteen responded "yes" to allow their children's participation in the study.

Interviews of the teacher and close observations were recorded (through audio recordings and observation notes). Once all consent forms (teacher, parent/guardian) were returned, the research began with classroom observations.

Observations

The observations were conducted at the completion of the 1996 school year. Research was ongoing until pertinent questions of the study were answered. Observations were conducted daily for approximately one month. Flexibility with regard to length of

time was imperative because classroom schedules were flexible. Observations during group time were conducted in a nonparticipant capacity: taking notes, listening, and watching the children and teacher while the researcher sat in the front, off to the side of the group on the floor and facing the children and teacher. The researcher's observations ended when consistent repetition of results was evident and no new information was obtained.

Based on the research, observations focused on issues and examples of autonomy such as: child decision making, child choice, perspective taking, self-regulation, rule creating and voting. Other areas of focus included: the teacher's role in the group time; the role of the children; activities being implemented (how, why, where, when); transition activities and their influence on group time; comments, questions, and non-verbal cues of the teacher and children; external forces influencing the group such as administration, school activities, school electives outside the classroom (see Chapter I for specific study questions).

Observations were not limited to the classroom's (several) group times. Informal observations took place within a participatory role in the classroom during the entire morning including free-play time. The researcher gained a more meaningful understanding of rationale, activities, and the socio-moral atmosphere of the classroom which guided the group time study. The children became familiar and accustomed to the researcher's presence in the classroom activities.

Teacher Interviews

Three interviews between the researcher and the teacher were conducted for one session each week during the observation period (see appendix A for transcripts). The times arranged for the interview were determined by the teacher and her schedule. Interviews took place in the classroom during the transitional period between the two half-day classes. The interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed by the researcher. Notes were also taken by the researcher during interviews. The length of time for the interviews was approximately thirty to sixty minutes. In a phenomenological research study, the interview, according to van Manen (1990), is a conversation which ends when there is a silence or a long pause in the discussion. This is a sign of reflection; in other words, the interview stops when nothing more can be gained or no new information is being revealed. Repetition of topics was another indication of when the interview should end. In addition, questions and discussion of issues during the interview provided for deep reflection. The researcher and teacher were considered to be co-investigators or collaborators during the interviews.

Data Analysis

Hermeneutic Phenomenology

The study was conducted and analyzed from a hermeneutic phenomenological human science approach. The purpose of the study reflects this method: to study the nature of group time in an early childhood constructivist curriculum. Observations and interpretations of the essence of this real-life phenomena enabled a deeper, richer

understanding of this event. It is a qualitative, interpretive, narrative approach to research. According to van Manen (1994), phenomenology is a journey of why and an exploration of specific interest into daily life. For children, the classroom experience is their daily life and for the researcher and reader comprehending a point of interest requires living that experience through their eyes.

Naturalistic inquiry was the form of inquiry. In addition to interviews and observations, the writing is a research process in and of itself. "...human science research is a form of writing." (van Manen, 1990, p.111). The form of writing is anecdotal or "story style" - a narrative form of writing as well as a qualitative style. It is a "methodological device in human science to make comprehensible some notion that easily eludes us" (p.116). The purpose of using anecdotal writing is to reveal the humanistic side of the phenomena. Anecdotes serve to allow the reader to reflect, become personally intrigued by the story, transform the reader on an intimate level, capture the reader's attention, and interpret the nature of an event through written language or poetry.

Thematic Analysis

Another method used in textual writing phenomenological research is the use of themes. According to van Manen, the purpose of identifying themes in writing is to focus the researcher. Themes are woven through a study as a process. They help the researcher and guide his/her way to explore deeper meaning. Themes are selected through seeking significant phrases from the text as a whole and/or phrases or sentences observed in relation to the phenomena which reveal a theme. "The research plan may be able to offer

a tentative discussion of the themes that are emerging on the basis of the preliminary work" (van Manen, p.161). The preliminary work developed issues based on an examination of research and review of the literature which included but were not limited to: autonomy, socio-moral atmosphere, socio-moral development and respect. Other broader issues were: the constructivist teacher's role in group time, the child's perspective of group time, group time and its place in a constructivist curriculum, and transitions to and from group time in a constructivist curriculum.

Uncovering thematic aspects involved three approaches suggested by van Manen which are as follows: 1) The wholistic reading approach, in which the text as a whole was used to isolate a theme. This method addresses itself to reading the materials gathered from observations and formulating a phrase to understand further meaning. 2) The selective or highlighting approach. This method concerns itself with the process of reading the text and isolating essential phrases which reveal significant aspects of the experience. 3) The detailed, line-by-line approach. This approach separates individual sentences which may be pertinent to understanding the phenomenon.

Observation notes specified the details of children's interactions with each other and the teacher; non-verbal cues used by either the children or teacher; quotations of the children or teacher; personal impressions of experiences taking place such as moods, expressions and activities; and materials used for group time and transitions. The themes also emerged from a thorough examination of teacher interviews. The transcribed document was scanned numerous times, carefully for each word, question, and responses. The three approaches mentioned above were also applied to the teacher interviews in

order to attempt to connect the teacher's vision of group time to the observation transcripts. van Manen (1990) states: "Once transcript themes have been identified by the researcher then these themes may become objects of reflection in follow-up hermeneutic conversations" (p.99). In addition, he continues: "In determining the universal or essential quality of a theme our concern is to discover aspects or qualities that make a phenomenon what it is and without which the phenomenon could not be what it is" (1990, p.107).

The researcher as outlined later in this chapter (p.29) identified seven themes which emerged from this process. These were essential themes, as opposed to incidental themes, raising the following questions: "Does the phenomenon without this theme lose its fundamental meaning?" (van Manen, 1990, p.107) Another question raised by van Manen is: "Is this phenomenon still the same if we imaginatively change or delete this theme from the phenomenon?" (1990, 107) Essential themes, in combination with each other, create the essence of group time in an early childhood constructivist curriculum. If one theme were to be taken away, the "puzzle" would be incomplete. This researcher selected these themes based on her observations and notes. It would be a valid assumption that a researcher other than this one may select other themes based on his/her observations.

"In selecting anecdotes one wants to be careful to include only material that illustrates or highlights a theme" (van Manen, 1990, p.170). A combination of other approaches to writing will be used in addition to anecdotes and stories. Analytical writing, for example, uses in-depth interviews to create anecdotes which include a theme. Exegetical writing may be used to describe other authors works in the field being studied,

for example, Piaget, Kamii, and DeVries. Text descriptions were strong, oriented (to life and the world), rich and deep in capturing the phenomena.

With human beings, phenomenology is most appropriate in capturing the essence of a natural setting, i.e., inquiring about a unique classroom family activity - group time. The researcher did not intend to prove, problem-solve or hypothesize, but rather to convey the experience and record it so others may gain a deeper understanding.

Confidentiality

Materials were secured and confidentiality maintained. All audio recordings and written observation notes created during the observations and interviews were secured by the researcher in a locked area when not being used. School, teacher and children are not identified by name in the notes or written results. Fictitious names were used to replace real names. The audio recordings were only accessible to the researcher. Upon approval of the thesis, the materials will be erased and destroyed.

Time Schedule

The completion deadline for this research will be December, 1996. Selecting and observing the subjects began after IRB approval on March 27, 1996 and ended on May 20, 1996.

Chapter IV

Findings

"A good teacher realizes that the student's experience of the lesson determines the ultimate significance of what is being learned" (van Manen, 1991, p.188).

The following group time anecdote exemplifies life in the kindergarten classroom and offers examples of group time in a constructivist setting.

Group Time Anecdotes

In Stacey's classroom on May 7, 1996, the second group time of the day began at 10:35 a.m. Some children sang songs on the carpet while others were still cleaning from choice time activities. The children had become accustomed to Stacey commenting during clean-up transition times: "When you think the room is clean, and there's nothing more to clean up you can join us on the carpet." Today was no exception. The shaping of the clean-up activity is an example of constructivism because it encouraged a tone and spirit of cooperation within the group. Self-regulation existed because the children, (not the teacher) were empowered to make the decision regarding the cleanliness of the room; they claimed ownership to decisions and results.

DeVries and Zan (1994) make several points with regard to constructivist aspects of group time. With respect to seating arrangements the authors state: ".....allowing

children to decide where they want to sit is a reasonable long-term goal” (p.109). Stacey’s classroom mirrored this constructivist goal. On a consistent basis children could be seen making choices regarding when and where they sat. This environment encouraged children to become thinking, selective individuals, as well as strengthening the cohesiveness and harmony within the group. In addition, DeVries and Zan state that the length of group time “depends on children’s interest and ability to focus” which indicates a need for sensitivity to the individual children in the group (p.109). Reflecting this important awareness, the second group time on May 7, 1996 was conducted for twenty-five minutes. Stacey’s flexibility and insight recognized that the children’s needs required a somewhat shorter group time experience. Her focus, on a daily basis, remained on the individual needs of the children.

An unplanned group time arose when the classroom’s magic markers dried out. The consequences of leaving caps off magic markers was brought to the group’s attention and discussed. The children and teacher problem-solved through this discussion. The children realized that the dried-out markers needed to be discarded and they would soon be left with the remaining crayons and colored pencils in the classroom. The children reminded each other of their classroom responsibilities, one of them being the maintenance and care of classroom equipment and materials. Stacey then raised the following hypothetical question: “If Brian walks by a table he is not playing at and sees an opened cap, should he go over to the table and put the cap on the marker even if it’s not at his table?” The children replied that Brian should put the cap on the marker because he is part of the classroom and they need to take care of all of the toys in the classroom.

“Activities that are particularly constructivist include rule making and democratic decision making, voting, and social and moral discussion. In addition, constructivist group time includes group problem solving and planning field trips and other activities” (DeVries, et. al., 1994, p. 114). The magic marker dilemma was an example of problem-solving in a constructivist group time setting. The children were allowed the opportunity to provide each other with suggestions about solving the problem of the dried-out markers as well as the broader need for the overall care of materials in the classroom. A significant difference within this environment as opposed to a teacher-directed group time would be the use of the self-regulating, problem-solving approach. Also, the teacher conducted herself in a leadership role in this example, which is appropriate during a constructivist group time activity. She welcomed and encouraged the unplanned discussion as an equal group member.

Following the discussion concerning the magic markers, the children participated in a memory activity of the songs they sang throughout the year which represented the months in school. For example, “Apples and Bananas” was sung during the month of September. Children sang along with a tape and gave suggestions for the parent presentation they were preparing. This example is again in-step with the constructivist educators. The children were active participants in planning a special event, which lent itself to becoming an interesting group time topic. Some children at this time became restless and Stacey offered them the choice of either leaving the group or continuing to sing the songs. All of the children chose to stay. After the last song was sung, Stacey requested volunteers to continue cleaning the block area, left from choice time, before

going outside. Four children volunteered to clean up (although they had not played in the block area) as the thirteen remaining children sang and held hands to the playground. Prior use of the materials was not a prerequisite to clean up, as is often the case in non-constructivist classrooms. This demonstrates that the constructivist atmosphere contributed to the children's participation and their desire to enjoy the clean up activity.

Themes: The Seven C's

The following themes, termed by the researcher as "The Seven C's", emerged during classroom observations and teacher interviews. As described in Chapter III - Methodology, the method used for analyzing this data was hermeneutic phenomenology and thematic analysis. They are:

consideration for the individual child

community

content

continuity and consistency

chaos and conflict

- Teacher quotations are noted in italic type. See appendix A for transcripts of teacher interviews.

Consideration for the individual child

A typical morning group time contained twenty children gathered together for the day's activities. Lindsay spent some time retrieving water from the back sink as Paul quietly left to use the bathroom. Stacey did not call attention to their short absence by

requesting or requiring them to stay and/or be seated for the entire twenty minutes of group. As always, Scott sat in the back, alone, but not lonely, and Megan was sitting front and center.

These were the children in Stacey's class. They were all different and unique; their special behaviors and actions intertwined with the group. The majority of the teacher's responses during the interviews, were consistently in step with a constructivist approach, focusing primarily on each child.

As Megan took her turn during the transition of leaving group, Stacey whispered to her that she had done a great job listening at group and said she realized how hard it was sometimes for her to do that. Megan smiled, nodded, identified the number set on the die and left for free play.

May 1, 1996 - Day two: The class used sign language to sing their weekly "starting song". Kurt chose instead to sing "Zippidy Do Da" with his voice. As the song ended Stacey said: "This way is Kurt's favorite way," and the class used their voices to sing the song. Kurt beamed and sang very loudly.

"As the year goes by we get to learn the personality of the kids, then you start to redefine how you're gonna react to it.....and so that gives me some information about where that source of behavior comes from..."

For Stacey, every question concerning content, curriculum, or activities centered on the

children in that class. What was appropriate for child A may not have been appropriate for child B.

"Every level can be acknowledged and accepted and celebrated.....to celebrate the individual child."

May 2, 1996 - Day three: At group Stacey informs the children that a child has complained because he did not have enough time yesterday to play at choice time. As a result, on that day they will have forty-five minutes of choice time (free play). The children applauded and whispered.

May 9, 1996 - Day ten: Scott joined group time late and had recently experienced a death in his family. As the children moved from the group time activity to a large circle for transition, Stacey whispered to Scott as he came to sit by her. She asked if he wanted to share with his friends the death in his family. He replied no. Without a word Stacey wrapped her arm around Scott and continued with the next group activity. That day Stacey had this to say in interview #2:

"I would like for the children to be able to be in group, to be a part of the group and whatever the activity, leave group feeling good about themselves.....Scott is coming from a funeral so I had him sit by me and touch me: "How are you doing?" to acknowledge that he may be going

through a rough time. So he can leave group going into play day and saying, "Huh (Stacey sighs), I had my touch for the day and I'm okay and this is a caring school, there are people who care about me."

With respect to activities and group structure, Stacey chose transitions that gave her "information about that individual child." For example, using dice to problem solve numerical sets told her how each child had arrived at an answer, what he/she was thinking and how that child problem-solved. Stacey used the form or structure of a large circle at times to allow them the opportunity for "their own space as an individual so we're not all clumped together" and she would use it to call individual names.

Community

Group time in Stacey's classroom illustrated not only the individual's needs but the group as a community, as one. The community not only included the children working and sharing as a family, but also on ways in which the home and teacher interact to form its strength. For example, once per week Kristi's mother joined group time with Kristi's younger sibling. Also, children brought items from home that were relevant to the topic they were studying and shared it during group time. It was a time to state the rules for using the item brought from home and provide the opportunity to share it with others in the sharing box.

Stacey shared her own family with the students as well. Her children participated in class field trips and occasionally visited the children in the classroom. Stacey shared

with her students stories of her family as they shared stories of theirs. They also discussed other classrooms and experienced how they were a part of a larger community within the school. For example, Stacey pointed out to the children that a tear in one of the books she was reading to the class during group time belonged to another teacher and the owner may be upset that her book has been torn. Another day, Stacey discussed the concern the afternoon class had regarding paints being mixed together. There was a connection they had with other students who use and share that room.

The most meaningful relationship the kindergartners formed was with their reading partners of the fifth grade. On the final day of the reading group the children sang to their partners during group time, shared cards they decorated, and walked to outside play holding their hands.

The physical education teacher was also a part of their larger community. Mr. Hamilton visited the classroom during group time to say goodbye to the children at the end of the school year. The children formed a large circle around him and sang a goodbye song. Each child then whispered "good words" in his ear (either what they enjoyed about physical education or what they liked about him). They then hugged him or shook his hand and left the circle for choice time. As a family they united together as well as individually to say goodbye to a group member.

The children used group time as an opportunity to form bonds and friendships in the classroom. They hugged at the carpet, organized weekend birthday parties and held hands.

May 2, 1996 - Day Three: The loud arguing at group time initiated an idea from Kurt. He suggested a class hug was in order to resolve the conflicts. So the children did just that. They raised their hands up in the air and found a hand they could hold and when they were finished Kurt was praised by Stacey for having a "neat idea."

"...and when I can say we need a class hug they can generally rise to the occasion independently of me and it makes me feel real good to see that we've achieved some sense of community in this classroom."

Consequently, Debra was allowed to share with her classmates the news that a foal had been born at her farm the night before. She showed a video her father took of the new arrival and the children asked her dozens of questions and commented to each other about what they were watching and their own personal knowledge about horses.

May 8, 1996 - Day nine: The most meaningful sense of community I observed was during this group time as the children sang old songs from the beginning of the year in preparation for a class presentation. As they held hands and sang, the children beamed and looked at each other smiling with a tremendous feeling of love and friendship within the group. But it was Stacey whom I noticed when they sang "Peace Like a River"; Stacey had goose bumps on her arms and tears in her eyes.

May 9, 1996 - Day Ten: As the children sat on the carpet at nine o'clock in the morning,

there was an abundance of stories and discussions they had to share with each other. Stacey noticed the meaningful conversations and instructed the children to freely take the time and share their stories and conversations with each other until the timer stopped. And so, small groups of two or three formed as Paul spoke with Scott and Megan spoke with Debra. Some children and Stacey volunteered to listen to Daniel who claimed he had no one to speak with. When the timer rang, Debra and Elyssa hugged each other, smiled, and turned forward.

"I will always have a beginning group time where we can come together at the very beginning of the day and just kind of AHHH, (sighs) here we are, what are we gonna do today, how are we gonna do it. I will always have a part of my day where we come together for a story and sharing something...."

Content

"...there's no specific math time or language time or science time...it's just what concepts are we working on, what concepts could be used during this transition time....."

Content in this instance is a term for understanding the cognitive objective of group time.

The vehicle of constructivist teaching brings conceptual learning through daily life

experiences, which translates into academics. Group time cognitive objectives include the development of reasoning and intelligence and the promotion of knowledge construction in both logico-mathematical knowledge and physical knowledge (DeVries, et. al., 1994).

Also, group time promotes and facilitates language development and emerging literacy. Specifically, for example, understanding and constructing numerical knowledge occurred by means of unique calendar activities. The children counted the days they were in school by creating patterns (e.g.: the children wearing sandals would count the first row and children wearing shoes would count the second row of numbers). Songs and fingerplays with numbers and the days of the week were sung. With respect to mathematics, children learned graph reading from the sign-in sheet (which decided what story would be read that day). When they voted by raised hands, votes were counted also increasing mathematical knowledge. Children used large dice to count numbers, numerical sets, and addition as they explained how they got their answer to the others.

Prediction and estimation was a method used to enhance such skill as mathematics and language. For example, children used the sign-in sheet that asked, "Have you been to the zoo?" in order to predict what will happen if this question was asked after they went to the zoo (Stacey asked the children: "How many children will answer yes if we asked this same question after we visit the zoo?"). Other predictions included reading Bill Martin's book Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See? This book was also used to compare with Martin's Polar Bear, Polar Bear, What Do You Hear? The children used attendance to predict and estimate how much snack was needed for each person that day. They used math skills to estimate how many days were left to go on the zoo trip or how

many days were left of school.

Vocabulary expansion and language development were frequent during group time. Role playing stories the children wrote were acted out during group time. Language activities included sentence formations such as: "What do fifth graders need to know before leaving school?" and "I want to bring _____ for lunch to the zoo." The former question was used to read to the fifth grade reading partners as they graduated. Books were consistently read and children actively participated in an audio tape of an ABC big book. Children learned the word "estimate" when guessing how many letters were in their full names. Story pictures from the art table were shown by children who wished to show the class their special work. When observing the front cover of Here Comes Hungry Albert children contemplated if it would be a real or pretend story about monkeys. They then analyzed the letters on each page, as they had been doing with other ABC books that week. Active participation took place in letter recognition when trying to identify their special page for the first letter of their names. Picture books were used not only to increase vocabulary and language proficiency, but predictions and math skills were combined in these activities as well. For example, a teacher-made big book entitled A Bear Followed Me Home gave the children opportunities to learn the days of the week, predictable words, and number sets. There was also a pattern of the number of bears increasing by one bear each day of the week but was not pointed out by the teacher. But it was Megan who pointed out from the book to Katy, "See, I told you Baby was spelled B.A.B.Y."

On *May 15, 1996, Day Sixteen*, the children marched around letters during group

time to play an ABC game. When the tape stopped the children froze and called out the letter they were standing on. The calendar, attendance, book readings, songs, etc., all part of the group time routine, are examples of constructivist activities because children were given opportunities to select and vote on the books they read and the pattern they used to count the days of the month, rather than being assigned by the teacher.

Consistency and Continuity

"One, Two, Three, Four, automatic nerd," the children chanted, in an unplanned manner, almost daily as they waited for other children and Stacey to join them on the carpet. Laughter and giggles erupted when they would point to each other, chant, and count this rhyme. (It should be noted that for the children there were no negative connotations in singing the song; it seemed to become a familiar game for the children and part of the custom of group time). It is through the daily routine of coming together and sharing their knowledge and character that children developed the sense of consistency and continuity in the classroom.

"Starting songs are something I started last year as a 'how do I start my day in a consistent way.' "

American Sign Language (A.S.L.) was used by the children to communicate non-verbally. It was a consistent use of language for the teacher and the children during group time for songs and answering questions. It also brought a sense of continuity between home and

school, because the children became empowered to teach this to their families.

"Because it happens everyday it's part of the routine. The length varies, the type varies, but some point of the day we're always together, we're always gonna come together, so...it's a big factor."

Chaos and Conflict

Some days group time was tense and had an air of anger. Children argued and did not seem to listen to each other. On those days Stacey took the time to discuss with the children the problems and issues presented, and contemplate choices (as in the example above to form a class hug). Some days when conflict involved only two children, the children in question were given the opportunity to leave the room and talk privately in an effort toward resolving their conflict. Sometimes Stacey helped them resolve the conflict when adult intervention became apparent. On other days, children autonomously returned to the group when their issue was resolved.

"During group time I'm constantly having to make a judgment decision and do I acknowledge that Katy touched Kurt's back or do I let it go this time? Where does this fit into the big picture of the day?"

There were days when chaos prevailed and group time was shorter. Potential chaos was

prevented when Stacey suffered from laryngitis and informed the group of her illness during group time through sign language. On another occasion, when Kurt and Megan physically were hurting each other during group time they needed to be "watchers" for a few minutes until they were ready (and they decided when they were ready, not Stacey) to rejoin the group.

It was Stacey's calm, controlled voice and manner that guided her way during tense moments of group time, (for instance, when Brian became disruptive with his words and needed help leaving the group). Stacey also discovered new ways for empowering children like Brian who needed to release anger in positive ways:

".....without the anger that has nothing to do with school but life in general. So that gives me an...an intriguement, and with kids I'm really intrigued, on my good, good days it's the intriguement, it's the sheer wonder, it is the sheer wonder."

Chapter V

Discussions and Conclusions

Implications For Constructivist Teaching

This study originated by posing several questions which the research can now address. The first question asked: What is the nature of group time in an early childhood constructivist curriculum and what is the students' experience in this setting? The finding was that children in this environment were motivated to discovery and exploration. This was an outcome of an environment which respected individuality, freedom of expression, and the right to make mistakes within a constructivist group time experience. Secondly, the question was raised: How is group time practiced before, during, and after the activity? The finding in this study was that children in a constructivist group time activity participated in a program rich in peer interaction, responsibility, and respect within all the other daily interactions. For example, there was flexibility and choice in regard to where the children sat and the length of group time. In the former, the children were encouraged to choose where to sit, in the latter, group time varied from five to forty minutes depending on child-interest. Children were consistently offered opportunities as active participants, listeners and observers. As a result, by the end of the year, conflicts between children were being resolved autonomously through their own problem-solving skills. Another question posed by the study also included: What components of child development are being enhanced (i.e.: language, social and emotional, motor, cognitive skills)? The finding to this question lies in the continual attention given to the individual

developmental needs of the children within a group setting. All areas of development were recognized in a constructivist setting which addressed these needs through discussions, reading literature, voting in a safe and secure environment, etc. This environment emphasized ownership of the classroom and responsibility for one another, the group and the classroom materials. Socially, communication was very important during group time. Children were encouraged to communicate their feelings, whether anger, sadness or joy. The implication of the study is that this strengthens the acquisition of social skills and fosters the development of self-esteem. Also, children were productive in this setting and became successful learners because activities in group time were interesting and joyful to them.

From the teacher and his/her perspective, this study reveals the nature, meaning and essence of group time not only as an activity unto itself, but as it is woven into the various activities throughout the child's daily experiences. A teacher may be interested in reading that group time is not only a tool for implementing content curriculum (such as calendar, days of the week and singing songs), but also exists to provide children with opportunities for conflict resolution, enhancement of positive social experiences between each other and the teacher, and occasions to reveal information and ideas about the individual child within a community-like atmosphere. Furthermore, for some educators this study may help to dispel the longstanding myth that views a constructivist, child-centered curriculum to be equated with a "permissive", poorly managed classroom environment where minimal "learning" takes place. Instead, this study may demonstrate and illuminate the appropriateness of a constructivist teacher and approach: one with

compassion and respect for the individual group members, subsequently leading to a well-managed, vibrant classroom. Teachers who previously held misconceptions about constructivist teachers/classrooms may become more enlightened as a result of these findings.

Another result of a constructivist group time is the fostering of learning, experimentation, and development. Children in this atmosphere were not intimidated when they made mistakes or questioned things in order to understand their world. The children in Stacey's classroom resolved conflicts autonomously during group time as opposed to using physical responses. Not only did children learn about each other in these situations but self-knowledge and self-understanding was evident during conflicts and problem-solving issues. Therefore constructivist teaching is a long-term process of developing moral reasoning and commitment to a larger group.

This study asks the reader to embrace an openness in accepting the world through a child's perspective. This requires adult flexibility and understanding. In Stacey's classroom, we see this in action -- and children's feelings of ownership for the classroom will always be her goal. The "love of having kids interact and talk and discuss and actually hear them problem solving out loud.....when it's done in a constructive way" was achieved through group time discussions and the decentering process.

The awareness and recognition with respect to the timing for the constructivist teacher's leadership role during group time (and that, in fact, it is appropriate to do so at times, as put forth by DeVries, 1994), was carried out by Stacey in the classroom. This does not define the teacher as being heteronomous, especially when the teacher allows for

so many opportunities for autonomy in group time. Instead, it defines the teacher as one who knows when to relinquish control and when, as a member of the group, to be the leader.

Some examples of child-centered leadership include: allowing a child to choose who is the "line leader" or the "caboose" that day, or empowering the children by transforming the dramatic play area into group time, or placing the calendar and all of the charts and tools used to conduct group in that area. A teacher such as Stacey who, in her words, is "real aware of looking for those moments I can turn it back to them...looking for and listening for the teachable moment" demonstrates the effectiveness of this philosophy and approach, as well as its potential. This philosophy, based on constructivism, where children are "not raising their hands, there's no real rigid....everything I try to do is based on a reason or respect" is reflected in Stacey's classroom experiences with the children.

Another significant aspect to Stacey's classroom is the focus on active listening. In her words, it is "...that moment in time when I was receptive, it comes back to me, I was receptive to hearing, to be listening to the kids, trying out something and it worked and you could see the magic of it working." The mutuality of listening and respect emanates and glows between the children and Stacey. These, then, are the implications for creating a successful group time. A productive and stimulating group time does not occur "magically" – by chance. It occurs through skilled and experienced facilitation with primary features of quality listening, observing, and understanding the daily changes of the individual child. Thus, there can be no "checklist" or quantitative assessment instrument in a constructive classroom which guides this daily occurrence. Rather, it is a skilled

“sense”, a well-developed set of instincts and expertise in this realm, in the same way that an early childhood curriculum is based on the sense which the child makes from his or her experience, which is the fundamental ingredient for the recipe. Not only are children experiencing new meanings and understandings of their own lives and personal experiences, but, as a member of the group, the teacher joins with them to explore and appreciate the unfolding of the beauty of the world before them.

Recommendations

Implications and conclusions for the field of constructivist teaching have been drawn from the seven themes. Indeed, the foundations of constructivist theory are the fundamentals of daily practice in Stacey's classroom. Interestingly, Stacey never referred to herself as a constructivist teacher. She prefers to remain unlabeled because Stacey "fights labels....because a label is only for that moment in time" and she chooses to keep her "passion and belief system" absent of a written, packaged philosophy because it is instinct, feeling and the sense of the experience. Therefore, this researcher concludes that you need to follow your instinct and you must be brave (because you are non-conventional) as a teacher in a constructivist environment.

Reflecting on possibilities for further research in this field, one can diverge into many areas. Other constructivist classrooms may be observed and examined during group time situations in order to discover themes not revealed in this study. Do other constructivist classrooms share common or similar themes? This question could create an interesting follow-up study in order to distinguish the findings in this study from other curriculum in the field of constructivist teaching. Furthermore, although research has

analyzed autonomous teachers and autonomous classrooms, studies which specifically examine autonomy during group time are sparse. Other areas for future study may explore an investigation of free play (choice time) in a constructivist curriculum. More specifically, some components of free play, such as water/sand, outside time, or art activities are other possibilities for deeper examination. What I have found, also, in my study is that a focus on group time has highlighted and underscored that group time certainly is not merely a separate, isolated moment in a classroom's day. Rather, it is an accumulation of the day's experiences, including its conflicts, problems, dilemmas, etc. Therefore, in order to capture the complete essence of group time, it is important for the researcher to observe and/or participate in other experiences within all daily classroom activities. What is of significant advantage, however, is that isolating a daily event such as group time provides the opportunity for in-depth analysis of that particular classroom happening. Studying this daily event in a child's classroom activities can be of tremendous value because it contributes to the wealth of information and insights pertinent to the research findings. Finally, I would like to point out that constructivism in today's educational sphere has yet to find its place. Unfortunately, (and this would make another interesting study), constructivist teaching is generally considered a non-conventional approach. Yet, teachers like Stacey, convey best to us the rich rewards which can await us, when she says:

"I get goose bumps when I think of these little kids and their angelic voices singing when we did Martin Luther King, teaching peace in sign language. It just adds a whole new dimension."

As I conclude this study, I find it appropriate to express my hope that I may always continue to get "good goose bumps" and add new dimensions through experiences with children.

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APPENDIX A

Stacey's Interviews

Interview #1

May 2, 1996

Tell me about your educational background.

I went to school in El Paso, Texas, I went to school in Colorado and that's where I graduated with a B.A. and that's as far as I've ever gotten and when I came to (school's name) I went back and picked up the hours so I have eighteen hours above and beyond but I don't have a Master's degree and it's all in Elementary Ed. I've done lots of workshops, I've done lots of seminars, I've done lots of whatever, but I've plugged in specifically to early childhood and what has happened as far as a degree plan, is I've got a degree certificate that will only be good in (state) for early childhood and that was because when I was hired I was kind of hired under a grandfather's clause that said thirty days that's already in the system is not in early childhood and that was to protect the people already in the system. If you'd have entered kindergarten now or first grade you'd have to have (is it first grade too?). I know if you do kindergarten you'd have to have early childhood. So my certificate it's just a certificate it's not a degree.

OK, so, it's different in every state.

Yeah, if you're hired after a certain number of years you'd have to have that in place for instance, Karen, my assistant, I think hers is Elementary so she could not teach kindergarten.

So, you were telling me that when you were working you did preschool for most of the time before this Kindergarten.

Well, no I graduated with a B.A. to teach and I taught in more second grade for a year, two years, husband got transferred, moved, everything changed, I, you know, did the family, did the kids, and all of that, and I didn't teach all of that time. Then I had to get back in the work force when I did go back in the work force I did preschool but mainly because it was real supportive for being a parent, and being a mom and my kids I could do that and manage what I wanted to do. So that's one reason I got back into the preschool setting. Then, got divorced, needed to change my financial situation, so I know I needed to get back in the system. Preschool is minimum wage, there's no benefits, there's no nothing, so I needed to plug into the system. So I came back kind of dragging my feet but I had to do it.

And that's how you wound up here, was this the first of school in the public....

In (city's name). I taught in more second grade for two or three years.

And then you wanted to go back to the kindergarten, you were telling me that when you were interviewed here by the committee or whoever interviewed you that you had preferred the kindergarten grades and then how many years have you been here?

This is my sixth or seventh year. Six years because the Principal has also been here around seven years. Yeah. Okay, I've been here six and Mr. Brown was here before that.

Okay, specifically about group time, in the beginning with this group versus now because it's at the end of the year, what's the difference from when you first started with them and now?

Length. At the very beginning of the year, group time's were very, very short, very, very minimal. There was much more time was invested in how we are going to do group time, what is it gonna look like, the rules of group time. In really following through with those on a consistent basis, never starting group time until we were settled and quiet. It was more formal at the very beginning, the kids are too, they're apprehensive, they're not real secure with themselves and with everything else, so if you were to come in at the very beginning of the school year it would be me predominantly in a leadership role but just because it's all new for them some of my kids have never had preschool experience. So even getting little ones, just getting to a carpet and making a transition that is a stage in itself that I had to acknowledge.

How did that change, the transition time from the beginning of the year to now how is that different?

They're very independent now.

It's gradual...

Right. It's an ownership for their room, there's a rhyme and a reason. A lot of our time at the beginning of the year is learning about where we put things, how we take care of things, what would it look like for pick up, what happens if we don't. It's all kind of those class discussions that you go through over and over and over again, whereas now, there's, again, more of an ownership, more of an independence. You know, I had a staff meeting this morning and when I came in at eight-thirty-five/eight-forty, the kids had already come in maybe about ten minutes independently on their own. They know the routine. They come in and find their starting area where by the end of the week they knew where their starting areas were. They're much more capable, they're a year older, so just growth in itself allows for a lot of changes. At the same time as the teacher I don't have an expectation of where we should be, I don't have an expectation of what the changes should have to be, there's no checklist; okay, group time is five minutes and in August eight minutes and in January twenty minutes. I don't have that, it's just kind of "where is

this group of kids", how are we, where has the growth been, has there been any growth, so it's more of an observation in mapping that out and group time's are more, each group time has a different purpose, my morning group time is really just kind of bring us together like the last two days we haven't counted, I really haven't paid a lot of attention to the calendar, that's because it's not that important we've done it over and over and over again.....

At the beginning of the year was it?

Oh yes, we did our schedule, we did the days of the week, yeah, and now it's kind of like, you know, it's depending on what I need to get done, depending where the pull outs are, I'm much more comfortable letting go of something. Now, they themselves say we need to count the number of days to the zoo, that was important to them, so I'll do that. Nobody, if you noticed said, what's that number hiding under (remember the new May calendar), nobody mentioned it

yep.

It wasn't that important to them and it's not that important to me because I had a hundred and one things that we needed to.....

So would you have said that in the beginning of the year?

I probably would have allowed, I probably would have made it a point. We're gonna do the days of the week, we're gonna talk about our schedule, counting. We've already counted to a hundred when we celebrated a hundred school days so this is our second go around so now we do it, we do it, we don't, we don't so...When we come together and you haven't seen a lot of them because that's the rhyme and reason of where we're at, we have a pick up time. A lot of times that's what I call my concept lesson where that's a science experiment or we'll do a graph or we'll do something, I'll introduce a new game, that's more teacher-directed. The end of the day we always try to end with a story or sharing or some sort of that's a little high energy, whatever...

Why do you do that? That the end you always have a story...

Because a lot of times they're burned out, they're tired, they're irritable, they've maxed on ...so just to relax on a story, you know, without having to really think about anything, you can just enjoy. It's good to just share and evaluate our day. A lot of times at the very beginning of the year I was real consistent about what's called headline news, we did *a lot* of sharing at the very beginning of the year: "What was your favorite thing about today" "What was the one word, the one kind word that you heard today" "Who did you play with today" "What happened today that made you..." and I tried to give them a starting sentence so it's just kind of like a fill-in so it can be quick, we can share, we can hear, but I can also, you know, I get information about the kids that's why.

And that's why it was more at the beginning of the year..how has it changed now?

Yeah. Well, because we're so verbal and I get a lot of that information just hearing it during the day. In class, personalities are different. I do that a lot more in my afternoon class, my afternoon class, very seldom do I see another child hit another child or use an ugly word. It's constant in my morning group. The Lindsays of the world, the Chrises, the Jeffreys. If you notice during group time I'm constantly having to make a judgment decision and do I acknowledge that Cheri touched Chris back or do I let it go this time. Where does this fit in to the big picture of the day? And this class is much more, I sense, much more strong willed personalities, I put much more emphasis in this morning class on just social skills. How do we get along together, what does it look like, what does it feel like, sharing food I mean for the morning class is such a struggle where my afternoon class for whatever reason, eighteen different kids, no problem. There are conflicts, but their conflicts are so much more, they're gentler, they're not so hateful, they're not so rough, whatever...

Has group time then, coming to group time in the morning class, has group time helped with the conflicts, from the beginning of the year, let's say, to the end of the year have you seen a difference in their conflicts has resolved it a little bit better..

They know how we do it in our classroom. Cheri knew the whole routine, they have heard what comes out of your mouth first, words. What does this mean in sign language. They know all of the routines that we go to do problem solving. They're real, they're excellent at if I remove a child and say, you know, before you come back into the room I want you to, here's some paper, who do you think you need to write a letter to, who's your story picture, what's it gonna have on it, they are so quick, they know what is expected of them and they follow through with it. So, but that's taken a whole year. You know, the class hugs for instance, there are days and there are weeks that we just kind of peek out and say boys and girls we need to talk about our room...

Well, you didn't even have to tell them that today. Chris was the one who said, he brought it up to you(about class hug)

And that was a step that would have never happened in the beginning of the year how we did our class hug at the very beginning of the year it's very teacher-directed, "boy and girls, you know what we're gonna do, we need to let each other know that our hands don't hurt, okay, this is how we're gonna do it, I need a big round circle" and now it may take five minutes to get that circle, how are we gonna get more space, negotiating..." okay now, all our hands are gonna go up, gently fall down and we're gonna give each other a gentle back hug" "how does it feel?" So we do this, and that might take twenty minutes, the next time we do it, it may take nine minutes and it just varies, but they work and it just hit me today was a statement on this (inaudible) they had the idea of the class hug, I have learned to go, oh gosh, if I have to do another transition, gotta get in the circle 'cause it's the only way we know how to do a class hug so it was an experiment, what happens if we

put our hands up and find another hand to hold and it was just the same and it worked and so....here's the intrigue of that morning class and here's the wonder of that morning class it could've failed as much as it succeeded. I never can put my paycheck indebted on that class.

So when things are as successful in group, they can fail.

They fail, and that failure is through my eyes and who knows when we fail is it really a failure or does a child internalize some way, I don't know, who's putting that statement on success and failure? What are my standards for success and failure? At this time of the year, I have real high expectations of my kids. I would have been real disappointed now I can applaud them and that's great and wonderful that they can come in and I'm in a staff meeting and they can operate this classroom independently but deep down and the kids have heard this "boys and girls, what month is this--ooh, this is April, let's see, how many months have we been in school" and we'll count "my goodness, and we've done this seven months," so I remind them of my expectations and for this class I have higher expectations than my afternoon class.

Why is that?

I think sometimes because this morning class their academics are strong and I don't have to worry about these guys, I mean, you've got you've got the alphabet, we've got the numbers, we can do the context kindergarten, but their social skills are so appalling at times and that's my personal button. Now I don't like violence, I don't like ...we've got to learn how to work together, we've got to be able (pause) to be able to say a kind word to somebody, to know what it feels like and to initiate it, so for them I spend that's their focus, my afternoon class, bless their little hearts, we are so low academically that it's kind of like, but their social skills, they're so much gentler, so much kinder, you just see them working together.

So would your group times be different as far as your p.m. class versus your a.m. class?

In my p.m. class I'm much more laid back, I'm more relaxed, they're a given, they can get out of control and we can get them back real quickly. This morning class if they get out of control, when Paul loses it, or Chris loses it or Jeffrey and Dan lose it, it's always a mental drain sometimes 'cause I feel like I'm always having to observe, record, watch all through, and I'm thankful sometimes that my morning class is my morning class 'cause in years past it was just the reverse, I'm tired, and Robin (next door teacher) is struggling with it. Her afternoon class is you know, but group time activities with social skills and everything else so it's harder that's the given, two programs, half day rather than regular day. So I'm much more I can joke, during that story with my afternoon class (Polar Bear on record), explain the rules one time, "Boys and girls I can?" They can flick into imagination real good, they're also, the majority of those kids have had nothing, so this is all still very magical. This morning class, the majority of my kids are day care kids, so

there's a certain amount of wiseness. "We've done group times for four years," it's an attitude. I call it an attitude, a cocky controlling attitude, "You know, you are just one of fifteen adults in my life and there's nothing special about you," whereas in my afternoon class, the teacher, I'm next to mom because it was their first. So I can do that Polar Bear, and I did yesterday, I did the Polar Bear story one time, very quietly, I introduced the rules, when my hand goes up, no noise, and they did it.

So when the Polar Bear, just taking that, when you think about it before going to group whether it's the morning of or the night before do you plan it so that you know that the a.m. class, it'll be different, it'll be different rules, different instructions like longer, or whatever it is that you have to plan for, you're still doing an activity that is different. Do you think of it differently for both classes? when you plan it?

When I'm planning, no. I just kind of have a game plan in my head of what I want to reach for the day or a concept that I'm trying to get across or a theme or an activity and then the day unfolds.

And it changes.

And it changes.

And it changes as you're there...at the present time.

So, for instance, when I started that Polar Bear story they really weren't all that settled so it's a game plan of watching and observing, are they ready to do this or not or do I just muddle through it the best I can and ignore or do I make it a point to say I'm really gonna try this, so I made that point, that decision I really want to make this tape, I really don't want to have to stop that button eighteen times to tell Debra or Chris.

Yeah, I noticed that.

I really didn't want to do that so we did the practice, I gave them the reinforcement, "Ooh, I liked how you did that"....gave them the positive strokes, when I thought they could catch on then we started. The testing that was done was so minimal and it happened so late in the story that it was like hey, in this class, we have really done well.

So in the beginning, if you had done that activity...or you probably would not have done it.

Well, in the very beginning of the year, these guys, this class has really changed, the confidence level of this class has changed.

What's happened (to change that)?

I don't know. They're just much more confident and it may be just the way they responded to the room, being given responsibilities, we can carry it out, we can do this, some of it is just time of year. Some of it is age. Six year olds are testers. Six year olds can be talky. Six year olds can do a lot of that talking, it's developmentally appropriate, you don't have to accept it but it's part of being six. So you start to witness it because these kids are growing. Four and a half, five year olds, are much more complacent, they're real followers, they're pleasers, so some of it is just age appropriate that we're moving more and more towards that kind of behavior. That's a thought provoking question.

A very broad question: Why do you have group times for this class, what is it about this class, what are the purposes? And the fact that it's separated into three or four sometimes, why do you do that and what is it that they get out of it.

I think it has to do with, group time is the one time that you can bring the kids together and do have them all, so I'm not running around and repeating myself a hundred million times. If we can share it in group time the majority of kids can get it. Some of it is just social interaction. We've got to learn how to do this...

Together as a group...

Right. And I have thought and I haven't been able to figure out whyI went to a workshop about two months ago and I said to Robin, I said, "You know what I want, I want to be able to come back to the room and just do, throw the whole schedule out the window," what would happen if you didn't do group time?

Did you do it?

No.

Why were you even thinking of it?

Because I'm wondering what it would look like and what would happen. There are some parts of group time that I love; starting song, I love those, I love hearing kids sing as a group activity. I love having kids interact and talk and discuss and actually hear them problem solving out loud and I like doing that sometimes I like hearing that when it's done in a constructive way when I don't have to, we don't have to deal with the pushing, the shoving, the fighting, etc., all of that. That contaminates it, but when you can eliminate that and it's just a pure enjoyment of kids being together and enjoying each other....

Like the horse today.

Yeah! That was so gentle. And I could've put that tape (of the horse with Elyssa) if you didn't have group time and kids were never comfortable about coming together you could have a VCR on say, "Boys and girls, sometimes today there's a VCR, you need to go

watch it." At the same time there's a large amount...for two and a half hours for kids to be independent with not a lot of structure. 'Cause that's a constant judgment call also sometimes whether or not we extend choice time or let them stay and do something else. This particular class does a relatively good job being creative, staying on task, finding things productive to do so choice time is an important time for them and I question the value of group times at times.

You question it but do you change it, do you do anything about it? Like do you shorten it sometimes?

Oh yeah.

Because of that to give them more choice time if needed.

Right. And sometimes we'll come and I'll say, "Oh, boys and girls, today is gonna be a flip-floppy day, we're gonna have group time that's gonna be this (small fingers) short and all we have to do is sit very quietly for just a few minutes because all I have to do is tell you just a few things and then the rest of the day is yours. Or, "guess what, I need you to work really hard, because today group time is gonna be a little longer because, this is what we're gonna try to do." So, it just varies and changes, but I used to not do a, I used to what I would do was a morning group time where I tried to cram so much into it that it was too long and so that's why I came up with the group time just before snack because that group time was much more appropriate to do a total group graphing or a science experiment or a shared reading or something because the truth of the matter is they play themselves out, they've got to do what they wanted to do the reward for snack is gonna follow, they're much more receptive to a concept so I eliminated that from my first group time and that's why I added that third group time.

You did this year, with this group?

Uh-huh. Before sometimes I would try to do it all in that very beginning group time and it was too much, I mean then you wouldn't even wanted to do calendar or starting song because it was, "Oh, we've gotta to do this graphing experiment" or we need to do our starting areas, or I don't know what, so I have learned that if I could make the group time short and much more specific...

And more of them.

Right, the kids were more receptive to them. Now, there are sometimes that I will say, like during choice time, "Boys and girls, during choice time today, I'm gonna be calling the red table over I'm gonna be on the carpet, and this is what we're gonna be doing," and then I'll do something in a little group but that's so hard to do because of the noise level in this room and the interaction, I get pulled, there's too many interruptions, I have to stop to deal with a conflict and I haven't been skilled enough to be able to do that. There are

kindergarten teachers out there that do it, I admire them for it, I'm a visual learner, so I need to go visit their rooms to go figure out how to do it, but I can't do it. Assessing is a big issue for me 'cause I try to assess during choice time and you should see it. I mean, (inaudible) all about non-group activities.....
it's real hard to convince people of what we do in kindergarten and it's so disguised what we do.

You do the sign language during group time a lot, where did it come from?

Here it tells you about how you change, the kids, we did something last year, and I went to the speech teacher and I asked how you say thank you in sign language, something that's so simple and then it's just grown and grown. Then I just decided the kids responded to it so much. The other thing that happened was the parents were so in awe 'cause it was little ones going home and teaching the parents, it wasn't a little one going home and counting to five, they knew how to count to five. It was a skill and new knowledge that parents were.....

So it was something families and school could share together.

Exactly.

I notice you use it a lot also as non-verbal cues.

I did just to quiet them down and you don't have to use your voice as much and they don't either. So maybe I used it and it started that way with non-verbal cues that I plugged my kids into it the very beginning of the year and then we just extended it and it was so easy to extend it. "Boys and girls in group time, if you see me doing this that means I really need you to be listening, if I'm going like this that means that I need you to be sitting down, if I go like this it means that I need you to be quiet." So I probably without even speaking sign language I did those non-verbal cues. I'm also drawn to sign language. I don't think there's anything more beautiful. There's a part of me that's always wanted to be able to sign, I've taken sign language classes.

Do you think that's why, that they see that you love it so much?

Well, I love it, there's a fascination. I mean, the yellow, our bible over there (brings over sign language book), so I'm constantly, "how would you do that?" Starting songs are something I started last year as a "how do I start my day" in a consistent way. If I introduce a song on Monday and we sing it everyday, on Friday you've got a brand new song. I've also learned that if you plug in one or two more signs in our starting song like "we're going to the zoo" key word zoo, it's so easy to do and the kids have responded so if they're responding that makes me do it.

And vice-versa.

Right. I get goose-bumps when I think of these little kids and their little angelic voices singing that. When we did Martin Luther King, teaching peace in sign language. It just adds a whole new dimension. There are some kids too, that will sign and they won't sing. It's an unknown for me so at the end of the year so I can look on my flip chart and say ha, I'm learning some of this stuff. I'm gettin' pretty good at it so it's a fascination and I don't have a beautiful voice but I love to sing so maybe that washes my voice if I can use my hands. So it's been something new. The other teachers have caught on I mean they're real fascinated when we go to the office there's something very impressive, I don't do it to impress other people but there's something very, when we have other, reading partners come in on Friday the kindergartners are teaching the fifth graders all the sign language songs. So we'll do our starting song and the fifth graders sing with us and do it with us but it also allows the fifth graders to sing these mickey mouse songs feeling okay about it because they're doing it in sign language that language takes it way up here to a whole new level.

They (fifth graders) come during group time?

They come every Friday and do what we call shared reading.

Interview #2: Stacey

May 9, 1996

Last week we were talking about how the group times changed overall and I want you to tell me about now how the individual children in this class affect your group times.

Uh, you mean class personalities? Reading the group and their personalities?

Yeah.

Um, and I can give names? Will that help you if I can?

That's fine, or if you're speaking generally, that's fine too.

(long pause). (interruption).

Cheri has a hard time coming to group and I'm very aware when she gets up and leaves. Megan is another one that is real hard to get and stay in group. So at this time of the year there's patterns, I would like to be able to break those patterns or change those patterns so it's like at the very beginning of the year I can kind of (inaudible) the slack where developmentally we can immature, we're not ready for this at the beginning, now there's more of an expectation and it started probably maybe not now but more after Christmas. So like with Cheri there's much more of a consequence, like yesterday, "Uh, bummer, you weren't in group can you go to" whatever, you know, before we started group today, I said to Cheri, "Cheri, today's your Olympic play day (inaudible) in group, we're ready to say go, work real hard, when you hear the words, meet me at the carpet, where do you need to go?" And when I said those words she was still cutting and there was this thing of ooooh, I don't go when she says go to carpet, you know, I always stay where I'm at and I'm comfortable dealing with that but I watched her almost struggle with getting to the carpet and letting go of something and getting there she did. So we have those kinds of personalities that I'm real aware of so I constantly have to make a judgment call on do I stop and bring him back or do I let him go or do I call it to him later. With Megan, a lot of times what I'll do now is when she chooses to leave the room I don't stop group because it's so hard to get these kids anyway. She leaves group but then during choice time I search her out and I'll say, "You know what, during group time you chose to get up and leave and go over here and play with the water table so you've already had your choice time so now I need to have and sit, and be a watcher for a few minutes" and there's a consequence to that behavior. Personalities; Scott is a loner, I try to bring him in as much as I can and yet ninety percent of the time he's in the back and there's a part of him that I don't necessarily know if he wants to be there but we don't have the security to be up, real uh interactive so I'm gonna be in the back. If I can draw him in with his name or with a question, or whatever, that kind of gets him closer into group whereas Jeff is just, I

need my own space, you know, so he's always kind of in the back on his knees, twittling and whatever but usually have got him auditorially you know I don't have to worry about, Scott is a personality, Jeff is a physical (inaudible) that he just needs to be kind of in the back and he gets real frustrated when I bring him up close, "Ms. Rogers! I like it back here!" (inaudible)...the strong-willed child like Lindsay, Chris, that need lots of control, that need lots of attention, you know, that's the personality that's trying to take control, so if I put a tape on or music on, I'm gonna be the star, I'm gonna be the leader and I'm gonna do it in a real aggressive way. Those kind of children are much more, um, I don't know if I want to say firm but I don't, there's a part of me that says Lindsay, I'm gonna let you be a leader in other ways, you know, I'm gonna let you be a leader in the choice time connecting with the rules of a board game or I'm gonna let you be a leader outside on the playground and establishing a game that everyone wants to play and if you need to be bossy and demanding or whatever, these are places in the day where you can do that and I'll give her strokes for it but I'm not gonna give you strokes in group time. I'm gonna try to give her the message there's a time and a place for this behavior, uh but Lindsay is strictly of uh, hers is just uh, streetwise burned-out day care child that I'm gonna, we're just gonna test and test to see...so yes, in the beginning of the year I didn't know her, I didn't know where that source was, be more tolerant, be more giving and more accepting. As the year goes by we get to learn the personality of the kids then you start to redefine how you're gonna react to it. Lindsay, I can give a look to Lindsay like, "Uh, you know, this is it" and she can read that look really easy...

She knows.

She knows. And so that gives me some information about where that source of behavior comes from and it's sure testing, it's sure power, it's sure control. Whereas for instance, with Megan, you can give the same look to Megan and Megan is almost like, "I'm not quite sure about that look, because I'm so enthusiastic, I'm so spontaneous", I'm not, it's not so much of a control issue...

Not manipulative.

Yeah. So you know, it's so subtle it's so internal. You internalize that so much as a teacher because you get to know the kids and you spend so much time with the kids there's so much interaction, there's so many group times and you just kind of (inaudible)...but at the beginning of the year all of that's all new so you know it's much more I'm much more of an observer at the very beginning of the year just really trying to take in and evaluate, judge, figure out, now at the end of the year, it's like, "Oh, I know where this (inaudible) is coming from."

And do you ever have to change the actual activity or planning because of their personalities or do you stay the same and have them ...

No, I constantly change because I know, where this class is, they're so strong as

individuals so I constantly, I have a whole resource of things I have to do and ways of handling it but what I choose to do and how I choose to do it is all spontaneous. For instance, a whisper, if we're counting and they're yelling and they're real demanding, then I'll say, "Okay, this one is a whisper" and that's one way of getting that energy down or using the sticks to draw names, I mean it's not consistent, but there's techniques that I have access to so I constantly make a decision on what technique I have to use, "Do I need to be in a circle, do I need to be in a half-circle do I need to be in a regular group time?" "Am I gonna leave out something in our morning routine because I had to add something?" (inaudible) And with my morning class, I call it a mental drain because I really, really, have to constantly.....

On you?

On me, it's a mental drain on me and I don't mean that in a negative sense, it just takes a lot of teaching skills to pull that off whereas another group of kids, I'm gonna use my afternoon class, it's an entirely different personality when they come together as a group. It's much more relaxing and I don't have to do all of this (inaudible) head stuff, it's kind of a given, you know, and it is amazing. I can do a starting song, and it's like, calendar, starting song, we have that routine, they're just so complacent in a way, they're so willing to do it and there's not all this (inaudible) and the morning class they do all that stuff it's just different. I'm constantly having to make a judgment call and think of what technique might work, you know, humor, with my morning class, I really have to rely on humor sometimes, uh mental humor, "We blew this one!" or whatever just to get a perspective of what the day....

Um, I want to talk about transitions and what you use them for....

What you do with them?

Before and after group time like the dice.

That was.....I try to make the transitions have a purpose, they don't have to just leave, but that gives a transition of dismissing a child from the group activity if I can do it individually or in small groups it makes the transition calmer, if I just said, "Everybody go play, or everybody go line up", at the beginning of the year, that's almost impossible, now at the end of the year there are times where I just say, "Oh, go meet me at the door" and they can do it, but again, why I do that, I don't understand the question...like rolling the dice, that gives me information about that individual child. I can do any type of activity as long as it's quick and it moves but that gives me information and when I say, "How did you figure that out?" You know, it gives me how they're thinking, it also is still in the group activities and it problems for the next child, a new way of doing things. I can stroke the child, "Oh, neat, Dan didn't see four he saw two and two" so the pace is fast and quick and I usually have a lot of times during the transition period, a lot of times is there because they want to be called on next or whatever so it's just a real quick activity I try to plug in

because there's no specific math time or language time or science time or whatever so it's just and again, it's just what concepts are we working on, what concepts could be used during this transition time, at the beginning on the year we might be working on colors, so if you can find red anywhere on your clothes go make a choice, or shape or what a concept and we just change or make into a transition. Those are not planned. Yesterday when I did the match and unmatch, same or different, that was just in my head, and it's like, oh, we never did this before, let's see what happens. And I was real, oh, we got this down.

Yeah, I was gonna ask what you thought about it.

Yeah! Because every child did it, every child was able to do it and watching even Laura who will probably repeat kindergarten you know just really, really (inaudible) developmentally I think it really took a long time to figure it out it wasn't just a spontaneous thing where same or different, she was really thinking about it. Those dice, again, I just discovered them in a store, bought 'em and they're just lifesavers. I mean I can just use them in all kinds of different ways. Lots of times we'll do the alphabet, again, different concepts, use them in different ways.

What about the transition, a lot of time you have them in a large circle as they, before snack let's say, you gather them just before another activity. Why, or what benefits it has for them being in a group and then a large circle where they roll the dice.

Okay, for the dice, it's just a matter of maintenance, I can't roll dice in front of a classroom where the kids aren't gonna be able to see. By putting them in a circle it's a visual it also gives them their own space as an individual we're not all clumped together, I'm gonna call each child by their name to do this, that might be a message they may have, I don't know I haven't really thought about it, but if I'm rolling dice in the middle of a circle I want everybody who's got the attention span here to see what's going on, so I'll put the kids in a circle when we're doing that kind of an activity, when we do a science experiment we get into a half a circle, or a circle when I really need them to be able to see something that's when I'll use the circle when I'm presenting something it's usually they're in front of me so if it's a book on sharing it's a song or it's a story chart (inaudible) and I'll give them all a unifex cube and I'll put three books in the middle of it and I'll say we're gonna go and have snack but before we have snack this child gets to vote on the book we'll read for our class story, think about it, look at your cover....and we'll do this thing on covers and what this story might be about and then they'll come and put their unifex cube on top of a book and then they go get snack. When we're doing something like that we're always in a circle.

And what about the transitions into group time? When they come from choice time how do you bring them together?

You mean from the starting areas, into group time? Sometimes I'll use the light, I'll turn the light out, if I think they can handle that I can flip the lights and say, "Okay everybody

leave your good work and join me on the carpet." That works on Tuesdays and Thursdays because I can always say, "Join me on the carpet if you're ready to go to P.E." P.E. is a hook..

A bribe!

It is a bribe, they love P.E. So what do they do, they'll stop and they'll join me. I can't use that on Monday because Monday is library day and, "I don't want to go to the library" so on Mondays I know they don't like to go to library so I go around usually to the table and sometimes I'll connect individually to every group, with the Lindsays of the world who I know will not go to group they need that individual, so again, that technique varies on the mood, the time of year, the energy level and I get to read that if it gets to me and how I see them interacting at the tables, at their starting areas, it's a constant reading. And again, as a teacher and a teacher with the number of years that I have and the one benefit that I have is that my head is full of lots of different ways. So I do have a head resource full of stuff that I can try. That works to my advantage.

In general or specifically to today's group time, you can pick either, reflecting on the experience what do the children leave the group time feeling about themselves and each other as members of the group. I don't know if you want to take that as an overall general question or specifically something that you did today.

How they leave group?

Feeling about each other.

Well you can do philosophies.....

(interruption)....

I know what I want and if I say that happens I would say, oh I don't know. Sometimes I've had it one hundred percent and other times it's just a disaster. I would like the for children to be able to be in group to be a part of the group and whatever the activity leave group feeling good about themselves. Having experienced a positive comment directed to them either as a group and they internalize it or specifically, you know Lindsay.... I would love for those messages to sink in and say you know, that felt good, I think I'm gonna do that tomorrow and eventually to be able to do that without the strokes. Scott is coming from a funeral so I had him sit by me and touch me, "How are doing?" To acknowledge that he may be going through a rough time. So he can leave group going into play day and saying, "Huh, (sigh), I had my touch for the day and I'm okay and this is a caring school there are people who care about me." For the Megans of the world you know that are real aggressive and real abrasive and their personalities are hard to attach to somehow we'll have to work through that and say, "You know, you're a really neat kid, you can turn a lot of people off, including me at times but after all, the majority of the time, I like you

as a person it's just some of this behavior, this attitude, I need to reassure you that I like you but it's the behavior that it's real hard to (inaudible) to." So you'd like for them to be able to get all of that with what you're giving them. I would like for them to be able to come together without the, "She kicked me, she hurt me, she said a bad" which is so typical five, five and a half, and really typical of six year olds. How do we file this, where do we put it, how can we let go of it, how can we do this hug. This class generally I think, likes each other and when I can say we need a class hug they can generally rise to the occasion independently of me and it makes me feel real good to see that we've achieved some sense of community in this classroom. In that first group time about presenting their choices, one reason I present the choices is to say, you know it's your choice I want your (inaudible) I want the room to be neat, I want you to be aware of all of the things that you can do so we don't have to just wander or we don't have to spend our time thinking about what we're going to do at recess or we can be involved in an activity. So that's motivation. I would like to in some group time share our work, we're not only sharing the concept of a number set or one but we're also taking pride, this is a team effort we did this together we shared this, it's important to say, we share our writing, there are the Laura's of the world that just put scribble on the page, "That's Lauras, Laura, are you gonna read your story?" You know? It's still valued because we presented it and we shared it as a total group. We can also do Marc's who has a hundred and one words and isn't that great, look at all these writings, look at all these words. Every level can be acknowledged and accepted and celebrated so you know I do a lot of that for that very reason, to celebrate the individual child. And sometimes it's just a matter of, "Let's get out of here! this is not good, we need to get into our own little areas and maybe we'll try again next time!"

'Cause I was gonna ask how can you tell if you want them to leave group time feeling good about themselves or about each other or learning something about themselves or each other, how do you know that, how do you know if you're successful in doing that?

Right. And some of it is if during choice time a lot of that is seeing children interacting in a positive way, well, that, sometimes you can say well that's a carryover from group. Sometimes if you see a child in their starting area that's really invested in their work there's a part of me, okay, here's an example, Debra is a fine example, if Debra knows it's gonna be shared in group she is the most meticulous, "Show my book, show my book, show my book!" If she knows that it's not going to be shared in group if it's just whatever, I mean we just get an attitude of scribble, scribble, I don't care, there's no investment. So here again, you know, how do you know some of the times that attitude changes because we do so much sharing and because you don't know. Sometimes what gets shared and what doesn't get shared we have a hard time finding because it's not real consistent uh, you tell me how to do it. So for the Debras of the world, most of the time she'll invest because she thinks....now whether that's good or bad, I don't know. It's somehow an internal, "I want to do this because (inaudible)."

Also today it was interesting because today's group time when they had a chance to talk

with each other about stories and maybe they left with knowing stories about each other and maybe it gave them a chance to hear those stories..

And I did that...

And they share a bond.

Right. And I do that occasionally when they come to group and I just...this class cannot though, a lot of times in my afternoon class, what I will say is and I get it with this class too but it doesn't necessarily work and again it's the strong personalities, "Boys and girls it seems we have a lot of stories to tell today so why don't we one, two, three, let's make a round circle everybody (inaudible) and we're gonna share one thing that we want everybody to know about us today" and we'll do it, but for my morning class we are so egocentric we are so "I"-centered, they don't want to really hear the other eighteen stories they just want everybody...and Chris is one, Chris, once he has that he goes on and on and on...I don't know if you've been in here....Lindsay is another one, if you say one, uh uh we're not gonna do one, we're gonna get three or four, you know, and Lindsay's another one so that type of story doesn't work real good, is not as productive, I've done it, but I know it's not as productive, uh, setting a timer, you choose who you want to talk to, just talk and share and I've only done that a couple of times with this group and it's always an experiment. And that was a judgmental call today, I saw the timer, I saw them talking, let's just chill for a few minutes. But their talking was very productive and it worked and when the bell went off, eighty percent maybe, but I'd much rather, personally, I like it when we all get around a circle and share because then that gives me information about the kids but I'm also, I felt good about watching them share with each other, they were in groups and they were sharing. Phyllis was mad this morning, her brother woke her up, and that's what she wanted to talk about, Laura went to a birthday party last night, you know, but that was just the little group that I had access to. What Dan and Jeff and Chris and Debra and those guys in the back, I don't know but it looked like it was pretty good stuff.

Right, I couldn't hear where I was.

Right, but here again that's a technique that, there's a time and a place for that, would I do that everyday? I don't know, some days it's productive, some days it's not, so.

What did the children learn about you today? Specifically today or in general about you. Do they learn something about you as a role model or as a person?

Well, here again, if it's today or in general. Today I think the kids know that I don't feel good. This head cold has got me....I'm not as animated and spontaneous as I can be, sometimes I am. The humor, I can't just draw it out of me right now because I just physically how I feel so my patience level, and they probably (inaudible) a little bit more, um, because they know me, they also know there's a side that could probably be more

humorous, I don't want to say fun-loving, it's just the last week, two weeks. It's just where I'm at.

In general?

In general, what do the kids feel about me?

No, what they learn about you I mean are you as part of the group, as a member do they know about yourself or about...

Oh yeah. So they know my family and when I say Peter or Joy you know they asked about not Joy's name but how old is Joy, you know, my kids have been in this room, I bring them, they get to skip school one day and come to be in this room mainly because I go home with so many stories so it's like, Ellen came to the zoo with us so they become a part of the classroom so I can use them as an example, um, so they know and I remember there was one day where I showed them names and I showed my name Stacey, I mean for the Lindsay's of the world that was such power, "I know a grown-ups first name" but it was just kind of like Stacey....

And why do you think that to them this would be....

Fascinating?

Yeah.

Sometimes adults like to put a distance between them and a child and I find that if you come down you become real you know, it's, I can tell my kids, "You know I don't feel real good today, I do have a headache, I am kind of grumpy today, you know what I need you to do, I need your best today" or today I feel real silly, let's just have a silly.....(tape turns over).....if it's a graph or it's a ...

Modeling?

Modeling and again I'm also getting information about them.

Do you think they consider you as part of the group? as a member?

When I do, it depends, there's segments, when we're just sharing and we're doing a starting statement or whatever I become a part, if we're doing an experiment where we're all huddled together mixing colors or building a volcano or making a graph, I'm part of the group, I'm down on the floor with them and I think they feel like I'm just a part I just have an opinion, I'm equal when I'm in that chair when I'm doing a story, when I'm doing calendar, when I'm doing starting songs, probably I'm viewed as "The Teacher" so there's different, you know, she's up high, she's in control, she's leading, she's the teacher. When I

get down on the carpet all huddled together I'm a part so and I don't know if that's true or not but I would suspect ... um, when I'm down on the floor, like what did we do the other day? When I'm down on the floor and we're all trying to see something and I said you know, let's all get real close and if you need to stand up or kneel or whatever....

The train?

I don't know...but then all of a sudden I turn around and I get kids feeling my hair I got kids rubbing my back you know that says I'm just part of the group. When I'm up on the chair doing a story, Laura isn't climbing in my lap or whatever so that kind of gives me some information that they can kind of make the distinction between what Miss Roger's doing right now.

But when you're sitting in the large circle.....that's all I have today.

There's more? (laughing)

Another day!

Another day.

Yeah.

Interview #3: Stacey

May 16, 1996

Do you think that there's a sense of continuity in the classroom as a result of group time?

Continuity being consistency of a routine?

Exactly.

Mmm. And that's another factor to keep it and make it a part of the day. Because it happens everyday it's part of the routine. The length varies, the type varies, but some point of the day we're always together, we're always gonna come together, so yeah it is, it's a big factor. The other thing is starting areas are a big factor for this room, choice time is a big factor. If you eliminated one you'd end the day with or ninety nine percent of the time with, "But we didn't have" and I don't care what we put into the day it's still like there's very much an awareness of: "But we didn't have choice time" and it's almost like a sense there wasn't school, you know, because that is school, that is our day or if we don't do starting areas it's this constant, "What are we gonna do or where are they" or whatever um, the day we went to the zoo you know, there was nothing it was like, "Where is the (inaudible)?" so it kind of throws 'em but it's also a statement of yes, this is also very much a part of your school day. But like even gathering....they let go of any routine, like it didn't throw them that we're not counting and doing the you know, the regular stuff that we were doing. All that's been moved in the orange area (dramatic play) this week it's gonna do that independently, we don't need to do that, we're not gonna do that part of group time. So they can let go of that with the idea ofand I almost did that as an experiment for you and for me is to come in, do starting areas, go around, whisper, "Boys and girls we're gonna go to choice time" and never, never, come together of course, and if you did that then you'd say pick a different choice you could go from starting areas to choice but then to do that transition into snack it's almost like some of the group time gathering is a maintenance almost you know, I can't imagine kids going from choice time pick up the room go get your snack and go outside and line up we're going home. You know if you tried to eliminate all of them and I toyed with it mentally if you eliminated all of them and there was no ever coming together what would that day look like? And what would it feel like?

So there would be a lack of consistence, continuity?

Lack of consistency...yeah.

It would be missing to a certain degree.

I wanted to discuss with you the choice that you give the children during group time and decision making that they make for example I notice that you allow them to choose where

they are going to sit for group time. I wanted to know some of the other opportunities you offer them for autonomy and self-governing in the group time.

This particular group, 'cause every year is different and every group's different. This particular group probably has fewer than my afternoon because of the strong-willed personalities and the time constraints. To problem solve in this room with these children takes a hunk of time because some of them are so strong-willed they don't need, I mean, it's almost like you have so much control in your life this is the point in time that you're not gonna get the control, I'm gonna give it in other areas but this is one time of the day that I really want you to be able to let go of the control issue so it's a balance, but, they get to sit where they want....

Today they chose, Dan asked you for example (inaudible) for the ABC book.

Right. Or, if we roll the dice, Chris will, "I have an idea!" so it's real spontaneous, it's a matter of working out who are what are they where's the energy level, what is the suggestion what is the source of that suggestion, can I make it happen, can I make it happen...so, I don't know if I have, I don't know if I have an answer to that, I'm just aware of it, I'm aware of looking for those moments I can turn it back to them. I'm looking for and listening for the teachable moment, I want that it's part of my game plan in my head that's part of my philosophy, that's part of my guilt sometimes, if I go home and replay my day you know (sigh to herself as the end of the day). "Let it go Stacey, you've got too much control" or, "Stacey don't"...I do that number anyway so it's kind of like um, then again, everyday is different, just being real, real aware of anytime I can give them a choice. You know, that have a choice to get up to go to the bathroom, take care of their own needs. They're not raising their hands there's no real rigid, stuff like that, everything I try to do is based on a reason or respect or something tied into that. They don't have to raise their hands but there's some days that I, it's just that yelling, screaming, "You know, it's real hard to hear, if you really know something put your finger on your..." and I do it that way but again it's not, I allow the group to become what and who they are and then we put those limits, those rules or whatever into the day that we really, really need for safety or respect or maintenance or whatever I don't you know just like the other day which book do you want to read again, that's up to them, a control of the group that day. My goal was today, to read the other book to value the kids that didn't want Chicka, Chicka, Boom, Boom, that wanted the other one I thought it was important to honor their choice and it was a tie so I was real aware of that and in my game plan okay there was a tie, we're gonna do this one first and I'll the end of the day with the other one and tie the two together with the graph, for whatever reason, I can't tell you yesterday at the end of the day what happened, we didn't have time that was a game plan, I had the book there as a reminder to read that one today I wanted to redo Chicka Chicka that was first so I do it with a story tape but again when Dan said, "Let's do Storyland" I knew that's important to them so here again it's those constant decisions that you have to make.....I think when I deal with this of choices, respect for the individual, control, ownership of a classroom, I see that being played out more and more in choice time, it was easier to have that played

out in choice time, there's more opportunity for that to be played out in choice time. So if I looked at just my group time and you never walked in this room than at any other point in time during the day and you just saw group there, I may fall short if I was making a checklist, but the total day, how the whole day is played out, then I can go home and say, "Yeah group time wasn't too many of those elements in group time," but I, you know what, it is balanced out in choice time, in how we do snack, it is balance out in outside recess or whatever, or in another area or in another part of the day

I was gonna ask, you were talking about, you always have a reason, what is the reason when they problem-solve, when they have their own conflicts with each other and during group time sometimes, and other time of the day, they go out if it's two or three people they go to the bathroom, or in the hall, and they problem-solve. Is that, did you ever change it so that you used to do it in group time?

Sometimes I do and I meant to and again the clock stares at you because I don't have the time or the kids aren't ready for it, I meant to take the problem between Laura and Megan to group. So there are points in time when we've had a conflict, there are points in time throughout the year that a child did come to group and I will call on a child I can specifically remember one time, and I don't even remember what happened but it turned out to be so humorous but it was Chris, "Chris, come get up on my lap we've had a problem today will you help Chris solve the problem?" And they talk about what, the dynamics and then we'll review how it could be done what it would be different...and then we do it and we've done that enough throughout the school year and we've done that all of the very beginning and the middle of the year in total group where so much of my time, and that time frame was a review of choice time, "Uh, how do you guys feel about choice time today, what was the problems during choice?" And again I'd really like to emphasize the positive, "You know, the block area today was incredible, five boys were in there today, they all were playing and building their own thing, not one 'em knocked somebody else's, and not one of 'em had to argue over who got blocks, I don't know how they did it but they all worked in a small area." So, you know, that's emphasizing the positive but we've done that enough and we've brought back things into the group so now, I didn't send kids out to do this at the beginning of the year, but it's evolved, it's been a process, it's been a building, so you're coming into kindergarten at the end of the year where I can say, "You know, we've already talked about what needs to come out of our mouths, what's first when you, you need to be listeners, you need to share we both need to feel good about the solution, you guys go do that." And it almost goes back to that if sometimes children have problems and they have a problem because of the audience, the attention you know, the hubbub that it creates, you take all of that away and it's instant. you have two kids, she's absolutely dead-locked over a toy, fighting and arguing and whatever, all you do is pick up that person out there and go, "Hmmm, you guys need to figure out who's gonna play with that toy and how it's gonna be shared (inaudible)" and it's ... amazing.

Because a lot of times I see those conflicts from choice time and they.... drizzle down,

when they sit at the carpet, there's still sometimes...

It hasn't been resolved.

They haven't agreed yet and

Right, and I'm gonna push you or touch you or annoy you because it didn't, yeah, but again when you look at a room that's set up the way this room is set up and you look at the allotted times that kids have and the number of choices that they do have, the conflict ratio is like yesterday, you know, you said that you noticed more conflicts than normal but even yesterday it's still amazing that there's that few sometimes. And there are those days, so many of those bad days that there have been so many that we have just stopped our day turned the lights out, "Choice time is over, let's get to the carpet, boys and girls, we were in choice time and this is all I've heard, this is all I've seen, now let's think about this." And then we go through what is choice time... "Okay, everybody sit for a minute, calm your hearts down when I turn that light back on we'll go back and we'll finish choice time, we have some work to do (inaudible)." So, we got off the subject, so, all of that ties directly back though towards children, respecting them, giving them control, letting them make choices, as long as your choice is a healthy choice, a respectful choice a productive choice, you know, this room is yours, when you start abusing that and we start misusing that then we're gonna come in, we're gonna sit down we're gonna talk about how we redirect how to problem solve how to change and I guess that's where the variety comes in because everyday we come in, in a different mood, a different weather a teacher that is stressed or not stressed or trying to get report cards done or looking at the clock and going, "AH how are we going to get out of here" or whatever so that's what makes the day different all of the time.

Okay. Do you think about what you will change for next year's class in group time activities or do you know some of the things that will be the same?

HMM.

Or is it too early to ask!?

Yeah! Come see me in August! What will I change?...I will hold on tight until I get a year where the kids just absolutely revolt. I will hold on tight to starting song. I will hold on tight to probably that one time of the day where we do rote counting on how many school days at the very beginning of the first one hundred days. We're real focused that is very much a part of so that's repetition of the rote counting, the days of the week, at the very beginning of the year, but I'm focusing on that first group time and I don't even see that as real content that I'm thinking that, that really can change or not change. I will always have a beginning group time where we can come together at the very beginning of the day and just kind of "AH, here we are, what are we gonna do today how are we gonna do it." I will always have a part of my day where we come together for a story and

sharing something and then I will put in the other group time with the content again, that you haven't seen a lot of, the concept where we do science and math and those kind of activities. The marching around the alphabet game, that would be considered a group activity, those get plugged in and I still see value in those and those can add to a day and help a day, so those, those kind of activities and those will always be a part. I'm real comfortable with the flow that I've established as far as having kids come in and being in little groups, I like that, I like having that, and I don't, all I have to do, if I'm Scott, I don't have to deal with the whole world right now all I have to do is get the hug, then Megan and I just have this little area that I have to deal with, I like that and I like going from that to the big, to choice. I like having snack after we need to come down. What I'd really like to do is to have snack as self-serve sometime during choice time, there's your food, there's your table, go do it yourself. I would like to do that somehow but at the same time you, having it in groups is okay I'm not real happy with that but it's okay. Robin is thinking evaluating whether or not to have snack at all and just doing away with that and I toy with that but it's something would I let go of that but I'm rambling....that part has taken me three years to come up with this and it felt good last year and it still feels good this year so I'll keep that kind of a flow going unless I can't. If next year's come in and it's entirely different and it's not working I'm certainly open to say, "You know what (inaudible)" but you know it's logistics, when I have kids come in some of it is eight-thirty others later until nine. What do you do with kindergartners during that time frame. First graders we can say get your reading books and read quietly, but it doesn't work, you know Robin is much more, "Find something in the room to do" and as quickly as she can she goes to group and I have done that and it usually doesn't work for me. I'm, kids come in and if it's not real specific, something, the Jeffs of the world, if there's an argument or a fight or something before we even started our day and so it's like and where they are in their starting areas right now has evolved and when they first came in a starting area maybe just explore the pattern blocks or just as something as leggos on the table or draw a picture so that has grown so it is now much more specific and kind of more content oriented or whatever so for some people my starting areas would be interpreted maybe as a center time, I don't know, so the rhyme and the reason is the flow of the day I'm real happy with and won't change....

The last question! I just want to know the rule chart, the chart with the rules that you obviously made in the beginning of the year, I just wanted to know how that was proposed, how it came about and how it was written was it a group effort?

Umm....it originated with me and it's used at the very, very beginning of the year on talking about introducing what a classroom is, that whole concept...

The first week or..

Yeah the first week. And then in talking about what they are in their(inaudible) I think there's three, four (she goes to read them). And I think what I would like to have happen in the rules, everything should fall into one of those. I have gone ahead and written it so

they did not come from the typical suggestions that you can read in some curriculum book. Constructivists would say you bring the kids together and say, what rules do you think this room needs. What I find is, they don't know, they haven't been to preschool some of them have been to Head Start, this is a first time they wave goodbye to mom at the door and the street wise kids, they're survival kids, but they don't know, this is a first for them to being around with one adult and eighteen other friends or people that you know...so I've written it, it's just my philosophy that's how I want to envision a classroom but I'm very open to getting their feedback, the rules are very positively, they're not, I won't, it's what we can do in this room. If we did this room, "why do you think that would be a good rule?" So I give it back to them, "If I was going to write a rule for this room one of my rules might be, "Well, we come to group we have our own space, do you think that would be a good rule, why?" So they have to give me all the why's back and we go through it all and if they can't come up with that I'm very willing to say, "Well, maybe that wouldn't be a very good rule." A constructivism, the way I would do it maybe a way to get kids more involved or to get the lesson across is to have those four rules then we go through 'em but in between each word have two rules that make no sense at all so then to have the power saying, "Oh isn't that a silly rule, do we really need that rule, let's just take that rule off" then they have that sense you know devising (the myth? inaudible!). I've never had a group of kids come to me at the very beginning of the year capable of doing what we want them to do..third grade, fourth grade, fifth grade, they do it, they can do it and it's productive so that becomes a starting point, it's also an easy reference, at the very, very beginning of the year, "Oh what's the rule, let's check rule number one, "Oh, we come to group, oh good we've got it written there oh we've got it right now." So I do it that way we refer back to it we use it as long as we need to there comes a point in time in the year that, that should be established that it's been integrated we can let go of it when we get to the end of the year and you're pulling your hair out and the teacher's going, "We're all kind of getting tired of each other and we're (inaudible)." You know it's this kind of because we're at the end of the year but that's how, so it's very mind created so I'm very aware of it, it's mine so to get through that and the way I present it and maybe that just you know the way I present it I can feel okay about it...

Because you do a little bit of both.

Right.

You might initiate it but you also throw it back to them so there's a balance. (pause) ...that's all I have except I was listening to you talk about your philosophy for just a minute for your philosophy of whatever it was but I never officially asked you if you have a philosophy. I don't know if you even have the words that you have a sentence or you know in your mind it's just that I never asked that because that's, I didn't think that there was, you know from what I see..

I had to write my philosophy several years ago for something and I ended running to all of the curriculum books, all of the professional books that I read, reading how did they say it,

what did it sound like, I went straight to Bobby Fisher my own mentor that I really like and really admire, I like to read her work and here's her list and it's like oh yeah I.... so I wrote it all out and present it when I reread it I don't know, it sounds common sense, it sounds hokey, it sounds teachery so I you know, to go through....and yet I do have a passion I mean I do have a belief system, there is a philosophy there but exactly how it can be packaged and presented I don't know....

I find that it's more of a feeling or an instinct. It's not something that you can put into words and if you did it loses that feeling..

Yeah. It puts a label on it and I fight labels you know because a label is only for that moment in time, you know and what kind of label would you put on Dan what kind of label would you put on Lindsay, you know, strong willed? Yeah, but you know there are some days where this child isn't strong willed and she's just the sweetest, compassionate soft, so who knows, what would be more interesting is to turn that around and you know you've been in my room for several weeks, what philosophy, what label whatever would you because that's almost more important then what I believe because you're looking at the outcome. It doesn't really matter what a teacher's philosophy is, is it being carried out? How is it? And so to have your input on, "How do you feel when you walk in this room, how do you see the children, how do you?" So because that is the philosophy, I mean, that is the reality of that's the check point of so....

That's why I never officially asked because it just doesn't seem right in the class to ask because it always is changing, something's changing or even how you feel about something and it's, that's what I feel...

I just thought about something today, you talk about changes and how things come up, today I had a things like, "Thank you to the green table" they gave me a new term, they were trying to do this, over this cookie...

Oh at snack time.

Yeah. And here I am looking at these kids telling each other, four strong willed children, all had an idea but it was like, they couldn't hear each other because Chris's voice, it was this demanding; and it would be my idea and therefore we're gonna do it so that my idea and this how it's gonna, and their ideas were great but they couldn't hear. All of a sudden I gave them a phrase, "how about".....tape turns over....and I discovered that today so that little piece, that little "how about" was internalized for me so do you think that will be a phrase that will used in my room next year? Yeah!

I couldn't hear anything that was going on over there but I had heard that you had said, "Well, how you know pointing to Chris and saying, "Well how about to Laura, say how about to Jeff and I thought to myself I never really heard it phrased that way and I thought ooh, that's such a good word..."

So and that's my teaching that's the changes, that moment in time when I was receptive, it comes back to me, I was receptive to hearing to be listening to the kids, trying out something and it worked and you could see the magic of it working. That may not work with every group, it may not work with..but it gives me that one more piece of, "Ooh, we're solving problems," sometimes it's real important the words we pick to solve our problems so when you're out in the hallway or you're in the bathroom and you had this problem, why don't we try and start with "how about" and so they have this information and so they can go in the block area and just say "how about!" and just dropping that phrase and seeing if they can pick it up, you know, how much power would that be for Jeff to have if he can say, "how about" without the anger that has nothing to do with school but life in general. So that gives me an...an intriguement, and with kids I'm really intrigued, on my good, good days it's the intriguement it's the sheer wonder, it is the sheer wonder. These are not big people you know, their minds are five years of growth and wonderment and how they see things and how they make their connections and how they put things together and on those quiet days when you can appreciate...my frustration is again the clock the pressure of still having to be accountable, the pressure of still having to have some sort of a game plan, so it's kind of like you know, again, wanting to do something...Megan not coming to group knocking the papers over and there's Lindsay and you know, it's okay it's really okay and not have to worry that again, you're a part of it or Mr. Brown comes in and a parent comes in and enjoys the kids and we'll make productive music or tie it in, in a good and healthy way...

And that's your philosophy!

And that's my philosophy! I don't know! I've enjoyed having you in the room.....

Okay, thank you.

Thank you.

APPENDIX B

Shari Kessler
2001 N. Perkins Rd.
Stillwater, OK 74075
(405) 372-4201

April, 1996

Dear Teacher/Administrator:

I am a graduate student in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at Oklahoma State University. I am seeking a teacher for my thesis research project who conducts her/his classroom in a constructivist teaching approach. The title of the thesis is: ***"The Nature of Group Time in an Early Childhood Constructivist Curriculum."***

This project includes the researcher observing group time and its transitions in the classroom. Teacher participation will include: interviews of thirty to sixty minutes (with flexibility), once per week, during a one month period (approximately four interviews) by the researcher concerning the topic of group time. Interviews will be conducted in the school at the teacher's convenience. The teacher will be asked to distribute parent consent forms.

The teacher and the children's parents will be asked to voluntarily sign a written consent form indicating willingness to participate in the research. An audio recorder and observation notes will be used as an aid for the researcher. Identity of participants will not be disclosed in the thesis. The tapes and notes will be destroyed upon approval of the thesis.

Classroom research activities will begin in the spring (April/May), 1996. The researcher's presence during this month will be several times/week before, during, and after group time, as well as during interview sessions.

If you have any questions, you may call me at: (405) 372-4201 or Jennifer Moore in the OSU IRB research office at: (405) 744-5700 or my advisor, Dr. Kathryn Castle at (405) 744-7125.

Thank you for your assistance in this project.

Sincerely,

Shari Kessler

cc: IRB Approval Committee
Advisor: Dr. Castle

Teacher Consent Form

I, _____, hereby authorize or direct Shari Kessler,
(Teacher's Name) (Researcher)

or associates or assistants of his or her choosing, to perform the following project.

Title: *The Nature of Group Time in an Early Childhood Constructivist Curriculum.*

The researcher intends to observe group time in one early childhood constructivist classroom over a period of time (approximately three to four times per week over a one month period). Transitions will be observed. The teacher will be asked to participate in interviews once per week. Interviews will be thirty to sixty minutes in length with flexibility depending on the subject's schedule. Parent/Guardian consent forms will be distributed prior to beginning the study. The teacher will be asked to distribute the consent forms and return them to the researcher. Any child not participating in the study will not be removed from any classroom activities. The researcher will collect and record data (including interview sessions) by note taking during observations and audio recording activities. All materials will be the responsibility of the researcher. Tapes and notes will be destroyed upon completion of the study. There will be no identification of participants in the thesis. Observations will be conducted during group time in the classroom. Observations will occur in the classroom several times per week (three to four time per week) over a one month period (April/May, 1996). This is considered to be a "minimal risk" study. No risks or discomforts will be placed on any participant(s).

The benefits for the teacher may result from reflection of the interviews. He/she may use the information reflected upon to facilitate his/her change in the curriculum of the classroom.

“I understand that participation is voluntary, that there is no penalty for refusal to participate, and that I am free to withdraw from participating in this project at any time upon notification of the researcher. I agree to the use of audio recordings and note taking in the classroom and during interviews by the researcher. I am aware these materials are the researcher’s responsibility. I understand that I may withdraw from the study without penalty at any time.”

Signature of Teacher

Date

If you have any questions, please contact:

Researcher: Shari Kessler
2001 N. Perkins Rd.
Stillwater, OK 74075
(405) 372-4201

Advisor: Dr. Kathryn Castle
306 Gundersen Hall
Stillwater, OK 74075
(405) 744-7125

Oklahoma State University — Institutional Review Board
Jennifer Moore
305 Whitehurst
Stillwater, OK 74075
(405) 744-5700

APPENDIX C

Shari Kessler
2001 N. Perkins Rd.
Stillwater, OK 74075
(405) 372-4201

April, 1996

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s):

I am a graduate student in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at Oklahoma State University. I am conducting a research study for my thesis research project entitled: "*The Nature of Group Time in an Early Childhood Constructivist Curriculum.*"

I intend to observe, with parental consent, the children in _____ classroom in the spring of 1996 (April/May). Observations will be conducted by this researcher several times per week (three or four) before, during and immediately following group time activities. Observations include note taking and audio recording these activities. All materials will be the responsibility of the researcher and will be stored in a secured (locked) place. Tapes and notes will be destroyed upon completion of the study. There will be no identification of the participants (the children or teacher(s)) in the thesis. The regular classroom schedule will not be changed or altered for this study.

This is considered a "minimal risk" study. No risks or discomforts will be placed on any children. The benefits for the project include possible improvement or enhancement of future curriculum development. Any research in the field of education may benefit society because of its direct impact and implications to children in the classroom.

Enclosed is the parent consent form for participating in this project. The parent/guardian may choose at any time during the course of the study to refuse participation. No penalty will result for not participating; this is a voluntary study. If you choose not to participate, please indicate in the appropriate section of the consent form. Your child will not be removed from any activities in the classroom if you choose not to participate. Information about your child will not be used in the thesis if you choose not to participate. Please send in the consent form to your child's teacher by April 22, 1996.

Thank you for your time and quick response.

Sincerely,

Shari Kessler

cc: IRB Approval Committee/Advisor: Dr. Kathryn Castle

Parent Consent Form

I, _____, hereby authorize or direct Shari Kessler,
(Parent/Guardian) (Researcher)

or associates or assistant of his or her choosing, to perform the project entitled: ***“The Nature of Group Time in an Early Childhood Constructivist Curriculum.”***

The researcher will observe group time activities in the regular classroom for approximately four weeks. The researcher will not test, question, or interact with any of the children. No child will be removed from the classroom. The researcher will use audio recordings and note taking during the activities. These tapes and notes will be secured in a locked place during the study and will be destroyed upon completion of the study. The thesis will not identify any children by their names. Regular classroom schedule will be maintained.

___ I do agree that my child may participate.

___ I do *not* agree that my child may participate.

“I understand that participation is voluntary, that there is no penalty for refusal to participate, and that I am free to withdraw my child from participating in this project at any time upon notification of the researcher. I agree to the use of audio recordings and note taking in the classroom by the researcher. I am aware it is the researcher’s responsibility for these materials.”

Signature of Parent/Guardian

Date

If you have any questions, you may contact:

Researcher: Shari Kessler
2001 N. Perkins Rd.
Stillwater, OK 74075

Advisor: Dr. Kathryn Castle
306 Gundersen Hall
Stillwater, OK 74075
(405) 744-7125

Oklahoma State University - Institutional Review Board
Jennifer Moore
305 Whitehurst
Stillwater, OK 74075
(405) 744-5700

APPENDIX D

OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW

Date: 03-27-96

IRB#: ED-96-107

Proposal Title: A STUDY OF THE NATURE OF GROUP TIME IN AN EARLY CHILDHOOD CONSTRUCTIVIST CURRICULUM

Principal Investigator(s): Kathryn Castle, Shari Kessler

Reviewed and Processed as: Expedited

Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved


ALL APPROVALS MAY BE SUBJECT TO REVIEW BY FULL INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD AT NEXT MEETING.

APPROVAL STATUS PERIOD VALID FOR ONE CALENDAR YEAR AFTER WHICH A CONTINUATION OR RENEWAL REQUEST IS REQUIRED TO BE SUBMITTED FOR BOARD APPROVAL.

ANY MODIFICATIONS TO APPROVED PROJECT MUST ALSO BE SUBMITTED FOR APPROVAL.

Comments, Modifications/Conditions for Approval or Reasons for Deferral or Disapproval are as follows:

Signature:


Chair of Institutional Review Board

Date: April 11, 1996

2
VITA

Shari Ellen Kessler

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Science

Thesis: THE NATURE OF GROUP TIME IN AN EARLY CHILDHOOD
CONSTRUCTIVIST CURRICULUM

Major Field: Curriculum and Instruction

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in New Brunswick, New Jersey, the daughter of Mike
Bruckheimer and Caryn Bruckheimer.

Education: Received Bachelor of Science degree in Human Resources with a
major in Early Childhood Education and Development from the University
of Delaware in May 1993. Completed the requirements for the Master of
Science degree with a major in Curriculum and Instruction and a
specialization in Elementary Education in December, 1996.

Experience: Employed as a teacher in 1993-1994 at the Jewish Community Center,
Wilmington, Delaware. Employed as a teacher in 1994-1995 at a nursery
school in St. Kitts, West Indies.