

THE JOURNEY OF AUTONOMOUS EARLY  
CHILDHOOD TEACHERS

By

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Classroom A

All of the children are sitting in their assigned seats doing a worksheet. The room is quiet, except for the footsteps of the teacher as she walks about the room making sure the children stay on task. The room is brightly decorated with ready made bulletin boards that the teacher arranged on the walls. There is a list of about eight rules that the children are to follow. They basically consist of "Don't talk without permission." "Don't get out of your seat without permission." "Don't run." "Keep your hands to yourself." and a few others. The schedule for the day is also posted on the wall. It consists of group time (where the teacher gives direct instruction), seatwork (done individually), snack, recess, and ten minutes of centers. The curriculum for the year is recognition of the alphabet, recognition of numbers to 20, learning the sounds of the letters of the alphabet, learning to write the letters of the alphabet and numbers to 20, learning to write first and last name, and simple math.

## Classroom B

Next door in a different classroom, the children are very active. There is a hum of active participation in the room. Some children are sitting in chairs, some are standing, some are sitting on the floor, and some are lying on the floor. One group of children is building an elaborate zoo out of blocks. Another small group is sitting at a table drawing maps of a zoo. Another small group is starting to play Zoo Bingo and is engaged in a discussion over who should go first. Two children are on the floor with a deck of alphabet animal cards making up their own game with very specific rules. The room is decorated with the children's work. It is an array of arts, crafts, stories, maps, labels, graphs, and a few other meaningful artifacts. There is one rule posted on the wall that says, "Do what you know you should do." It is signed by all the children. There is also a schedule hanging on the wall. It basically consists of large group activities and small group activities. Large group activities include singing, movement, discussion, voting, decision making, storybook reading, and group rewrites of books. Small group activities include the type of activities that were described in the beginning of this particular vignette. There is also a time for snack and recess. The curriculum for the year consists of interacting with and observing



physical objects, forming relationships through meaningful interaction with the environment, and learning appropriate social conventions.

There is a distinct difference in the two kindergarten classrooms just described. The first vignette describes the type of classroom that I experienced as a student. The second vignette describes the type of classroom I eventually experienced as a teacher. As I pause to ponder what has lead me to the point of a child centered classroom, one word comes to mind, and that word is frustration. I experienced frustration as a student who was continuously asked to complete meaningless assignments. I also experienced frustration as a beginning teacher, who was forced to teach in an atmosphere based on control and blind conformity. Through my overwhelming feeling of frustration, I eventually found an alternative that opposed meaningless assignments, control, blind conformity, intolerance, prejudice and submission. The alternative I am referring to is autonomy. Autonomy means being governed by oneself. The opposite of autonomy is heteronomy, which means being governed by others (Kamii, 1985). Autonomy also means that you are able to see other people's viewpoints. It is taking relevant factors into account to make the best decision possible (Kamii, 1981). What does this have to do with education as it

currently exists? Very little as I see it, and that is wherein the problem lies.

#### PROBLEM STATEMENT

The research in education does not fully address how teachers become autonomous. Kamii says that "educators change their beliefs with the public as the pendulum swings, and they jump on bandwagons when new fads appear" (Kamii, p.7, 1981). She also states that the majority of the curriculum decisions are made through a powerful hierarchy without any scientific debate (Kamii, 1981). I once conducted twenty interviews with elementary teachers concerning autonomy. One of the questions asked was, "What is your belief about how children learn?". The majority of the teachers answered "by doing". When I probed with the question, "by doing what?" they had no reply.

Kamii states:

"For centuries educators have assumed that children acquire knowledge by internalizing it from the environment. Constructivism shows, however, that children acquire knowledge not by internalizing it directly from the outside but by constructing it from the inside, in interaction with the environment" (Kamii, p.18, 1991).

Programs that focus on promoting children's knowledge construction such as the second classroom previously described are more likely to promote education for understanding, unlike behavioristic programs such as the

first classroom described (Piaget, 1974). The first vignette was an early childhood classroom based on traditional educational practices which basically subscribes to the empty vessel theory in which the students must be filled with knowledge conveyed by the teacher. The second vignette was an early childhood classroom based on constructivism in which the learner constructs his or her own knowledge. Piaget (1974) and Kamii (1991) identified three kinds of knowledge; physical knowledge, social conventional knowledge, and logico-mathematical knowledge. Physical knowledge is knowledge of an object's external attributes such as size and shape. Social conventional knowledge is knowledge of a culture's conventions made by people, such as in America we celebrate Christmas on December 25. Logico-mathematical knowledge is knowledge of relationships formed in the mind that cannot be observed (Kamii, 1991). Although Piaget and Kamii identify three kinds of knowledge, they are interrelated in many ways. In fact, all knowledge is constructed through a logico-mathematical framework (DeVries, 1987).

Physical knowledge can be gained through interaction with and observation of objects. Social knowledge can be gained through direct instruction because it is arbitrary or conventional knowledge which has been agreed upon by a group of people. Logico-mathematical knowledge can be

gained through putting objects and events into relationships in the mind (Kamii, 1991). Teachers promote the construction of the three types of knowledge when they give children choices, allow children to make decisions and share perspectives, and encourage social interaction (Devries, 1994).

DeVries and Kohlberg maintain that "We know children construct their knowledge, intelligence, and morality basically because they have so many ideas we never teach them" (DeVries and Kohlberg, p. 16, 1987). They also claim that too often educators do not adapt their teaching to how children learn. Children beginning school are especially affected when educators insist they learn what they cannot understand (DeVries and Kohlberg, 1987). For example, place value is traditionally introduced to students in the first grade. Kamii's (1985) research indicates that even by the third grade, the majority of primary children do not grasp the concept of place value. Kamii advocates posing situations in which the students will discover numerical placement themselves rather than telling them about place value and expecting students to absorb the information like a sponge (Gronlund, 1995).

Constructivism and the notion of autonomy do not just apply to children. Many teachers have stated that to attain autonomy meant overcoming their own experiences in

school and their teacher training experiences (DeVries and Kohlberg, p. 380, 1987). There is basically a conflict between these experiences and what the teacher believes to be right. It is the effort to resolve this conflict that helps the teacher attain autonomy (Duckworth, 1987). It is known that autonomous teachers in general are decision makers who are able to take other viewpoints into account (Kamii, 1994). What the research did not show is how teachers evolve or develop into autonomous teachers. If research could paint a clearer picture of how this happens then educators might gain a better understanding of how to facilitate autonomy in all classrooms, preschool through the university setting. Most significantly, such an understanding would greatly affect teacher education courses. Therefore the purpose of this study was to help fill this void by focusing on the question: How do early childhood educators perceive their development of autonomy as teachers? More specifically, the following research questions guided the collection and analysis of the data.

A. Do early childhood educators perceive that their early childhood experiences influence their development of autonomy? If so, in what ways?

B. Do early childhood educators perceive that relationships with others (teachers, professors, or

administrators) influence their development of autonomy?

If so, in what ways?

C. Do early childhood educators perceive that certain choices and decisions played a role in educational experiences, especially as a teacher? How have the consequences of those choices influenced their development of autonomy?

D. Do early childhood educators perceive that disequilibrium in teaching experiences influences their development of autonomy? If so, in what ways?

#### SIGNIFICANCE

Research has shown that for the most part, teachers teach the way they were taught, not the way they were taught to teach (Fosnot, 1989). It is not difficult to understand how this can occur since most teachers spend at least twelve years in traditional education. Therefore, studying early childhood teachers who were able to break out of the cycle, gave us further understanding of what is necessary for education reform. This is in no way meant to imply that we should try to emulate these early childhood autonomous teachers. That would only be a repeat of past mistakes in educational reform. Too often teachers spend their energy on emulation rather than on thinking (Fosnot, 1989).

Murray stated:

"The current reform proposals will fail, as they have in the past, because they attempt to reform education simply by telling teachers (and everyone else) what to do, rather than by empowering them to do what must be done" (Murray, p.29, 1986).

This type of reform is based on the factory model of the Industrial Revolution. The problem is that we no longer live in an Industrial Revolution. Our current world is one of technology and service in which abilities such as problem solving, brainstorming, cooperating, synthesizing, and organizing are necessary (Fosnot, 1989). As Wilucki put it,

"At a time when school improvement rhetoric is voluminous and incongruent and all parts of society call for excellence in education, there is no more important characteristic for teachers to possess than autonomy" (Wilucki, p. 280, 1990).

It is important that teachers feel confident in their own ideas and knowledge of how children learn rather than solely depending on textbooks and tradition. If a teacher feels that they must "cover the curriculum" and follow the textbook then they cannot possibly accept children's ideas of uncovering the curriculum (Duckworth, 1987). Uncovering the curriculum is a phrase used to describe indepth learning that requires problem solving, brainstorming, cooperating, synthesizing, and organizing. The more we know about the development of autonomous early childhood

teachers, the more we will know about excellence in education.

#### BACKGROUND

In recent years, there has been a growing emphasis placed on formal instruction of academic skills in early childhood programs. This emphasis is based on misconceptions about how young children learn (Elkind, 1986). The cacophonous call for "back to basics" and accelerated standardized test scores has caused many educators and non-educators to focus on a narrowed curriculum and obsolete instructional approaches that are incompatible with early learning (Bredekamp, 1986).

Education should be liberating and open minds in a setting where everyone feels at home. Each child should feel a sense of identity in which he or she has the freedom to invent and discover. The curriculum should not be prescribed, rather the curriculum should be emerging (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1993). It is understandable that early childhood classroom teachers feel a great deal of pressure from state mandates, administrators, colleagues, concerned parents and various others. In the end though, it is the teacher's professional obligation to ensure developmentally appropriate practice to each and every student (Bredekamp, 1986).



Edwards, Gandini, & Forman write:

"If teaching is monodirectional and rigidly structured according to some "science," it becomes intolerable, prejudicial, and damaging to the dignity of both teacher and learner" (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, p. 77, 1993).

Even when many teachers view themselves to be democratic, their approach to instruction too often includes curriculum packages with readymade scripts. "This provides a professional justification for waste and suffering" (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, p.77, 1993) All of which is done in the name of education.

There is no doubt that the predominant behavioristic view of education has influenced all of us. This is one reason why Piaget's theory of constructivism is often difficult to understand, accept, and adapt to. It causes us to look through a different lens. We have to view learning and teaching in a new paradigm. "It is a paradigm shift from behaviorism to constructivism" (DeVries & Zan, p. 286, 1994). To sustain such a paradigm shift we must look to those who have already lived the experience. We look to them for understanding and guidance, not so that we can step into the tracks of their journey, instead so that we can each make our own tracks.

## DEFINITION OF TERMS

Autonomy: the ability to govern oneself and to make knowledgeable decisions by taking all relevant factors into account, independently of rewards and punishments (Kamii, 1994).

Heteronomy: the opposite of autonomy in which one is governed by others (Kamii, 1994).

Constructivism: the theory that we construct our own knowledge from within through interaction with the environment (Kamii, Manning, and Manning, 1991).

Equilibrium: the balance between assimilation and accommodation.

Disequilibrium: the imbalance between assimilation and accommodation.

Early Childhood Educator: refers to people working in education programs affecting children from birth through age eight (Bredekamp, 1986).

Constructivist Education: engages interest, inspires active experimentation, and fosters cooperation (DeVries and Zan, 1994).

## ASSUMPTIONS

This study was based on the following assumptions:

1. The study of the lived experience of autonomous teachers gave us insight into teacher autonomy.

2. Autonomous teachers are reflective practitioners who draw on past experiences for self-awareness.

3. The stories of how autonomous early childhood educators perceive their development of autonomy as teachers have some concurrent themes.

#### LIMITATIONS

The autobiographical method of research is often considered problematic because it is subject to memory, bias, and subjective perceptions. At the same time, it clarifies our understanding of experiences which inhabits growth (Graham, 1991) As Grumet stated so succinctly:

"To delete dialogue from this concept of educational experience would be to relegate learning to a series of reactive, conditioned behaviors best described as training" (Grumet, p. 29, 1992).

A certain openness is required for this type of research. Therefore, all of the questions cannot be rigidly preplanned, instead they will emerge from the conversations and written correspondence (van Manen, 1990).

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter will review education reform, research on teaching, constructivism, teacher autonomy, and teacher autobiography.

### EDUCATION REFORM

Our society continuously calls for education reform. Legislators have made numerous attempts to reform our educational system. Throughout the last half century, educators have dealt with top-down mandates, learner objectives, and accountability issues. This section on education reform will address past and current attempts to reform our American educational system. Specific issues of education reform such as, motivation, accountability and teachers' roles will be addressed.

The fact that our country provides a free education for everyone through the twelfth grade is evidence of the important role education plays in our society. Many people outside of the field of education have a vested interest in it for reasons ranging from having children to paying taxes.

Legislators are motivated by such interests to pass bills of legislation that hand down mandates, objectives, and stakes for accountability. Legislators have historically taken an empirical view of education which is basically deciding what the objectives should be and then the procedure for meeting those prescribed objectives. Clandinin and Connelly described this approach in the following manner. "They make clear that for them the distinction between curriculum and instruction is a distinction between ends and means" (Clandinin & Connelly, p. 365, 1992).

The research in education leads one in a different direction when looking at the issue of education reform. It is described by Clandinin and Connelly as the Deweyan view which states that "end and means are so intertwined that designing curricula for teachers to implement for instructional purposes appears unreal, somewhat as if the cart were before the horse" (Clandinin & Connelly, p. 365, 1992).

One of the major differences between these two viewpoints is the role of the teacher. In reviewing the literature, the empirical viewpoint seldom addresses the teacher and if it is attended to, the implied role of the teacher is somewhat that of a robot. The second viewpoint sees the teacher as an integral figure in the role of curriculum decision maker. Clandinin and Connelly stated,

"Teachers and students live out a curriculum; teachers do not transmit, implement, or teach a curriculum and objectives; nor are they and their students carried forward in their work and studies by a curriculum of textbooks and content, instructional methodologies, and intentions" (Clandinin and Connelly, p. 365, 1992).

In the past and present the majority of reforms and mandates have led our nation to making the wrong decisions about what to fix (Berliner, 1984). Kenneth Sirotnik says, "modus operandi of the typical classroom is still didactics, practice, and little else" (Sirotnik, p. 17, 1983). The basic application of education reform has often boiled down to doing more of the same. Constance Kamii cites many factors for this modus operandi. She refers to it as the quick-fix approach (Kamii, 1994). Legislators, in an attempt to hold schools accountable, invariably impose test requirements and graduation requirements. Tests are considered to be the cheapest and most efficient way to measure student performance (Kamii, 1990). It is important to note that achievement tests have been criticized for testing only lower level thinking and becoming ends in themselves because teachers often succumb to overwhelming pressure and teach to the test. Kamii made an astute observation when she said,

"Even though teachers and principals are held accountable to produce higher test scores, policy makers and those who purchase these tests are not held accountable to prove that the tests, in fact, improve instruction" (Kamii, p. 6, 1992).

For true reform to take place, we must look at the whole picture. Early childhood educators have been doing this for quite some time by taking the whole child into account when making decisions about education. Kamii asserts that autonomy should be the aim of education (Kamii, 1994). If this were the aim of education, then drastic changes would occur in classroom practices. Children would be encouraged to make decisions, intrinsic motivation would be fostered, and children would be encouraged to exchange viewpoints (Kamii, 1994). Kamii stated,

"Education that aims to produce autonomy is better suited for life in a democracy than traditional education, which fosters conformity" (Kamii, p. 677, 1994.)

For autonomy to flourish in the classroom, it is imperative to look at the role of the teacher in this endeavor. Holland stated,

"For a long time in education, teachers thought they couldn't do anything to change the system. Close the door to the outside world, their supervisors ordered. Bury students in textbooks and worksheets. Keep them under control. Don't stop. Don't think. Don't worry" (Holland, p. 266, 1997).

Teachers often feel pressure to cover the curriculum (Blasi, 1996). One teacher said she often felt like a worker on an assembly line because she felt pressure to cover all of the mandated objectives and to get through all of the lessons in the textbooks (Holland, 1997).

There has been a great deal of research on teacher

styles and teacher competencies. As Allan Ornstein noted, "Missing in both approaches is research in the human element of teaching" (Ornstein, p. 24, 1993). The human element of teaching is often left out of education reform discussions because it is difficult to measure. It is difficult to measure creativity, problem-solving, imagination, and other forms of high-level cognition (Ornstein, 1993). This approach to teaching and learning requires authentic assessment that goes beyond what standardized tests typically measure (Jones and Whitford, 1997). Many researchers have pointed out that humanity plays an integral role in effective teaching. For example, Nel Noddings wrote a book titled The Challenge to Care in Schools. She said,

"The need for care in our present culture is acute. Patients feel uncared for in our medical system; clients feel uncared for in the facilities provided for them; and children, especially adolescents, feel uncared for in schools." (Noddings, p. xi, 1992).

Maxine Greene has also written about the role of the human element in good teaching in which she discusses the importance of encouraging children to: use their imaginations, communicate openly with each other, and to think for themselves as often as possible (Greene, 1986).

Elliot Eisner seems to agree with Ornstein's viewpoint when he writes of the fallacy of quantifiable research when it comes to excellence in teaching. He notes that when we do so, we are neglecting a valuable part of the learning



process (Eisner, 1985).

Berliner commented,

"Teacher research and teacher evaluation, I believe, should focus on the learner, not on content. It should attend to the feelings and attitudes of students, not just knowledge and skills, because feelings and attitudes determine what knowledge and skills the student will seek and acquire. It should examine the long-term growth and development of students, not short-term objectives or specific tasks" (Berliner, p. 27, 1984).

When reviewing the literature on education reform it seems that the formula for reform is oversimplified by the top-down empirical view and that the means of accountability is not appropriate or authentic. Shields and Knapp stated,

"The schools with the most promising reform efforts are those that set attainable reform goals with long time lines for accomplishing them; focus explicitly on particular aspects of the curriculum and instructional practice while targeting professional development to these changes; put in place a school-level process for considering changes in practice while refraining from making school governance the main preoccupation of the reform effort; and encourage collaborative engagement of staff members with one another and use professional development resources to further this end" (Shields and Knapp, p.294, 1997).

It was also apparent that a key figure missing from previous education reform was the teacher. With the recognition that teachers play a pivotal role in the success of education reform it is necessary to look at the research on teaching.

#### RESEARCH ON TEACHING

Understanding teaching may give insight as to where we

have been in education and where we can go in education. This section will address factors that influence teachers, longterm studies concerning early childhood issues, pedagogy, and teacher education. When teachers subscribe to the traditional methods of teaching based on the behaviorist theory, their work is more routinized and deskilled. They simply follow step-by-step directions of the manuals for textbooks. They dole out rewards and punishments as determined by pre-existing rules. They often feel controlled by mandated curricula (Hargreaves, 1994). This approach to teaching often produces passive learners. Fosnot points out that these teachers are probably products of the same system. It is said that this is residue of the Industrial Revolution (Fosnot, 1989). This approach coincides with the empirical and behaviorist theories that many subscribe to.

Many of these teachers say that they didn't learn how to teach until they started teaching. They feel that their teacher education was not realistic therefore, their techniques and insights were gained through trial and error as teachers (Lieberman and Miller, 1984). It appears that they rely on common sense to make decisions concerning teaching practices. In contrast, the Constructivist viewpoint relies on scientific research based on how children learn (Kamii, 1982).

The research highlights many reasons why teachers rely more on common sense than scientific research. One factor that greatly affects teachers is the increasing intensification of the teacher's work load. A teacher's work is never done. There is always more that they could do. They are constantly asked to deal with all of societies' ills such as drug abuse, child abuse, learning difficulties, violence, and huge amounts of paper work (Hargreaves, 1994). Hargreaves reported,

"Intensification creates chronic and persistent overload which reduces areas of personal discretion, inhibits involvement in the control over longer-term planning, and fosters dependency on externally produced materials and expertise" (Hargreaves, p. 118, 1994).

Another factor that greatly influences a teacher's actions is the relationship between the teacher and the principal, which can often affect a teacher's methodology. Lieberman and Miller commented,

"The principal makes it known what is important, what will not be tolerated, and, in a strange way, sets the tone for tension, warmth, openness, and fear" (Lieberman and Miller, p. 28, 1984).

The principal can set the tone for a school. The principal can be caring and open to teacher's views, thoughts, and practices or the principal can try to stifle creative thinking and problem solving by mandating rules and educational practices (Lieberman and Miller, 1984).

The research on teachers and the dominant factors involved in determining their teaching practices is in

contrast to what the research says is good teaching. A longterm study was done by Weikart and Schweinheart comparing the effects of three different theoretical preschool programs. The study found that students from the constructivist and maturationist programs grew up to be more psychologically adjusted and law abiding citizens than did the students from the behaviorist classroom (Weikart and Schweinheart, 1998).

Another significant study was done by DeVries, Haney, and Zan (1991) concerning the sociomoral atmosphere. The goal of this study was to describe the sociomoral atmosphere in three kindergarten classrooms reflecting different paradigms in educational thought. The general hypothesis of this study was that the sociomoral atmospheres of the three classrooms would be different, and that differences would be manifested in part through teachers' enacted interpersonal understanding. Classroom research is reported on three public-school kindergarten programs in low-income neighborhoods. Children in the three classrooms experienced cooperative (constructivist), strong coercive (DISTAR), and weak coercive/cooperative (eclectic) programs. The reason these subjects were chosen were for the comparable demographics, willingness to be involved in the study, and their chosen paradigm of teaching. The researchers concluded that it is expected that these different

experiences will influence the development of children's interpersonal understanding in ways that favor a leading edge of development when it comes to reciprocal sharing of other's perspective with one's own in the constructivist classroom and a trailing edge of development when it comes to unreflective, poorly regulated contagious enthusiasm in the direct-instruction classroom. Therefore, the unilateral relationship with the teacher in the direct-instruction classroom is extremely heteronomous and does not encourage autonomy. This is a very significant study in that the first principle of constructivist education is that a sociomoral atmosphere must be cultivated in which respect for others is continually practiced. This study has shown us that the sociomoral atmosphere, which is the nature of interpersonal relationships in a group, will be predominantly either coercive or cooperative (DeVries and Zan, 1991).

Barell, Liebmann and Sigel stated,

"Programs to teach students critical thinking, while empowering them to be self-directed, must also stress respect and empathy for the viewpoints of others. To foster improved thinking, then, we must create an environment conducive to developing a sense of autonomy. It is not sufficient to teach our students to solve problems by rote if, when they leave school, they cannot identify daily problems in their lives and work toward solutions" (Barell, Liebmann, and Sigel, p. 14, 1987).

Therefore, curriculum should be based on children's interests and experiences. The teacher is a facilitator,

one who is a resource for the children but not the dispenser of knowledge. This is true of the sociomoral atmosphere also. Castle wrote,

"The teacher does not ask, 'What do I need to do to get this child on track in terms of my goals,?' but rather, 'What needs, wants and concerns have led the child to act in a certain way?' (Castle, p. 209, 1989).

A teacher who promotes autonomy will encourage children to solve their own problems with as little intervention as possible. This type of teacher is often very reflective because they are trying to see the child's perspective.

Castle also wrote,

"Through sensitive teaching, we gain a greater understanding of the child's world. Understanding the meaning a child attributes to a learning situation helps us plan a more child-centered approach. Through children's eyes we discover new perspectives, possibilities and hope" (Castle, p. 212, 1989).

van Manen shared a similar viewpoint when he wrote,

"We pedagogues (teachers and parents) willingly open ourselves to children. This means that we do our utmost to understand what it is like to be in the world as a child" (van Manen, p. 13, 1986).

Pedagogy is conditioned by love, care, hope, and responsibility for the child. Reflection is imperative to pedagogical thoughtfulness (van Manen, 1991).

In light of the research on teaching it is important to address teacher education. Many recent articles have been written concerning practicing what we teach in early childhood teacher education classes. Carol Marshall (1996) feels that reform must begin with her as a university

professor. She bases her practices on research such as Katz when she wrote,

"Katz suggests that students who are learning to teach must experience, not just be told about, those behaviors that they will later be expected to exhibit in their own teaching" (Marshall, p. 44, 1996).

Carol Marshall wrote of her journey in this endeavor. Others have written of their efforts to practice what they teach such as Eleanor Duckworth when she wrote about the having of wonderful ideas (1987). Kathryn Castle shared how she encouraged students to reflect on what it means to construct knowledge through a moon project (1997). Amanda Branscombe shared how she promoted student awareness through Project Books (1995). Bufkin and Bryde wrote,

"Using a variety of techniques also provides a good model for teaching children and if preservice teachers are to become strong teachers, they must see good models. Constructivism is a model of teaching and learning which supports this demand" (Bufkin and Bryde, p. , 1996)

The research on teaching illustrates many of the factors that influence teachers and teacher choices. The review of the literature in this area presented a strong case for developmentally appropriate practices and constructivism from preschool through the university level. Therefore, it is important to take a closer look at constructivism.

## CONSTRUCTIVISM

## Theory

This section will focus on the meaning of constructivism, the theory of constructivism and the role of autonomy in constructivism.

The theory of constructivism is based on Jean Piaget's research of how children learn and develop. Kamii defines constructivism theory:

"Constructivism is a theory that explains the child's acquisition of knowledge as a process of construction from within, in interaction with the environment, rather than as one of internalization from it" (Kamii, p. 1, 1984).

DeVries and Zan wrote the following about Piaget's theory:

"The predominant behaviorist paradigm has influenced all of us. This is why Piaget's theory is such an eye-opener for most people. Piaget's theory leads us to think in a new way about learning and development. The implications of Piaget's theory lead us to think in a new way about teaching. We can speak about these fundamental changes in our world view as a paradigm shift from behaviorism to constructivism" (DeVries and Zan, p. 286, 1994).

Through his research, Piaget proved that children do not acquire knowledge directly from the environment as stated in behaviorist theory. Instead, children construct knowledge from the inside, through interaction with the environment. They do this by going through one stage after another of being wrong (Kamii, 1982). For example, a child



who tells his mother, "Me do myself" did not learn to speak that way by drill and skill. Rather the child constructed that sentence on his own by making relationships in his mind. It is also important to note that knowledge is constructed as an interrelated whole (Kamii, 1982). For example, a child who has a dog as a pet, may think that all animals with four legs are dogs. When he sees a cow for the first time, he may point and say, "Dog". He has assimilated the new information of the visual picture of the cow with what he knows about dogs. His sister might say, "That's not a dog. It's a cow. Cows go moo and dogs go woof." The child might be experiencing disequilibrium because his sister has contradicted his thinking. Later when the child hears a cow go moo, he might accommodate his thinking that cows have four legs like dogs.

The three types of knowledge are an integral part of understanding the theory of constructivism. For example, social knowledge is knowledge from one's culture. When a child speaks English, it is evident that he knows the language of the American culture. The source of social knowledge is other people. Physical knowledge is knowledge of an object through observation and interaction with the object. Logico-mathematical knowledge is knowledge that is constructed through making relationships of how one thing relates to another in the mind. The above example

illustrates this point when the little boy makes a distinction between dogs and cows. The difference is not in the dog or in the cow, rather the difference is in the little boy's mind.

Constructivism is based on scientific theory rather than common sense. This is a distinct difference between much of empiricism and constructivism. For example, it is common sense to believe that a child who can do a math worksheet has a good understanding of number. Piaget's and Kamii's research have shown that children can parrot back information of which they do not have a true understanding (Piaget, 1932; Kamii, 1985). A perfect example of this is a little boy named Alex. He was asked to count the chips laid in front of him. He correctly counted the seven chips. Then he was asked how many chips are there. He said, "I don't know." Alex had not made the relationship in his mind that if he counted seven chips then there are seven chips there. He did not see the relation between counting and number.

Children construct knowledge in many different ways. One of the most important ways that children construct knowledge is through play. All three types of knowledge are constructed through play (Chaille and Silvern, 1996).

"Play offers the child the opportunity to make sense out of the world by using available tools. Understanding is created by doing, by doing with others and by being completely involved

in that doing. Through play, the child comes to understand the world and the adult comes to understand the child" (Chaille and Silvern, p. 277, 1996).

Perspective taking is another way that children construct knowledge. As children have opportunities to share experiences and negotiate, their ability to take another perspective into account develops. That is one reason why conflicts are viewed as learning opportunities in early childhood education (Devries and Zan, 1996). Socialization is also an integral part of the construction of knowledge. Children are social beings and need many experiences in which they can interact with others (Burk, 1996).

Games are another example of ways in which children construct knowledge. When children play games, they have many opportunities to converse, interact with each other, negotiate, follow directions, problem solve, learn skills, and create (Castle, 1990; Kamii, 1985; Dominick and Clark, 1996).

#### Autonomy

One cannot fully understand the theory of constructivism without understanding the role of autonomy.

Kamii says,

"In constructivist education, the teacher gives instruction but believes in the following interactionist principles: Children learn quickly

when they are personally interested and mentally active. The long-range goal of education must be autonomy, and not the ability to recite "right" answers. Teachers must reduce their power and encourage children to exchange points of view honestly to foster the development of autonomy in children" (Kamii, p. 4, 1982).

It is important to note that autonomy does not mean independence or freedom. As Kamii points out,

"Autonomy means taking relevant factors into account in deciding what the best course of action might be for all concerned. There can be no morality when one considers only one's own point of view. If one takes other people's point of view into account, one is not free to tell lies, break promises, and be inconsiderate" Kamii, p.76, 1982).

When educators and parents are asked what their long range goals are for their students and or children, the most common responses are for the children to become adults who are successful, happy, life-long learners, self-directed, responsible, problem solvers, creative, and caring (Boud, 1981; Kohn, 1996). All of the aspects are included and or implied in the definition of autonomy. Kamii stated,

"Autonomy is the ability to govern oneself and to make knowledgeable decisions by taking all relevant factors into account independently of rewards and punishments" (Kamii, 1994).

DeVries and Zan say the same thing in a different way.

DeVries and Zan wrote,

"The attitude of mindless obedience is referred to as heteronomy, in contrast to an attitude of reflective understanding or autonomy. Heteronomy is moral and intellectual regulation by others. Autonomy is moral and intellectual self-

regulation" (DeVries and Zan, p. 31, 1994).

Fosnot made a similar point when she wrote:

"Most educators would probably agree that they want children to believe with personal conviction in such basic moral values as respect for persons. Without belief that arises from personal conviction, children will not be likely to follow moral rules. Nevertheless, educators generally manage children in ways that promote heteronomous rather than autonomous morality" (Fosnot, p. 107, 1996).

Autonomy cannot be mandated. It is not a product but rather it is a process. Therefore, to promote autonomy means to facilitate an atmosphere in which children have the opportunity to be autonomous in the process of learning. This would encompass an atmosphere in which students felt free to take risks, make mistakes, and think for themselves. The teacher would guide the children in decision making, conflict resolution, and perspective taking. Children would be encouraged to negotiate, debate, and interact with each other. Cooperative and collaborative learning would also be encouraged (DeVries and Zan, 1994; DeVries and Kohlberg, 1987; Kamii, 1985). "Children are autonomously capable of making meaning from their daily life experiences through mental acts involving planning, coordination of ideas and abstraction" (Edwards, Gandini, and Forman, p. 75, 1993). For a teacher to create such an environment, then some of their control must be relinquished. The atmosphere should be less teacher directed and behavioristic and more student directed and constructivist. One important part of

relinquishing teacher control is ceasing to use punishments and rewards because their sole purpose is control. Alfie Kohn (1996) says that punishments and rewards work when it comes to temporary compliance. Therefore, if your long-term aim for education is autonomy, rewards and punishments would be counterproductive because they actually encourage heteronomy (Kohn, 1996). DeVries and Zan claim,

"Respecting children requires communicating acceptance and affection. It requires providing an environment that encourages and supports children's expressions of feeling, interests, and values. This means accepting the child's right to feel anger and sadness as well as positive feelings" (DeVries and Zan, p. 59, 1994).

Choice plays an important role in the development of autonomy. Kuhs and Flake (1993) summarized DeVries and Kohlberg's perspective on choice and autonomy when they wrote:

"Rather than accomplishing a certain educational task because it is required, the constructivist asks the learner to select tasks that will help accomplish a specified goal or demonstrate a particular understanding" (Kuhs and Flake, p. 5, 1993).

Kohn makes a similar point when he claimed,

"We are most likely to become enthusiastic about what we are doing--and all else being equal, to do it well--when we are free to make decisions about the way we carry out a task" (Kohn, p. 192, 1993).

Worksheets are another common practice in schools that encourage heteronomy. They are "right" answer oriented, teacher directed, more about parroting information than problem solving. Worksheets are more about assessment than

learning. For example, if a child can successfully complete a worksheet then he or she already knew how to do what it asked. There was not any actual learning taking place (Kamii, 1985). A more appropriate teaching method is through the use of games and real life experiences. Kamii wrote,

"In games, it is the children who decide which game to play and with whom. It is the children who check each other's answers and decide what to do if someone cheats. Games thus encourage children to become more autonomous socially, morally, and intellectually" (Kamii, p. 7, 1982).

It is important to note that there is no such thing as total and complete autonomy. There are only degrees of autonomy. DeVries and Kohlberg explained this well when they wrote,

"In order to discuss contrasting teacher orientations, we set up the polarities of instruction versus construction, reinforcement versus interest, and obedience versus autonomy (or coercion versus cooperation). However, these shifts in teacher's thinking are actually shifts of emphasis. The constructivist teacher does sometimes instruct, does sometimes reinforce, and is sometimes coercive" (DeVries and Kohlberg, p. 377, 1987).

This section reviewed Piaget's theory of Constructivism and the importance of autonomy in the aim of education. In order to promote autonomy in the classroom it is important to have an autonomous teacher. This leads to the next section in the review of the literature.

## TEACHER AUTONOMY

When one understands the theory of constructivism, it is clear that the role of teachers is to help students take increasing responsibility for their own learning (Boud, 1988). Wilucki aptly stated,

“At a time when school improvement rhetoric is voluminous and incongruent and all parts of society call for excellence in education, there is not a more important characteristic for teachers to possess than autonomy” (Wilucki, p. 280, 1990).

Teachers are professionals who should have a considerable degree of autonomy in teaching matters (Glatthorn, 1987). “Excellence in education is the result of decisions made by autonomous teachers” (Wilucki, p. 280, 1990).

Teachers know their students better than administrators and legislators. Therefore, they are better able to determine the needs of the students and how to effectively meet those needs (Glatthorn, 1987). When teachers are bypassed in the decision making process then they receive the message that they should stick to the status quo. The result of this is often teacher burnout (Wildman and Niles, 1987). When teachers as well as children feel that they don't have any control over a situation and that their input is not valued then their self-esteem is greatly reduced (Kohn, 1993). Wildman and Niles wrote,



"Peters and Waterman (1982) in their best-selling book In Search of Excellence, emphasized repeatedly that the most successful companies in our society construct and nurture a culture for learning that is characterized by individual experimentation and problem solving rather than formal, hierarchically driven personnel development efforts" (Wildman and Niles, p. 7, 1987).

There has been a great deal of research concerning the relationship between teachers and principals and the effects of such relationships on teachers. Principals have a lot of influence over the school climate. If the principal at a given school promotes autonomy among the teachers, then the teachers are more apt to be autonomous (Lam, 1983; Bratlie, 1987; Lieberman and Miller, 1984). There is also evidence in the research that collegiality plays a role in teacher autonomy. Teaching is often an isolating experience because there are few opportunities to interact with other teachers. Holland shared the statistic that "Teachers' conversations with adults are usually reduced to sound bites during 20-minute lunches in noisy cafeterias" (Holland, 1997). This is a hindrance to the development of teacher autonomy because research points out that when teachers connect with a colleague or several colleagues they tend to feel a greater sense of support and autonomy (Lam, 83; Boles, 1992; Salmon and Truax, 1998). Boud wrote,

"Autonomy cannot be developed if teachers deny their competence and authority and abrogate their responsibility for facilitating learning. Non-autonomous teachers do not make the best facilitators

of autonomous learning" (Boud, p. 28, 1981).

Fosnot aptly stated,

"An empowered learner is defined as one who is an autonomous, inquisitive thinker--one who questions, investigates, and reasons. An empowered teacher is a reflective decision maker who finds joy in learning and in investigating the teaching/learning process--one who views learning as construction and teaching as a facilitating process to enhance and enrich development" (Fosnot, p. xi, 1989).

Ayers made a similar point when he wrote:

"The teacher must find ways to choose and to act in a shifting, uncertain world. She must find ways to take responsibility for her teaching without guarantees. This, as we shall see, requires a teacher to be wide-awake and fully present in her teaching; it requires a kind of heroism in the classroom" (Ayers, p. 21, 1993).

This section explained teacher autonomy and the role that it plays in education. To further understand teacher autonomy, it is necessary to look at teacher autobiography because it is through teachers' stories that we can build a better understanding.

#### TEACHER AUTOBIOGRAPHY

The review of the literature on teacher autobiography will illustrate how teacher's stories, self-reflection and documentation are the keys to opening the doors to so many questions that have gone unanswered in education.

Ayers says, "Autobiography is a process of self-formation and self-declaration. It is a method that

connects the inner self to the public self" (Ayers, p. 126, 1989). From such a process one can interpret practice and shed light on the journey of how one came to be. Teaching is often measured through quantifiable analysis but there are many aspects of teaching that cannot be measured and quantified. Teacher autonomy is one of those aspects. "A teacher's life is not an orderly professional pathway; rather, it is a personal journey shaped by context and choice, perspective and values" (Jalongo and Isenberg, p. xvii, 1995). It is through narrative, autobiography, and teacher's stories that one must look in order to gain a more indepth understanding of teachers and teaching. "It is our individual and collective stories which present projects are situated and it is awareness of these stories in which is the lamp illumining the dark spots, the rough edges" (Pinar, p. 148, 1988). Teacher autobiographies not only allow for individual reflection but they give others the opportunity to gain insight, see themselves in mirrored reflection, and view other perspectives. Autobiographies have been referred to as "public photograph" because they freeze moments in time even if they are reflective moments (McEwan and Egan, p. 189, 1995). Clandinin and Connelly reiterated this point when they wrote that "we need to understand how to work with teachers to hear their stories of themselves as curriculum makers" (Clandinin & Connelly, p. 385, 1992). Jalongo and

Isenberg devoted a whole book to such work entitled Teachers' Stories in which they stated,

"We contend that it is through careful examination of real-life classroom experiences -- both lived one's self and borrowed from other teachers -- that teachers explore the complexities of what it means to teach" (Jalongo & Isenberg, p. xvii, 1995).

One of their goals in writing this book is to encourage more reflective practice by showing rather than telling (Jalongo & Isenberg, 1995). Schubert and Ayers have similar views concerning the value of reflective practice.

"We remain convinced that conscientious teachers reflect seriously on their work. They think and feel carefully about what they do and why they do it" (Schubert & Ayers, p. ix, 1992).

Reflection is a way for teachers to learn and grow which leads to personal insight. Documentation of such reflection is a way for others to learn and grow which leads to professional development. Graham stated,

"Autobiography permits access to valid sources of information that facilitates the recovery and inspection of ideas of great relevance to education and to the field of curriculum in particular" (Graham, p. 16, 1991).

The purpose of teacher autobiography is not only to gain a deeper understanding of teaching; rather it is to learn from one's experience and make needed changes in teaching and education (McEwan & Egan, 1995).

The review of the literature in this section and the preceding sections clearly points to the important role that the teacher can play in education and education reform.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

#### Nature of the Study

The focus of this study was on the lived experience of autonomy in teaching. Lived experiences are appropriately explored through phenomenological methodology of autobiography (van Manen, 1990). It seems only fitting that to better understand teacher autonomy, the sources to be studied were autonomous teachers. That is the reason why this study lent itself so strongly to a phenomenological study through autobiography. As a method, it clarifies understandings of experience and knowledge (Graham, 1991). Pinar stated: "Understanding is understanding only when it evolves in the context of an individual's life history" (Pinar, p. 41, 1973). Autobiography opens doors to sources of information that facilitate ideas of great importance to education. It can bring into focus areas in education such as teacher autonomy that at present are often dimly perceived and understood (Graham, 1991). It is our individual and collective stories along with our awareness

of these stories that deepen our understanding. Similar to Grumet's (1976) study of students, this study was less interested in autobiography as a record of a teacher's passage through teaching... than as a source of energy and direction for the journey (Graham, 1991).

Phenomenology is the study of the lived experience.

van Manen states:

"The meanings of the lived sense of phenomena are not exhausted in their immediate experience. A rich description is concrete, exploring a phenomenon in all its ramifications. The educator, as author, aims to capture life experience (action or event) in anecdote or story, because the logic of story is precisely that it retrieves what is unique, particular and irreplaceable. The dialogic quality of these devices is obvious, for they engage us, involve us, and require a response from us" (van Manen, p. 450, 1988).

Husserl defined phenomenology as "a scientific discipline of description of how the world is constituted and experienced." He went on to say that "the phenomenological investigator moves underneath the surface of social life to its essences" (Aoki, p. 402, 1988).

Heidegger extended this concept by declaring that "phenomenology is ontology which is a study of the modes of 'being in the world' of human being" (van Manen, p. 184, 1990).

Autobiography is a story of one's life told by someone. It could even be considered a conversation. It consists of relations, interactions and situations that

reveal moments of growth in a search for pedagogical significance (van Manen, 1991). Pedagogy is also grounded in dialogue (Grumet, 1992). "All theory and research were meant to orient us to pedagogy in our relations with children" (van Manen, p. 439, 1988). Pedagogical theory has to be theory of the particular case, of the unique. It starts with and from the particular case, searches for the universal qualities and returns to the particular case (van Manen, 1988). Aoki says:

"To undertake to reorient ourselves so that we overcome mere correctness so that we can see and hear our doings as teachers harbored within pedagogical being, so we can see and hear who we are as teachers" (Aoki, p. 27, 1992).

This experience can be approached in a phenomenological study of the relationship of one person to his or her world (Grumet, 1992).

Phenomenological human science is the study of lived experiences and it attempts to describe and interpret these experiences. In a broad sense phenomenology is scientific. It is systematic in that it uses certain modes of questioning, reflecting, focusing and intuiting. Human science strives for exactness and rigor by aiming for interpretive descriptions that are full and complete with detail (van Manen, 1990).

In The Good Preschool Teacher, (1989), William Ayers reported research on the life experiences of six teachers.

One of his main interests in doing the study was to find out how they came to be the teachers they are. This question and others were researched phenomenologically through autobiography. He stated reform proposals and the lack of respect for early childhood teachers as two of the main reasons for doing this study. He suggested, instead of the overused and unsuccessful "trickle-down" theory of reform that it might be more productive to allow reform to "trickle-up" (Ayers, 1989). Because this study was so similar to the one done by Ayers, his methodology became a pertinent guide for this research. Many of the questions that were planned for the conversational interviews were similar if not the same as his. This is not to suggest that our studies are the same, rather they are complementary to each other. The present study built upon the previous one by specifically focusing on the development of autonomy in teaching.

#### DATA SOURCES

Purposeful sampling was utilized for the selection of participants in this study. Patton states:

"The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research" (Patton, p. 169, 1990).



I first sought and received permission from Institutional Review Board to conduct research with human subjects. I then asked three different people whom I consider to be expert authorities on autonomy (as defined in Chapter 1 of this paper) for a referral of an autonomous teacher who would add depth and richness to the study of teacher autonomy (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). These three expert authorities had either conducted research on autonomy or had written about autonomy in the professional literature. All three had been influenced by the work of Constance Kamii, a recognized expert on constructivism and autonomy. If for some reason the individual referred was unwilling or unable to participate or if it was not a good match between the researcher and the participant then I would have gone back to either the original expert or found a fourth expert.

I initially contacted participants by phone and if both parties agreed, a formal interview session was scheduled. Further contact was made as often and in the manner that the study required. If it became clear during the first interview session that for whatever reason the information was not forthcoming, the participant would have been thanked and the interview would be terminated. At that time I would have returned to the expert or sought out a fourth expert for another referral. The number of

participants was limited to three. This was enough to give an adequate description of how autonomy develops. The purpose of this study was not to generalize but to focus on specific individuals and their perceptions of how their autonomy as early childhood teachers developed. The richness of the information was the goal, not the volume (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, and Allen, 1993).

#### QUESTIONS INVESTIGATED

I questioned the phenomenon of how early childhood educators perceived their development of autonomy as teachers. I did this by studying autonomous teachers and transforming their lived experiences into a textual expression of its essence (van Manen, 1990). I conducted conversational interviews with each participant. One purpose for this was to use it as a way of exploring and gathering narrative material that may be a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of how teachers come to be autonomous. Initial questions for the conversational interviews included the following. Additional questions would emerge during the interview process.

\* What led you to become a teacher?

\* What role did your family play in your decision to teach?

Do you remember any early experiences that affected your decision to teach?

\* What was your formal teacher education like? Did it prepare you for what you face in the classroom today? Explain.

\* What teachers have you admired in your life? Why?

\* During your teaching career, were there any colleagues or mentors who influenced you? If so, how?

\* Why do you teach the way you do?

\* How do you decide on the curriculum used in your classroom?

\* How are the rules devised in your classroom?

\* Tell me about your typical school day.

\* What is your role in the lives of your students?

\* What are your goals for your students? How do you strive to meet these goals?

\* Are there any conflicts between your goals and the schools goals? If so, what are some examples?

\* Have you ever felt like you were out on a limb as a teacher? Tell me about that.

\* Can you remember at what point you felt confident with your philosophy and practical knowledge? Explain.

\* Can you describe the central teaching ideas that guide your work and how you came to adopt them?

- \* How have you changed as a teacher over the years?
- \* What experience or experiences helped solidify your own felt teacher autonomy?
- \*What is your perception of how present activities influence your continued development of autonomy?
- \* Do you ever feel like leaving the profession? If so, why and why do you stay?

Other questions emerged as well as these were modified. A certain openness is required in human sciences research that allows for emerging directions, techniques, and procedures that are not always foreseeable at the outset of a research project (van Manen, 1990).

#### DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

The following procedures were utilized to obtain information about the questions upon which this study was based:

1. Both scheduled and spontaneous conversational interviews were recorded in person and by phone.
2. After the preliminary drafts were written, the participants were given copies of the text that concerned their own personal story. They were requested to read, reflect and comment on this text. Dialogue about their reflections and comments took place between myself and the participants. Through such dialogue, consideration for

additional comments and /or deleted comments would be negotiated if needed.

#### DATA ORGANIZATION AND INTERPRETATION

It is important to keep in mind that when referring to phenomenological themes, they are not conceptual formulations or categorical statements, rather they are a structure of experience. Themes give order and control to research and writing. I used the selective highlighting approach in which I listened to or read a text several times and asked what seemed essential or revealing about how early childhood educators perceive their development of autonomy as teachers. I then highlighted those statements. This was done with the transcribed conversational interviews and phone conversations (van Manen, 1990).

I used the emerging themes as generative guides for writing the research study. The conversational interviews were reconstructed into life stories. The themes were the tools that helped portray a deeper understanding of how early childhood educators perceived their development of autonomy as teachers (van Manen, 1990).

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

#### Introduction

The main question for this study was: How do early childhood educators perceive their development of autonomy as teachers? This question was divided into four specific parts.

A. Do early childhood educators perceive that their early childhood experiences influence their development of autonomy? If so, in what way?

B. Do early childhood educators perceive that relationships with others (teachers, professors, or administrators) influence their development of autonomy? If so, in what ways?

C. Do early childhood educators perceive that certain choices and decisions played a role in educational experiences, especially as a teacher? How have the consequences of those choices influenced their development of autonomy?

D. Do early childhood educators perceive that disequilibrium in teaching experiences influence their development of autonomy? If so, in what ways?

I had indepth conversational interviews with three teachers Joy, Lark, and Kira which resulted in approximately 450 pages of data. I chose to include only a portion of data from the conversational interviews of Joy, Lark, and Kira in Appendix A, B, and C. This represents a sample from the interview script. The author can be contacted for a copy of the full interview transcripts.

#### JOY

The first participant that I have chosen to write about was recommended to me by one of the other participants in this study. During one of our many breaks, I was explaining to her that I was still looking for a third participant. She immediately thought of Joy. I then contacted Joy, explained about my study and she eagerly agreed to be a part of it. Joy was the last teacher that I interviewed. I suppose I chose to write about her first because she was fresh on my mind. She teaches first grade in an urban school district. She is married to an educator and they have two school age children.

### Early Childhood Experiences

Joy did not have many memories of her early childhood experiences that she felt related to her development of autonomy. Although, she had two elementary teachers that she loved along with many positive music experiences in school. She felt that those experiences played a role in her decision to become an elementary music teacher. Joy commented, "Education was viewed as an acceptable career choice for a woman at this time in my life." Many of her friends also chose it as a career. Joy's husband was an education major when they started dating. They envisioned a lot of quality family time because of the hours and summers off.

### Early Relationships with Professionals

After three frustrating years of teaching music, Joy took nine years off to raise her children. She had not been very satisfied as a music teacher because she constantly struggled with getting control over the students. She had been taught in her elementary courses many different behavioristic discipline techniques. The principal of her school often encouraged her to make sure that her students were quiet and obedient. Joy said, "I look back on it now and I think, how stupid. I had a principal who was



wonderful but she wanted the students to be quiet even when they changed from one song to the next. Adult choirs aren't even quiet during that time. Everybody stops and talks and that's part of the fun of it." To appease her principal, Joy started using Assertive Discipline to insure control over her music students. She commented, "I just kept thinking there's got to be a better way to do this. Then I would think I must not have control of the classroom very well to even have to be using this." This focus on behavior took much of the joy out of being a music teacher.

While Joy was focusing her energies on being a mother, she volunteered in her kids' preschool, kindergarten and first grade classes. It was during this time that she decided to go back to school and study early childhood education. Joy also remembers considering law school as a career choice. Times had changed and women's roles were changing too. Being in her kids' classrooms played a large role in her final decision to study early childhood education. Those experiences impacted her life and she knew then that working with young children was what she wanted to do with her life. She said, "I knew that's what I wanted to do. I never really had that feeling about music but going into early childhood felt right. I knew it was something that I was going to love to do." Joy stepped into this career with more awareness than she had possessed at

the young age of twenty. She knew the hours were exhaustive and the issues unending but she had found something in this new career choice, her passion.

This new found passion was triggered by Joy's first early childhood professor. This professor started out talking about constructivism and how children construct their own knowledge. This was the first time that Joy had ever been exposed to constructivist theory. She was amazed at how much sense it made. She commented on how her early childhood education professors reinforced their statements through research. This made a significant impact on Joy. Her previous experiences in education classes and with other teachers had been to use certain methods because they "worked" or because that is the way things have always been done. Joy stated, "I think that if I had known what I do now about how children learn, then I would have enjoyed teaching music more than I did. But, I was just so intent on 'not hearing a pin drop' that I was miserable. I just kept thinking there has to be a better way to do this."

In many of Joy's early childhood education classes, a common assignment was to make files of articles that would back up her teaching practices. Everything had to be based on research. She stated, "In my music education classes, they didn't do anything like that. They just told us how to teach and didn't tell us why." Now that she knows the

theory behind how children learn, she evaluates her actions as a teacher with the question, "Does this meet with what I know about children?". She made the comment, "When I came out of early childhood, I felt like I was ready to start in a classroom and know what to do and in music I was panicked. I did not know what to do. I really didn't."

#### Choices and Decisions as a Teacher

One thing that Joy was not prepared for when she began teaching again after she had her early childhood education degree, was the animosity that other teachers would feel toward her. She said, "I don't think I had a clue. I was real naive about that." Joy is different from the other teachers in that her methods of teaching are based on how children learn. She also does much to promote autonomy in her students. This set her apart from her colleagues because they subscribe to more traditional methods of teaching and discipline. Because of these differences, she has been ostracized in many different ways. Some examples are that the recess times have been changed around by teachers and they didn't tell her. Some teachers have left the school building unlocked on the weekend and moved her name around so that it would look like Joy was the last one out. People have gone through her files at school when she wasn't there. Her requests for ordering materials have not

always been carried out. She even walked in on another teacher while she was calling a school board member to accuse Joy of not teaching the state mandated skills. When Joy finished explaining these situations, she sighed and said, "I don't know if I can stay here."

Except for the support that Joy receives from her building principal, she has had to look outside of her school site to find acceptance of what she is trying to achieve as a teacher. There are a handful of colleagues within the same school district as Joy that have befriended her or acted as mentors. One such colleague teaches second grade at a different school. Joy stated, "She has taught me to quit caring so much about what other people think and to worry about the kids. She keeps on telling me if you'll just listen to the kids, they will tell you what you need to be doing." Joy first came to know this person when her son had her for a teacher. Joy was initially impressed by how this teacher developed a real community in the classroom. She commented, "She develops this real community in that classroom and the kids are real caring about each other and real empathetic."

Joy became allies with another teacher in her district when her kids had a different teacher. Other parents of children in the classroom criticized the teacher for not utilizing more traditional methods of teaching and claimed

that all the children did was play. Joy defended the teacher's actions and through this ordeal, they bonded as friends and colleagues.

Another teacher in the district has mentored Joy in a more specific way, in that she shares ideas with her and she helps Joy reflect on her teaching practices. When Joy tries something new like the Project Approach, a child centered approach in which children actively engage in project work, she shares what went well and what didn't seem to work out. They share frustrations and suggestions for problems. It is very much a give and take relationship. Joy met this particular teacher through an inservice meeting. The teacher felt empathy for her because she knew that Joy was being isolated in her school.

Joy is only in her second year of early childhood teaching and she is still trying to find her way. She truly values the support and assistance that she has found in this handful of comrades in her district.

Joy also continues to rely on research in giving her support for her teaching practices. She is currently rereading Bobby Fisher's book about how she does her first grade. Joy is still struggling with doing the projects in her first grade classroom. She completely agrees with the theory behind the Project Approach but she has yet to be satisfied with fully implementing it in the classroom.

During Joy's first year of teaching she mainly utilized the center approach with a strong emphasis on the Wright Group reading program. This year, she has been struggling with challenging herself to take her teaching a step further through the Project Approach. She states, " I know that's the direction I'm headed, if I can just figure out how to get there. I believe it is best for the children because it involves them in their own learning, they're creating their own curriculum and it's just so important for them to do that." She also stated, "I've read so much about it, that I know it's the best thing for these kids." Joy felt confident of this because of the research she had read.

When asked if there were any conflicts between her goal and the school's goals, Joy stated, "That's pretty much everything." She said, "My principal keeps saying over and over that she wants a balance and I told her to tell me what wasn't balanced about my program and I would fix it." The principal conveyed to Joy that she felt like her program was wonderful and that she likes what she does. Joy feels like her principal is caught in the middle. She knows that she gets pressure from the central office to make sure that all the teachers are teaching the necessary skills. Joy said, "The people who are in a position of authority don't understand what I am doing and it is difficult to explain. This week I sent all of my classroom newsletters to the

director of Elementary Education for this district, to show him how I taught the task skills in my class. Every weekly newsletter states the skills that we've gone over, so I mailed him a package about three inches thick."

Another goal of education that differs between Joy and the school in which she teaches is one of autonomy. As previously stated, Joy values her autonomy and her students' autonomy. Joy shared many examples of how the teachers at her school cite promote the opposite of autonomy, which is heteronomy. One such example is the goal of reading. During an Individual Education Plan (IEP) meeting concerning one of Joy's students, the only recommendation made was phonics. Joy voiced her concern that this might not fit the child's needs or learning styles. Joy shared her classroom observation that this child was beginning to experience some success in reading and she is relying heavily on context clues. Joy is not against phonics but she believes that as educators we need to focus on how the child learns best and that is not always the same for everyone. After sharing this story with me, Joy said, "I think the whole idea, of autonomy is disturbing in this building because they are of the opinion that the teacher is the authority and the children mind the teacher. They don't even know what you are talking about when you mention the word autonomy. There is just so much miseducation."

Another example of how her goals conflict with the school's goals are that the majority of the classrooms are arranged for individual work rather than group work. Interaction among students is not encouraged, in fact it is often a reason for punishment. Conformity is valued to the degree that everybody does the exact same math assignment on the exact same day. The children are placed in reading ability groups in most classrooms. There are thirty to forty playground rules that are to be enforced and followed. The children's art work is exactly alike because there is a model provided by the teacher that the children are to follow. The curriculum is predetermined for each grade level and if a child does not fit in with that predetermination then they are retained. A typical example of the heteronomy imposed in this school is an incident that occurred during lunchtime in the cafeteria. Joy said, "I heard a teacher that was on duty say that if anybody says one more word the whole entire class is going to sit against the wall at recess. That kind of stuff goes on all of the time. The whole class is punished if anyone does the wrong thing."

Joy also described the teachers' view of team teaching at this school. They believe that team teaching is planning activities together so that everyone in the same grade level is doing the exact same thing. They also occasionally put



two classes together for science so there will be forty kids in one room all doing the same science assignment so the other teacher can have time off and then he or she will teach math in the same manner. These are just a few of the examples in which Joy's goals conflict with the other teachers' goals at the school in which she works.

When asked how she came to adopt her central teaching ideas, she contributed it to her preparation in early childhood education. She also continues to read and reread books that focus on how children learn. Joy said, "Sometimes when I'm feeling really down or questioning myself, then I go pick up a book and reread it and that reaffirms my methods of teaching." She also stated, "I'm more tolerant of other people's ideas from when I first started teaching. Rather than being angry, I've begun to see that they just don't understand. I've started to read more. That's probably because I don't have other people in the building I can go to for ideas. I've learned that the students will learn what they need to know." Joy shared that she wasn't always so confident in her choice of teaching methods. There were times that she second guessed herself and her knowledge of how children learn. At these times, she would resort to giving children worksheets or getting out the basal readers. Each time she did this her students showed her how much they really knew and she came

to the realization that "I've wasted valuable time". She said, "when they play math games they're probably going through 50 to 100 addition and/or subtraction problems each day. You can't do that on a worksheet. There's no way they're getting the same practice and plus they're having a great time."

#### Disequilibrium

Joy attributes her continued development of autonomy to various factors such as reading and studying research, listening to her students, and relying on a constructivist network of people. She stated, "Up until last summer, I was still in classes and that was a real source for me. I wish there was something like that when you finished because I feel a real need to learn more. I feel like I'm just starting to understand this. I still call professors that I've had and talk to them a lot. I also call other people that I know teach like I do. I think that reinforces that this is the right thing to do."

Other factors that have influenced Joy's teaching methods are the NCTM standards, the NAEYC standards and Piaget's research. For example, Joy no longer uses any worksheets to teach math. She relies heavily on Kamii's games. Joy said, "I think that their minds are more actively engaged when they're playing games. There's

conversation going on, they have feedback immediately if they've got the wrong answer, when the kid says, 'no it's not it's twelve' and then they have to think and reason with each other." Joy does admit that she is not where she wants to be as a teacher especially where curriculum decisions are concerned. She wants the curriculum to be determined by her students to a large degree. Her first year of teaching, she relied on a lot of teacher made materials and she worked from units of study that other teachers shared with her.

This year she has relied more on the children's interests to determine what units to focus on. For example, she noticed several boys had started drawing rocket ships and space shuttles. The class ended up studying these things for about three or four weeks. Joy is trying to move away from centers and toward projects. This is a struggle for her because it is so different from her past teaching experiences. For the most part, she is still determining the units of study but she has been able to feel comfortable allowing the students a great deal of free choice within the predetermined units of study. Joy is reading, talking with other teachers and challenging herself to give her students more autonomy. Another obstacle that Joy has in relinquishing the decision for the units of study to the children is the school in which she works. For example, last year she had a class that really wanted to get into

oceans. When the second grade teacher discovered that Joy's first grade class was studying oceans, Joy was notified, in no uncertain terms, that oceans was a second grade topic and she was not to touch it. There is a list of what units are covered by each grade level and no one else is supposed to teach those units. This has been a source of frustration for Joy and a problem that she has not figured out how to handle. These frustrations interfere with Joy's goals for her students. She wants them to try to become as independent as they can.

She views her role as one of facilitator. To her this means that her role is to create an atmosphere of learning and thinking by offering her students many opportunities for discovery and indepth thinking. She wants her students to know that it is okay to make mistakes because it is through our mistakes that we often learn the most. More than anything else her ultimate goal for her students is for them to be autonomous. Joy realizes that this is a gradual process that must begin at an early age. She feels that by giving children choices while adults are around to give guidance and support leads to the students growing up to be good citizens who have learned to solve their own problems and make good decisions. Once again, this presents another conflict between Joy's goals for the students and the school's apparent goals for the students. Joy shared her

disappointment with the way things are handled on the playground. She feels that the other teachers play the role of judge when it comes to children's disputes. They want to get to the bottom of the problem and then dole out the punishments. Joy, on the other hand, wants children to solve their own problems in a way that they think is fair. She views her role as a facilitator of conflict resolution. This leads to a problem of inconsistency on how playground issues are handled by the teachers. Joy described one such example of inconsistency when she told me about a teacher who was livid because one of Joy's students had filled his pants with rocks at recess. This teacher, who was on duty, called Joy outside and proceeded to scream at this child in front of two other classes. Joy asked the child why he had done this. He said that he wanted to see how many rocks would fit into his pants. Joy asked him how he was going to get them out. He said that he was going to dump them somewhere. Joy told him to go back out on the playground and take them out of his pants. The teacher looked at Joy in disbelief. She wanted to know if that was all Joy was going to do. The teacher felt that he should lose his recess and he should be written up because he didn't know how to play on the playground. Joy ignored the teacher and went out to help the little boy. Joy said, "By the time I got to him, he was shaking all over and crying. I told him

that we all do silly things when we are kids and not to worry about it. At one point he stopped crying and we both started laughing because we couldn't get some of the rocks out. I commented to him that I bet he wouldn't do that again. That is all that needed to be said." This is very similar to how Joy handles discipline in the classroom. She works hard to establish a community in which every member feels trust and mutual respect toward one another. The kids in her class devise the rules. When a problem arises that concerns the majority of the class then they have a class meeting. The children state the problem, brainstorm possible solutions, and choose what they think will really help.

Another example of Joy feeling like she is out on a limb concerns the issue of retention. Joy stated, "Most of the teachers in this school have the idea that the curriculum is determined by the grade level and if the child is not ready for the curriculum then he or she should be retained." Joy has the opposing view that the curriculum should be determined by the students. She is also very knowledgeable of research that reports the ill effects of retention on children. Joy is openly criticized for not subscribing to the general practice of the school.

An additional area of contention is assessment. Joy commented, "I know that I've developed really good thinkers

in this class but I also know that they won't be assessed in the following years on their higher level thinking skills." The students will all be given standardized achievement tests which assess lower level thinking skills.

Joy spends a great deal of her time defending her teaching practices to parents, colleagues, administrators and school board members. She is disturbed by how much time and energy this takes away from her preparations for teaching. She said, "I spend most of my time defending myself. Then there's not the time needed to really engage in the activities for the children." The majority of the skepticism over Joy's teaching practices originates from her colleagues. When her colleagues make claims to parents and school board members that Joy does not teach certain skills or does not get the children ready for the next grade, others begin to question her. Joy tries to counterbalance such statements with newsletters, articles, and verbal discussions.

When Joy was repeatedly asked why she continues to teach this way considering all of the conflicts and criticism she is under, she invariably stated, "Because it is the right thing to do for the children." She also stated that she would quit her job before she quit doing what was right for the children. She insinuated that she could not live with herself if she conformed to the status quo and

traditional practices that exist in many schools today. She has thought about leaving the profession but continues to stay because she believes so strongly that it is the right thing to do. She considers working on her doctorate so she can teach at the university level, but it doesn't seem to be the right time in her life for that. She does question whether she could teach others to teach this way, knowing what might be in store for them. Joy questions whether it is possible to have harmony when a teacher tries to be autonomous in such heteronomous educational systems that are so prevalent in our society at present.

Joy is currently trying to get a transfer within her school district. She desperately wants to get away from the atmosphere of repression in her current school. She also wants to teach kindergarten for a few years because her teaching methods are more accepted with that age level. Joy feels that she could build a good reputation for herself as a kindergarten teacher and then when she taught first or second grade again, she would have more clout based on experience. Joy is in a state of disequilibrium and she is working hard to find her place in this world of education.

#### Summary of Joy

Teacher education seemed to have the most influential impact over Joy's development as an autonomous teacher.



Once she learned about constructivism, she seemed to feel that she could better defend her teaching practices. In fact, armed with such knowledge, she found herself unable to conform to the heteronomous agents in the system where she taught. It is evident that teacher education played a significant role in Joy's own felt teacher autonomy because that was the major difference from when she taught music. As she stated, "In my music classes, they didn't do anything like that. They just told us how to teach and didn't tell us why."

Joy found her relationships with professionals who support her to be a great source of comfort. Their encouragement and guidance influenced Joy's autonomy. It is through discussions with these colleagues that she shared her frustrations, disappointments, and successes. Joy looked to these people for guidance when she was attempting something new and different in the classroom. She also looked to them for moral support when she was dealing with the animosity of the teachers at the school in which she worked.

At the time of the interviews, Joy did not feel that her early childhood experiences played a specific role in her development of autonomy.

In reflecting on Joy's journey, it became clear that disequilibrium played a significant role in Joy's autonomy

as a teacher. Joy felt very uncomfortable teaching music, mainly because of discipline factors. Internally, she disagreed with the discipline approach that the principal desired, yet she was unable to defend her beliefs. When Joy was ready to go back to work, she chose not to return to that career because of her feeling of disequilibrium. She ended up choosing to enter into early childhood education. She found herself very stimulated by the teacher education she received in the field of early childhood education. Through research and knowledge of how children learn, she was finally able to defend what she had felt internally as a music teacher and as a mother.

Joy was somewhat in disequilibrium when it came to her teaching practices. She struggled with the Project Approach because she was finding it difficult to actually implement it in the classroom. Joy felt uneasy about allowing the children to decide what projects they wanted to study because of the lack of time to prepare and gather materials. Joy was dealing with this at the time of the interviews by reading more, talking with colleagues, and making small steps toward the project approach in her teaching practices.

Joy was still searching for a way to be an autonomous teacher without enduring animosity from colleagues. She felt that transferring to a different school might be the answer. She also felt that it might be helpful if she

taught Kindergarten for a few years, where her teaching style is much more accepted and gain experience. Joy was struggling to find serenity in her professional life.

#### LARK

The second participant was recommended to me by a fellow doctoral student who had just completed her a research on child autonomy in this person's classroom. Lark is currently a second grade teacher in an urban school system. She has been an educator for many years and was very comfortable in sharing her life experiences with me.

#### Early Childhood Experiences

When asked about her early childhood experiences and how those experiences influenced who she is today, Lark immediately started talking about her parents and her heritage. She described her parents as thinkers who were very proud of their heritage. They had faced many situations in which they were persecuted for being Native American. For example, her father was whipped in boarding school for not speaking English. Lark's parents taught her to take pride in her heritage. For example, her mother always told her to tell her teacher that she is Indian. Lark was very different from the rest of her family. She was vivacious and talkative. She remembers her father with

a smile on his face, saying to her mother in reference to Lark, "She's out there with the moon and the stars." Her parents loved her unconditionally and always made her feel safe and secure. Lark stated, "Childhood among Indian people is considered sacred." Lark related her heritage to her teaching through the following statement. "I am Choctaw Indian and I've always been interested in natural remedies as opposed to intrusive other kinds of things. My teaching is natural also, it comes from within - from within me and from within the kids."

A need for authenticity came early in her life. She started taking dance lessons which is something that the Baptist church that she belonged to opposed strongly. Her parents owned and worked at a print shop which was the family business at the time. There were days that they could not get away to take Lark to her dance lessons. Lark says, "I remember thinking it quite special that the Baptist minister would come pick me up and take me to my dance lesson. That is still quite special to me. He took a lot of flack for it too. I know that people thought less of him for doing that but I also know that he was living according to his own moral autonomy."

Another significant experience in Lark's childhood occurred while growing up and going to a public school. She commented, "I realized that all children were not treated

equally and I did not like that." She grew up in a protestant community where Jewish people were considered to be less than others. Lark never felt that this was right, even as a child. Even at this stage in her life, Lark was a deep thinker. She attributed her parents and the way they lived their lives as a role model and influence in her own life. She said, "My parents did not just follow anybody blindly. They stressed importance on who the person was inside."

Another childhood experience, that impacted Lark's life, took place where she grew up in the 50's. Every Friday, Lark and her little sister would take the payroll to the bank and then they would walk back to the print shop with all the cash. She started doing this in the second grade. Lark still marvels at the trust that her parents gave her and her little sister, although at the time it was a part of their everyday life. The townspeople knew that the girls did this and they helped look out for them. Lark said, "Occasionally we would be a little late coming back so my mother would call the drugstore. The owner would tell her that we were there getting a lime coke. It was a community and that is partially why I think community is the only way to grow up. And if you don't have one where you live maybe you can have one where you really live, inside a classroom." Lark summarized, "I didn't grow up spoiled but

I grew up feeling like I was an important part of a larger community and that was a wonderful feeling."

When I asked Lark why she decided to become a teacher, she responded passionately. "I always knew that I was a teacher and not that I would be a teacher. I was a teacher." She also stated, "I think I've always had a direction. One thing has seemed to lead to the next quite beautifully. It is the process of life that is important to me."

Lark thought about going into Special Education but her parents discouraged her. They felt that she was too sensitive and would become consumed with her future students' difficulties and dilemmas. This in itself was unusual for her parents because they usually let Lark make her own decisions without a lot of input from them. It was also somewhat surprising because her parents had met at Central State Teacher's College and her mother had been a teacher. They both always had a high regard for education. Even though Lark trusted her parents instincts, she was still determined to teach. She also wanted to teach Indian kids because her father was half Choctaw. Lark remembered knowing when she was a child that she was going to be a teacher, a missionary and a nurse. In her mind, she could be a form of all three teaching special education with Indian children.

## Early Relationships with Professionals

Lark majored in Elementary Education. She also took several sociology courses because of her interest in teaching Indian children. Lark said about her teacher education, "You know I really did my best to prepare myself, but nothing ever did. I always tried to tailor my learning to what I thought I would need to know but it was very, very methodical and by the book." Although she enjoyed school, she felt that her teacher education didn't give her what she needed. It was oriented toward linear learning and task skills. She did note however, that she took an elective with a professor which illuminated education for her. She stated, "Everything I believed happened to be early childhood theory. From that point on, everything I've done has had an early childhood theory as the base. Early childhood theory is the basis for the learning experience." This realization led Lark to get her Masters in Child Development. She had a great respect for her child development professors because they had a great influence on her life. She commented, "The teachers who challenged me the most are the ones I think of the most."

Lark's first teaching job was at a remote village in Zia Pueblo, New Mexico. She taught kindergarten there for one year. She describes this as a wonderful experience.

She also learned a lot that year. She said, "Nothing off the shelf worked with these kids." She found that she needed to relate learning to their culture, family, and surroundings. It had to be authentic. She left this teaching position because of family obligations and moved back to Oklahoma. She was hired as a kindergarten teacher at a public school. She remembers feeling optimistic, excited, and confident. Unfortunately these positive feelings were short lived. The classroom in which she was assigned to teach in was made up of four brick walls without any windows. This turned out to be a metaphor for the experience that followed. The principal was uncomfortable with Lark's teaching style. For example, when the principal observed Lark relating children's literature to learning and their lives, she questioned the value of such activities. She told Lark that she needed to follow the curriculum that the school had adopted. There were several instances of this same scenario in the following weeks. They just did not understand each other. After three or four weeks, Lark decided to resign. Lark said about the experience, "In New Mexico, I had a very deep experience with the children and community. It was very powerful! In this new school, I just knew immediately that I didn't fit at all. I was so sad that my dream was shattered. I wanted to do this because I was a teacher. I am a teacher. I was born to be



a teacher." She also commented, "I could have chosen to jump through the hoops and do this but I just couldn't sell out and not be true to myself. I knew I had something to give and I had to be somewhere that I was free to give it."

After working at a daycare for awhile, Lark found herself in the office of the person who was in charge of Indian Education in the Department of Human Relations Studies. They clicked immediately. He wanted her to share her first year's experience teaching Indian children because it struck a cord of truth with him. This is when she started her "dream job" working as an educational consultant. She said of this job, "Things that worked with kids, I did with adults. I basically inspired others to do what they're here to do." She did this locally for four years and then started doing it on a national level. She continues to be an educational consultant part time, to this day. She exclaimed, "This was my springboard to my complete freedom forever!"

She was invited to teach reading K-6 and help develop curriculum at an Indian school in another state. She described this as a very enjoyable working environment. She had her first and only child during this time period. She was going to quit teaching and stay home to take care of her baby. The school valued her so much that they made a nursery for her baby so she could bring him to school each

day. After a few years, Lark came back to her home state because her mother was ill. She worked for six years as a Curriculum Specialist and Teacher Trainer. At the end of the six years, they lost their contract so she went to work for the State Department in charge of Teacher Education and as the Director of State Programs in Indian Education. Lark bucked the "good old boy system" and effected some changes of which she is really proud. She wrote community based curriculum and she worked so that people with native language were given credit for foreign language. She was on the road a lot. Her job was very stressful and she was a single parent by this time in her life. The tolls of the situation were starting to affect her health. This is the point in her life that she decided to go back to teaching in the public schools. Her first year back teaching in the public school, the principal wanted her to teach fourth grade so she could effect change. Lark's intention was to work with the fourth grade teachers as a team. When she shared her ideas they saw her as a threat. They talked behind her back, refused to share materials with her, and criticized her to others. The principal did not back Lark up in any way. Therefore, when a new school opened up in the same district she transferred.

## Choices and Decisions as a Teacher

The students' in her class have a lot of autonomy in that they have many opportunities for decision making. She said, "The first of the year is really important. I talk to the students and tell them what I need and what I want. Then I ask them what do they need, what do they think would be helpful, what kind of community do they want? I say, 'These walls, this is our place and it can be anything you we want it to be.' I want to know what they want to learn about." Lark feels that in all of her experiences with children, there has never been anything that worked for kids more than what kids were interested in themselves. When asked why she teaches the way she does, she stated, "Because for me there's no other way to teach. I have little guys in here who've already been told they can't learn. In this class they are free. They become able to think of themselves as scholarly learners. They do research daily. They write. They go on their strengths. They help each other. It is beautiful!" Lark paused and reflected then she said, "The first class I had, I called them my ten little lights. I thought what they taught me was about cultural relevance, but what they really taught me was about living an authentic life. I have to have a life of meaning."

On the first day of school, after the children have discussed community, they brainstorm what they are interested in learning about. Lark believes that the process is just as important if not more important than the product. She explains, "For instance, I thought we were going to make a quilt as a class project. It ended up, the quilting bee turned into a pillow bee. This project originated out of the class's sense of community. One of the students is a Jehovah's Witness who doesn't celebrate and participate in class parties. The rest of the class did not want their classmate to feel excluded and left out of activities so they decided to forego their class parties. In this instance, they decided to have a quilting bee which turned into a pillow bee. Lark said, "I think it is remarkable for seven and eight year old kids to figure out how to have an inclusive society, especially when the whole world around them is not really based on being inclusive."

The children decide the curriculum and it is evident that they have wonderful ideas and their interests are strong. Lark explained, "Their study goes so deep. It's true research. They really learn a lot and probably more importantly, they learn how to learn."

The rules are devised by the students the first month of the school year. They change as needed. Lark tells the children that she doesn't want to be a policeman, rather she

wants to be an educator. She asks them if they will let her do this. The only consequence that is imposed is when a child is feeling and acting out of control they are asked to leave the room until they have calmed down and feel they can be a part of the community again. The child decides when he or she is ready to come back into the room. Safety is usually the reason that such a consequence is imposed. Lark doesn't feel that the children view this as punishment. She stated, "Sometimes, they'll just even tell me they think they need to leave the room for a few minutes just to kind of get it together." When the issue is not one of safety but rather a disagreement of some sort, conflict resolution is practiced. If the disagreement is between two students then Lark gives them some private time to solve the problem. Only if they can't come to a resolution on their own, does she intervene. She models problem solving by asking them questions. When the disagreement concerns the whole class then they have a class meeting. Lark feels that problem solving is part of the learning process and integral to community building. Lark says, "It's just like a family, it's a family living situation."

The central teaching idea that guides Lark's work is her belief that "children are capable, creative beings." She explained, "It is necessary to honor the spirit of each child and accept who they are and where they can go."

When asked how she has changed as a teacher over the years, she responded, "I have always been confident but I think I'm more confident now. I've always been sensitive but I think I'm more sensitive now. I've always been thoughtful and introspective but I think I'm more thoughtful and more introspective now. I think you just practice at the things you think are worth practicing at."

Experiences that helped Lark solidify her own felt teacher autonomy mainly consists of "observing first hand how children learn." She said, "I have dysfunctional groups of children. For example, I have had SED, special education, kids. I have had ED, emotionally disturbed, kids. I have had LD, learning disabled, kids. There was stealing, there was biting, there were fits, there was chronic depression, there was fetal sitting in the corner there were serious maladies and dilemmas. These children were teachers about how to be a community."

Lark strives to achieve her goals by asking her students questions at opportune moments. She commented, "They've made all the choices. I haven't forced them into anything. I've definitely guided them by asking them questions and giving them a chance to think about it and choose." She also said, "They create exactly what they want from within themselves but I always have the materials they need. I know what the focus is but you never know how

anything is going to go." Lark explained, "I just really love learning and I guess that's probably why it feels so important to me to have kids not just know facts, tables, charts and memorized information but to really have a solid, beautiful experience in learning how to learn and loving it."

When Lark was asked if there were any conflicts between her goals and the schools goals she discussed two main concerns. The emphasis that the school places on standardized achievement tests is a conflict of goals. Lark deals with this by believing in her students and having confidence in her teaching practices through years of experience and research. Lark helps her students deal with the stress of the tests by encouraging them to write their own standardized achievement tests. This gives the children a sense of control over the situation. Also during the formal testing period snacks are provided as much needed breaks. The children view the snacks as a great treat. Lark also realizes that testing will be a part of the children's lives and she helps them to cope with the situation by encouraging them to express their feelings.

The other issue of conflict between Lark's goals and the school's goals is the belief that a teacher's job is to prepare a child for the next grade. Lark believes that is contradictory of everything she knows about constructivism

and early childhood. Lark is preparing her students for life. Lark said, "My own goals are very much anti-biased curriculum oriented." Feeling how important relevance was led her to realizing authenticity in all areas of her life. She said, "I guess I've always chosen to be out on a limb because that is where the work needed to be done." She has felt support by many who knew there needed to be change and somehow felt that she had the ability to bring it about. She believes that learning how to learn is learning how to live and learning how to love.

#### Disequilibrium

When Lark talks with many of her colleagues, it is over surface things, the outer layer. It is seldom about the core, what it is really about. She said, "I don't want to fight every battle there is to fight. That kills me. My spirit dies when I have to fight for existence. Now I come here and live. I'm alive and so are my kids."

Lark did have an experience that truly tested her a couple of years ago. It was a terrible experience of betrayal by a student teacher and a colleague. Lark befriended a fellow second grade teacher who was experiencing some severe personal problems. This teacher was going through a depression and didn't feel like interacting with many people. Lark offered her classroom



and company during lunch. At the time, Lark had a student teacher who was struggling through the experience. The three of them would eat lunch together everyday. As the student teacher and the colleague became more acquainted, they spent time together without Lark. During these times, they would criticize Lark and her teaching methods. At first, Lark just ignored the situation even though she was aware of what was happening. The colleague was mainly jealous of the achievement test scores that Lark's students made. When Lark finally confronted the two she said, "Is there a reason that you two are needing to talk about me behind my back because I think the best thing that could happen is we all sit down right here and if you've got problems with me I think we should talk about it." Lark described their reaction, "Well, they just freaked out. It was hell." Lark ended up with Temporomandibular Joint Syndrome (TMJ) because she had not said anything for so long that when she finally did she said, "I felt I just died." They had undermined her to parents and co-workers. She felt betrayed because she had opened her spirit to these two people and they essentially stabbed her in the back. Lark said, "I just died from it over and over and over again. I daily died from it. Now I'm finally at a place in my life where I don't have to be loved by everybody." She explained, "If you're loved by everybody, you can't be much

of anything real." Lark appreciates the crisis in hindsight because it caused her to really re-examine every thought she had ever had in her whole life. She said, "I see how hard the judgmental stance is on people and how hurtful it is when somebody has to be right and the other person has to be wrong. If I had to do it all over again I still would endure the pain to learn the lessons I learned." Lark also said, "You never know who you really are until you've been tested." Lark shared a quote from Thomas Jefferson that she lives by, "In matters of style, swim with the tide. In matters of principle, stand like a rock."

Lark gets through difficult times through relying on her own inner strength and friends with whom she can be real. She described one such friend when she said, "We are real colleagues in that we can say the hard things to one another. Lark remembers one poignant conversation with Annette during a difficult time. They had been talking about Victor Franklin and how people endured the concentration camps. Through their discussion they started to see some parallel to this and their own situations. Lark said, "You know there's an imprisonment of ideas in a way that is at least somewhat comparable."

With such a dismal analogy, I asked Lark why she stayed. Lark commented, "My choice of profession has always seemed to reflect what I feel will be most effective." It

is clear that Lark feels that even with the difficult situations that arise in being an autonomous teacher, she is still able to be an effective teacher.

Lark said, "I don't like dissention. I don't like conflict. Most of my life has been about finding unity, inner diversity, and going from there. That's probably what will be on my tombstone, FIND UNITY IN DIVERSITY."

#### Summary of Lark

When Lark talked of her early childhood experiences it was evident that they played an important role in who she is today. Her parents taught her to be proud of herself and her heritage. They taught her this by the way they lived their own lives. They also promoted autonomy in Lark by giving her many choices and opportunities to be responsible and make decisions. Her parents did not impose external rewards and punishments on Lark. Rather they taught her about community, responsibility, and caring. For example, for the family to have a clean home, everyone had to pitch in and help clean.

Lark seemed to value autonomy at a very young age. As a young child she was able to recognize the act of her minister taking her to dance class as a moral act of autonomy. Even though she didn't have the words to explain it she did have the understanding. This is similar to her

understanding of discrimination. She was an insightful child who stood up for what she believed was right.

Lark also experienced a strong sense of community in the town in which she grew up. Lark remembered people looking out for each other.

Teacher education also played a role in Lark's autonomy. Although Lark viewed the majority of her teacher education as having little impact, she did feel that one teacher made a huge impact. When she spoke of this teacher, her eyes lit up with excitement. Through this teacher she had found the language for what she believed about teaching and life. Through this teacher, Lark was able to make connections between early childhood theory and what she valued about her own childhood. This experience led Lark to getting her Masters in Child Development.

Disequilibrium also played a major role in Lark's own felt teacher autonomy. Even as a young teacher, Lark felt such disequilibrium in her second teaching job that she realized that she would not be able to compromise her beliefs to the extent that principal required, so she left that position after only a few weeks. This was quite an act of autonomy because when Lark left she did not have another job waiting on her.

Lark was in serious disequilibrium when she was betrayed by a colleague when she had befriended. Lark is a

high achiever and takes great pride in her work. It cut her to the core when this colleague tried to ruin Lark's reputation with parents, other colleagues, and Lark's student teacher. Lark was in serious disequilibrium over this situation for about a year. Fortunately, she was able to come to terms with the situation and find peace within herself although she is still searching for unity within diversity.

Lark also relies on her relationships with other autonomous people for support through the difficult times. Lark attributes her experiences with children as the key factor in her own felt teacher autonomy. She says that her students are her greatest teachers. They are the reason that she has continued to endure painful experiences by doing what she believes is right for the children.

#### KIRA

Kira was my first referral. She just had her first baby this year and is relishing every moment she can spend with her. Kira has taught for four years. The conversational interviews took place during the Spring of her fourth year of teaching.

## Early Childhood Experiences

Kira always wanted to be a teacher. She is the youngest of seven children in her family. She was four years old when her first nephew was born. Kira said, "I was just little miss teacher, kind of from the beginning." She comes from a family of teachers. She explained, "I have two sisters that are teachers, a brother that taught, and two sisters-in-law that are teachers. Kira came from a loving, nurturing environment. Her large family was very close. Kira described her homelife as, "just a real loving constant family". She said, "I feel like that made me who I am inside, which played a big part in what I wanted to do." By the time she was nine years old she had several nephews. She would dress them up and they would put on skits for the family. Kira was always the director of activities. She has very fond memories of these times and feels like these positive experiences played a role in her becoming a teacher. She never questioned her decision to become a teacher. She said, "I just always knew that's what I would do."

## Early Relationships with Professionals

Kira's formal teacher education seemed to play a significant role in her development as a teacher. She talked about how her methods classes were very innovative and student oriented. Her language arts methods instructor was influential to Kira's learning. Kira said, "She was wonderful. She really lit a fire under me." When Kira was probed as to the reason why, she said, "She practiced what she taught. We wrote journals, we had pen pals with a third grade class, and we built a file of information that would help us as teachers. All of the assignments that she gave us were really practical. Everything we did were things we could use. It made sense."

Another influential person from Kira's teacher education was one of her special education professors. This person taught Kira how to adapt materials. She explained, "She showed us how to take traditional things and make them more hands on for kids who needed it." This is where Kira believes that her philosophy began to take hold. This person made such an impact on her that she decided to take part in a new degree plan that was being offered that included both elementary education and special education.

Both of these people had a positive effect on Kira because "they really believed in what they taught and did it in our classroom."

Kira believes that she had a wonderful student teaching experience as well. She was able to see in practice the things she had been learning about in her teacher education classes. She felt like it all came together at that moment. She said, "I saw it work and that is what really internalized it for me."

Kira started working on her Masters while she was teaching. She had a professor that she truly respects because she learned so much from her classes. She feels like the classes she took from this person were very valuable and beneficial. She said, "Her classes were really hard but the work was meaningful. She conveyed to you in her quiet demeanor that she didn't expect anything less than your best."

#### Choices and Decisions as a Teacher

When Kira was asked about her teaching methods she replied, "I just pretty much do what the kids are interested in. It's not something I predetermine." She explained that similar skills are covered such as the PASS objectives but every year it's done in a totally different way. When I asked Kira about the process of letting the children determine the curriculum she explained that the children will bring something to school or show an interest in something and she facilitates their learning from there.



She said that the curriculum tends to emerge as a theme although not everyone will necessarily be studying the same theme. For example, some children may be studying about sharks while others are studying something else.

When I inquired about the rules for the classroom, Kira said, "The kids make them." She explained, "I wait several days after school starts to give them some experience and time to adjust to the new atmosphere. If I ask them the first day, then I tend to get pat answers but if I wait a few days they start to realize the need for some rules. I say, 'what are some things that we can do to make our room a safe and happy place.' Then I'll write down what they tell me and post them on the wall." Kira said, "They know what they're supposed to do and what it takes to function in a community and what things have to happen for everybody to be happy and feel respected." Kira said that when a rule is broken they discuss the problem and try to come up with a solution or a positive way of dealing with the problem. They also have class meetings in which they take some time and evaluate situations together. Kira said, "We come together as a community and they know I truly care about them and they truly care about each other and there's just that respect there. That doesn't just happen quickly. I mean it takes some time to build."

Kira views the role of choice as playing a large role in the classroom. She said, "I think the kids need to learn how to make decisions early. At the first of the year, we start out making decisions right away and we talk about how important making our own decisions are and how I could make decisions for them but nobody would learn very much."

Kira believes strongly in the reading and writing connection. She has relied on Bobbie Fisher's books as a resource for her teaching of reading. She said, "I don't give very many worksheets at all. I do have a lot of parental involvement and this helps the parents deal with not seeing worksheets coming home everyday." The students make a lot of decisions concerning what they study and how they study it. For example Kira said, "When the students put on a play, they make the set and the costumes. They do it all."

Kira sees herself as a guide for her students. She said, "I want them to learn to be independent. Not to teach them but to help them learn to find the answers themselves. She said, "My goal is for them to enjoy learning. I want to allow them to go as far as they can go." She tries to meet these goals by building community within the classroom and building a good rapport with the parents of her students. She explained, "The community in the classroom helps foster the child's self worth. I strive to create an environment

that provides the tools that are necessary for them to learn. I have to allow them to do what they can and not limit them."

Kira encourages her students to be critical thinkers. For example, during her first year of teaching when she was forced to use basal readers she facilitated discussion groups to enhance comprehension. Kira said there were many times, during these discussions that children questioned the story line, the pictures, and various other aspects of the basal readers. She encouraged them to propose other ways of presenting the story. Essentially she encouraged them to be autonomous thinkers. Kira said, "What I've learned is that it's not the material as much as how you use the material."

When Kira moved from first grade to Kindergarten Plus, there wasn't any prescribed curriculum. She was freer to teach the way she believed to be best. She felt the freedom to use developmentally appropriate practices that were supported through early childhood research. Kira explained, "There wasn't any curriculum written for this grade. It was just a year to grow, so as long as the kids were learning and the parents were happy we were free to determine our own curriculum." Kira said, "It was really a lot of fun to teach. There wasn't any pressure because there wasn't a prescribed curriculum hanging over my head." Kira said this is different from first grade because, "there's a certain

place that second grade teachers would like their students to be, even though they don't all come at the same place and they certainly don't all leave at the same place, you still have this expectation hanging over your head. As a first grade teacher there was nothing whatsoever I could actually do about it except just try to get them as far as I could. You worry about the kids that aren't going to meet the expectations of the second grade teacher and you worry about how it is going to be handled."

Kira described her central teaching ideas by saying, "Children create knowledge themselves based on what they already know. I also truly believe that children are basically good instead of basically bad. I believe that children construct their own knowledge."

Kira sees her role as a teacher as a person who creates an environment that is challenging and fun. She feels that the aim of education should be that all kids feel good about themselves while they learn. She said, "I think self concept is one of the most important things. I think children have to believe that they can succeed." She also said that it is important for students to become independent learners. Kira said, "The best thing I can do for them is to teach them how to go about finding the answers rather than giving them the answers."

Kira attributes the construction of these ideas to past experiences. She said, "I think probably my childhood experiences played a large role in what I believe today. Being accepted for who I was, not necessarily being praised but just knowing my parents were proud of me for whatever I could do. We weren't rewarded for things we did. We never got money for A's or anything like that. It was all internal. I think that is the basis for my philosophy for kids. I want them to be motivated internally. I want them to do well because they want to do well. My classes in teacher education also influenced my philosophy. I feel that my student teaching experience helped to put it all into perspective."

#### Disequilibrium

Kira experienced a lot of disequilibrium her first year of teaching. She was hired to teach in a school system where the kindergarten classes were utilizing teaching methods similar to the constructivist method and the first grade classes were utilizing teaching methods that subscribed to the behaviorist theory. Kira was hired to teach first grade even though her own views about how children learn resembled that of the constructivist theory. A group of parents wanted their children to continue receiving an education similar to what they had experienced

in kindergarten. These children were placed in Kira's classroom. Kira said, "I just jumped in with both feet and started out the way I thought things ought to be." As a result, there were parents of children in the traditional first grade classes that wanted to place their children in Kira's class and there were parents of children in Kira's class that complained of worksheets not being sent home. The principal viewed this situation as threatening and one that should be extinguished so she told Kira that she needed to teach the way the other first grade teachers taught. Since Kira was a first year teacher and did not feel that she had any job security, she decided to go with the flow for a while until things calmed down. She felt like the group of parents who wanted her to teach using developmentally appropriate practices were very supportive of her decision because they understood the kind of pressure she was under. Kira said, "I had to do it because the principal came in every day to check on me. I also had to do it for my own sanity because they were making me crazy." She had to develop a rotation chart for the centers and put the students in groups and require them to go to each of the centers. The centers were also determined by the other first grade teachers. After a while, Kira allowed the children to choose the centers that interested them. She explained, "I wanted them to go to the ones that interested

them because that was where they were going to learn the most. So finally I just switched the chart around and I wrote the centers down on the chart. I also wrote the number of how many could be there. The principal commented that she noticed that I changed my chart. I told her that it seems to work better this way. She said, 'well do they all do the centers?' I said, some do and some do some twice and she said, 'well what happens if somebody doesn't do them all?' I said, then they don't do them all. You know if there's something that I really want everybody to do, then we'll do it. She knew I had to do that but she also knew everything that led up to that."

Kira also struggled with other aspects of the curriculum. She said, "I started out thinking that I wouldn't use basals in my room. That didn't last very long because they made me. I remember the day they brought me all my books and I was thinking oh this is good until I got the basals. They also brought me a stack of worksheets as tall as me and stacked them on the counter. Nobody asked me if I wanted them because it didn't matter. It ended up I had to use them because the principal would come in and check on it everyday." By the end of the year, she didn't have to require the students to do as many worksheets. Kira is proud of the fact that even though she felt the need to conform a great deal her first year of teaching she was

still able to incorporate a lot a developmentally appropriate reading and writing activities into the curriculum. When referring to the principal that Kira worked for that first year she said, "We got to be friends later but that woman made me shake for months. She was very strict and not very approachable."

After Kira's first year of teaching, she decided to teach Kindergarten Plus. It was an extra year program that was offered in the school system in which she taught. Kira volunteered for this position for several reasons. She said, "Basically I knew I would have to teach this class because I was the newest person and no one else wanted to teach it. I thought that it sounded fun and I knew I would be able to teach the way I believed children should be taught." Kira felt that teaching K-Plus was a very positive experience for her. She was able to practice what she believed and she saw the fruits of her labor. Having the freedom to teach using developmentally appropriate practices gave her the experience and ground she needed to stand on. She no longer had to rely on what she had read or heard because she could see it with her own eyes.

Kira decided to teach first grade again because as she says, "I was ready for the challenge. I was ready to go back and do things the way I thought they ought to be done." She felt better prepared because she could say that I have



taught children this way and these are the successes I have had. She felt this was a stronger defense than just having read about something or having heard in a classroom that it should be a certain way. Kira now had experiences to back up her philosophy of teaching. Kira said, "I really feel confident as a teacher now after having some experience. Even though I really believed in developmentally appropriate practices, it took seeing it and doing it before I felt truly confident." Kira says that even though she is much more confident as a teacher now, she still re-evaluates constantly. She said, "I question myself a lot to keep myself on track."

When Kira first started teaching, the principal didn't understand why she taught the way she did. She didn't give her the support she needed. When this principal retired, Kira made an appointment with the new principal. Kira explained her teaching methods and the reasons behind them. As a result, Kira felt more support from the second principal.

Kira also feels that it isn't as important to her what others think of her. She said, "Now I'm able to just kind of say to myself that I don't care what they think but the first couple of years it really mattered to me, more than it probably should have." Kira gave an example of this when she said, "It really seems to bother some of the older

teachers to have someone young come in with new ideas. They weren't very nice to me because of it. I dealt with it by reminding myself that they are good at their own things and I am good at my own things. I know that I can't change their attitudes. Some teachers have overcome their feelings of being threatened by someone new. Time seemed to help with that a lot. I think we have to accept each other for who and what we are. If I go around with the attitude that my way is the best way then I'm not any better than they are."

Kira told of an experience with a teacher that helped her to have more of an open, accepting attitude of others. Kira said, "There was a teacher in our building that at first I considered her to be a friend of mine. She had a wonderful classroom and did such neat things with the kids. She started on a rampage though. Everything she said about other teachers was negative. It got to the point that she started telling parents negative things about the traditional teachers in the school system. She was really saying some things that were out of line. She ended up making everybody mad at her, even her friends. There were some things she believed in really strongly and I wasn't too sure that I believed the same things, yet our philosophies were similar. At one point, there was something we disagreed on and she said, 'well that puts you on the other

side then.' That's when it became crystal clear to me. I've had this attitude that my way is the only way and I don't think I should ever have that attitude again. I mean just like we want to accept our students at different levels, I think there are all kinds of different levels of teaching and we all may have the same philosophy but our rooms aren't going to look the same. We're all going to be in different places because it is a journey. I journey every year a little bit closer to where I think I want to be and I'll never get there. I have this idea of what a classroom should be like and I'll never get there because it's just a journey. Every year I do a few more things that help me get there but we're all in different places. I just feel like we have to accept that of each other before we can ever get anywhere." As a result of this one teacher's rampage, the faculty pulled together. They talked more, shared more, and listened more. Kira said, "We all kind of caught on to what was happening to us and we realized that we were all working for the same goal. You know, we were all working for the kids."

Kira is now working for a third principal. She really respects this principal because she has shown respect for the teachers as a whole. She treats them as professionals. Kira feels that the principal can set the tone for the atmosphere of the school. She explains, "I think if the

principal puts a lot of pressure on the teachers then the teachers stress out and put undue pressure on the students." Kira feels this because of past and present experiences.

When asked about parent pressures, Kira says that she has been lucky in that department. She takes a lot of time, especially at the beginning of the year, to explain her teaching practices. Most of the students in her class are parent requests because they want the kind of education she is offering for their children.

Kira doesn't feel a lot of pressure over achievement tests although she is frustrated by their inadequacy. For example, one little girl who couldn't yet read, just guessed and scored on grade level. Another example is of a little girl who could read very well but is extremely meticulous. The test was timed so the little girl scored much lower than her actual abilities. The students are placed into special programs as a result of the test scores. Kira went to the students' future teachers and explained about the special circumstances. She also has to explain these situations to the parents.

When referring to the pressures she feels as a teacher, Kira said, "Sometimes I feel like I should be doing more and I have to fight that. I tell myself that each child is at his or her own place and they'll get it when they're ready. I have to feel comfortable with myself and my teaching and

not be afraid of test scores. I think in my mind I always feel like I'm not doing enough. I am always questioning myself by asking what more could I be doing to help these kids? What's something else I can do to reach this person?

Kira admitted that she is concerned about that happens to her students once they leave her classroom. She deals with these concerns in various ways. She said, "I just have to deal with the time that I have them and make the best of it by giving them the tools that hopefully will benefit them in the years to come. The tools being that of independence in their learning, taking charge of their actions, and being responsible. I've also kept journals with kids while they are in my classroom and they always have the option of continuing those journals after they have left."

When asked if she ever thought about leaving the profession, she said, "Only since my daughter was born. I mean only a love this great would take me away from my other love and only temporarily. I never thought I would ever not want to teach until her."

#### Summary of Kira

Kira's teacher education seemed to have the most impact in her own felt teacher autonomy. Kira seemed to have positive feelings about her teacher education as a whole, yet there were a few teachers that stood out in her memory

as having a major impact on her. She said, "They practiced what they taught." In those classes, Kira was able to experience things as a student that her future students would experience. This seemed to have a strong influence over Kira and helped her have a greater understanding of constructivism. Kira also felt that she had a wonderful student teaching experience with a teacher who taught the way Kira had been taught to teach. Kira felt as though this played an important role in the type of teacher she is today.

Kira also attributes her early childhood experiences as having a strong influence on her own felt teacher autonomy. Her homelife was very nurturing and loving. Kira felt accepted for who she was as a child. Her parents focused on internal values rather than external rewards. Childhood was greatly respected in her family. Kira attributes her respect and love for children to the way she was raised.

Kira relies a lot on research and her relationship with colleagues for support and guidance as a teacher. Kira works hard to have harmonious relationships with her colleagues and administrators. Kira also values her relationships with the parents of her students. Harmony with others is very important to Kira. She devotes a lot of time toward building positive relationships. It is important to note however, that Kira felt that she is less

afraid of controversy than she was her first year of teaching.

Kira experienced a lot of disequilibrium during her first year of teaching. Although she felt it necessary to make large compromises, she continued to find ways to meet the children's needs. After that year, she decided to teach a grade level where her teaching practices were more accepted. After gaining more experience, Kira returned to first grade and teaches the way she believes is best for her students. Kira feels that she can better defend her teaching practices because she has actual experiences and many successes under her belt. At the time of the interview, Kira could not imagine making the compromises she felt she had to make her first year of teaching. Her beliefs about how young children learn are stronger because she has experienced it first hand. That was very significant to Kira's development as an autonomous teacher.

#### THEMES OF TEACHER AUTONOMY

As each of these teachers told of the story of their individual journeys, themes began to emerge. The purpose of this section is to highlight what seems essential or revealing about how early childhood educators perceive their development of autonomy as teachers.

### **Teacher Education Seemed Significant**

All three teachers felt that their teacher education played a role in who they became as teachers. They attributed their experiences in teacher education to their introduction to how children learn and develop. They each strongly connected with some of their professors. They each took what they learned about young children and applied it to their own teaching practices. The following are just a few of the many statements made concerning teacher education. Joy said of her early childhood teacher education professors, "I think that they really prepared us. I mean they told us it was going to be hard. I had classes where we had to make files of articles to back yourself up and I'm so glad that they made us do that because I've had to use all of that." Lark said, "The teachers that challenged me the most are the ones I think of the most." Kira said, "I found that my methods classes were a lot more innovative and hands on than any of my others."

### **Self Reflection**

Each of the three teachers are heavily engaged in self reflection. It is a part of their everyday lives. Self reflection plays a large role in their choices and decisions concerning their own lives as teachers and the roles they play in their student's lives. They are constantly



questioning themselves and their actions. This does not mean to imply that they lack confidence in themselves. In fact it is quite the contrary. They use self reflection to be the best teachers they can be. A typical self reflective comment came from Kira when she said, "I question myself a lot, just to keep myself on track. You know there are times when I ask myself if something is really best for a child. So my teaching changes every year depending on the kids but I feel comfortable with my overall philosophy now."

### **Growth and Change**

Each teacher has a sense of growth and change. This is strongly connected to their self reflection. They each ask themselves what they can do to be better teachers. In their endeavor to be better teachers they read research, continue education, dialogue with colleagues and listen to their students. Each of the teachers challenges herself to take risks. They push the educational envelope to provide their students with the education they feel they deserve. In each of these teachers' stories, the theme of growth and change was constant. It is very much a part of who they are as professional educators. For example, when Joy was asked why she teaches the way she does she stated, "I think it's partly because I've read so much that I know it's the best thing for these kids. I think it's been proven in the

research." Lark said, "In the experiences I've had, there's never been anything that worked for kids more than what kids were interested in themselves." Kira talked of reading one of Bobbie Fisher's books and implementing the envelope books.

### **Respecting Children**

Each teacher respects children as they are. They understand child development and how children learn. They value children as human beings with a voice of their own. They care about the feelings of their students, value their opinions, and listen to their needs. Each of the teachers view children as decision makers and thinkers who are able to contribute to a community whether it be in a town, school, or classroom. A typical statement that illustrated respect for children came from Lark when she said, "I think it is remarkable for seven and eight year old kids to figure out how to have an inclusive society. Especially, when the whole world around them is not really based on being inclusive. But you know they've done something when they do that. They feel powerful. Well they are."

### **Concerns for Doing What is Right**

Each teacher has a strong sense of doing the right thing for their students. They feel this so strongly that

they each stated that they would leave their current job if they had to choose between the status quo and doing what is right for children. They all make some concessions for the system in which they work but overall, they strive to meet the children's needs and address the long term aim of autonomy. Concerns for doing what is right might even be understating it. Doing what is right for children is part of each of the teacher's being. It cannot be separated from who they are as human beings in this world. It seems to be connected to their soul. They exhibited this by their own inability to fully describe its origin. They also illustrated it quite clearly by suffering the many consequences of doing what is right for children in a heteronomous system. For example, when Joy was asked why she continues to teach this way considering all of the conflicts and criticism she is under, she invariably stated, "Because it is the right thing to do for the children."

### **Struggles with Heteronomous Agents**

Each teacher struggles with heteronomous agents, such as principals and colleagues, in her teaching profession. They each commented on the role of principals in their endeavor to be autonomous teachers. The principal is a powerful figure in the life of a teacher. Each of the three teachers have struggled with the constrictions imposed by a

principal. Another powerful heteronomous agent in these teachers' lives has been their colleagues. In fact these heteronomous agents have been the major source of disequilibrium for all of the teachers. This has been a struggle for them from the beginning of their teaching careers to the present. Their autonomy is illuminated through their stories of dealing with these heteronomous agents. Joy described heteronomous agents well when she said, "I think the whole idea of autonomy is disturbing in this building because they are of the opinion that the teacher is of authority and the children mind the teacher. They don't even know what you are talking about when you mention the word autonomy. There is just so much miseducation." Lark confronted two heteronomous agents when she said, "Is there a reason that you two are needing to talk about me behind my back because I think the best thing that could happen is we all sit down right here and if you've got problems with me I think we should talk about it."

### **Search for Authentic Voice**

Each teacher is trying to find her authentic voice. They are each genuinely real human beings searching for meaning as teachers. They seem to be searching for serenity in their lives. They are each seeking to find a place in

this world of education. They are seeking a place in this world that is safe for children to be children. In their search for their authentic voice, autonomy, and serenity they each leave and come back. They don't leave education altogether, rather they go to a place where they can regroup and gain more confidence and experience. Lark and Kira have both done so and then chosen to go back into the fire. While they were gone, they gained the confidence and experience they were searching for. They both returned stronger and ready to be who they are as autonomous teachers. Lark explained the need to leave a certain situation when she said, "I could have chosen to jump through the hoops and do this but I just couldn't sell out and not be true to myself. I knew I had something to give and I had to be somewhere that I was free to give it." Joy is looking for a safe place to go so she too can gain more confidence and experiences. Then she plans to return to the fires, more capable of dealing with the heteronomous agents. I am reminded of an anonymous quote, "Do we fear our enemies more than we love our children?". These teachers have replied with a resounding "NO!"

## CHAPTER V

### REFLECTIONS

The focus of this study was on autonomy with the question: How do early childhood educators perceive their development of autonomy as teachers? There were four research questions that guided the collection and analysis of the data. The four questions dealt with the participants' perceptions of how certain factors influenced their development of autonomy as teachers. Those factors included early childhood experiences, relationships with others, choices and decisions, and disequilibrium.

The most influential factor in the development of teacher autonomy in the professional lives of Joy, Lark, and Kira seemed to be teacher education. Teacher education was not a category in and of itself but it was revealed as an important factor as each of the participants told the stories of their journey. Teacher education fits in the category of relationships with others because it is the influence of the professors that impacted these three people's lives. Two of the participants felt that their early childhood experiences played significant roles in who

they are today as autonomous teachers. At the time of the interview Joy did not attribute much, if any significance to her early childhood experiences and her own felt teacher autonomy. It could be that Joy hasn't made such connections with her past experiences and her present life. It could also be that her early childhood experiences did not have much of an impact in her development of autonomy. It is important to remember that while Joy was a music teacher, she didn't feel that she was very autonomous. It wasn't until Joy entered into the field of early childhood education that she learned about constructivism, felt passionate about her career, and became a very autonomous teacher. This implies that teacher education can have a major impact on a preservice teacher.

At the time of the interview, all three of the teachers felt quite confident in their choices and decisions as teachers. They each had struggled to a degree with choices and decisions as beginning teachers. They each suffered negative consequences for their choices and decisions as teachers. Doing what is right for children is what guided each of their decisions. Each of the three teachers suffered grave consequences for such teaching practices. These consequences were in the form of betrayal by colleagues, administrative pressures, frequent evaluations, and tarnished reputations. Such consequences caused the

teachers tremendous amounts of anguish which resulted in health problems, nervous disorders, and depression. This in itself was the main source of disequilibrium for these teachers. They struggled to find a way to do what was right for children and to ease the pain of the consequences they were suffering. None of them could compromise to a point of not doing what was right for children although they each retreated or searched for a retreat from the animosity they were exposed to on a daily basis. In my opinion, this does not make them less autonomous, it just makes them human. What good would they be to children if they were not healthy, strong individuals themselves. Their retreats were not escapes, rather they were a time of healing and growth so they could be even stronger advocates for children. It is through these teachers' disequilibrium that their teacher autonomy was illuminated and made so apparent in their stories.

#### LIMITATIONS

It must be kept in mind that these three teachers may not readily resonate with others. The reader has to be the judge. It is important to keep in mind that if three different teacher's stories had been told the results might be quite different.



It is also important to keep in mind that these are the stories of three female teachers from the same geographic region. Two are from the same city and the other is from a town approximately 75 miles away. One teacher is Native American and the other two are Caucasian.

Another perceived limitation of the study might be that the themes that have emerged cannot be generalized because the study only examined three teachers. The purpose of the study was not to quantify large numbers of teachers' perceptions about their own felt teacher autonomy. Rather the purpose was to find greater understanding of teacher autonomy through an indepth study. Each person's greater understanding will be somewhat different as they read the findings and reflections of this paper because we each look through our own lens colored with individual background experiences and stories of our own. As I share the implications of this study, it is important to remain cognizant of this researcher's personal lens.

#### IMPLICATIONS

There are several implications from the results of this study. The question leading the implications is: How do teachers get to be autonomous? This study implies that early childhood experiences can have an important impact in the development of autonomy. Usually the most influential

people in a child's life are the parents. Alfie Kohn (1993) wrote a book for parents entitled Punished by Rewards. In his book, he points out the harmful effects of rewards and behaviorism. He also talks about the importance of choice in promoting autonomy. Lark and Kira both told of how their parents valued internal motivation over external motivation. They talked of the importance of feeling accepted unconditionally for who they were.

It did not come out in the study but I think it is a logical connection that if parents can promote a child's autonomy then a teacher could also impact a child's autonomy. Therefore, it is also important for teachers to relinquish some control and provide children with many opportunities to make choices and decisions. Each of the three participants told of their individual efforts to promote their students' autonomy. The professional literature certainly supports promoting autonomy in children. Through Piaget's and Kamii's research, it was stressed that autonomy should be the aim of education (Kamii, 1985). The research calls for promoting autonomy, through a sense of community in which children and teachers collaborate and care about others. To build community it is important to share experiences with others which can be done by working on common goals or projects. A safe environment also helps to promote community and autonomy (Devries and

Zan, 1994). It is also important for children to be given opportunities to become engaged in meaningful activities that are of interest to them (Kamii, 1985; Katz and Chard, 1989).

The results of this study also imply that relationships with others influences the development of teacher autonomy. This was most apparent when the participants talked of their teacher education experiences. It is important to note that the impact could have come from just one teacher as it did for Lark or a handful of teachers which was the case for both Joy and Kira. Joy's story illustrated the importance of learning the theory behind how children learn. All three teachers relied on what they had learned in teacher education to defend their practices as autonomous teachers. Catherine Twomey Fosnot (1989) has written a book entitled Enquiring Teachers Enquiring Learners which is devoted to constructivist teaching and learning for preservice and graduate students. She makes the point that since teachers teach the way they were taught then they need to have experiences as a learner who investigates, problem solves, collaborates, inquires, invents, and reflects. It is important for these students to have shared experiences, safe environments, and conflict resolution experiences. It is also important for professors to work with students to help them develop skills and strategies to cope in

situations of disequilibrium. This can be done through discussion and role play. For example, a group of students could be given a scenario in which they could practice being confronted by a parent, colleague, or administrator for their teaching practices. This would be an opportunity for them to brainstorm possible responses with a group of their peers in a safe environment. Then they could role play the situation.

The results of the study also imply that there need to be more community and collaboration in the educational system among teachers and principals. They need to support each other instead of tearing each other down. Kira demonstrated that when she said, "I just feel like we have to accept each other before we can ever get anywhere."

The study also implies that choices and decisions play an important role in the development of teacher autonomy. Each of the three teachers struggled with this factor in the beginning of their teaching careers. Experience and confidence seemed to be key factors in resolving their struggles with choices and decisions as teachers. This might imply that more appropriate field experiences would be helpful to preservice teachers to gain more experience and confidence in their teaching practices. It also implies that there should be more opportunities for choice in school settings from preschool through the university. It also

implies that beginning teachers need more of a safety net. They need to be in an environment in which they feel safe to make mistakes and try different strategies that are backed up through research. This safety net could be provided in the form of a mentor that promotes and encourages teacher autonomy.

The disequilibrium that the teachers felt over the consequences of their choices and decisions as a teacher implies that autonomous teachers need more of a professional support group. They need people with whom they can dialogue, feel comfortable, and connect. They need to hear about others successes and setbacks. They need to know and feel that they are not alone in this endeavor of doing what is right for children.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

I personally am interested in doing more research concerning the degree to which teacher education can influence teacher autonomy. It is also apparent that we need more principals who support and encourage the development of autonomy in teachers as they endeavor to do what is right for children. Autonomy and constructivism cannot be mandated, nor should they be, but it is imperative that autonomy and constructivism be more accepted in our educational system. Autonomous teachers must find a support

system in which they can dialogue and continue to grow as teachers. Teaching in itself is a very isolating profession. It seems that autonomous teachers are even more isolated because they are different which seems to threaten others and because they seem to want an authentic connection with colleagues that puts relationships on a deeper level.

#### CONCLUDING THOUGHTS BY THE AUTHOR

If I were now asked how teachers become autonomous, I would not be able to give a one sentence or one paragraph answer. I would however be able to give a lengthy response with more insight and understanding than I had before I completed this study. Becoming an autonomous teacher is definitely a journey. It does not happen in a moment. Rather it happens over a lifetime of experiences. It is important to remember that there are varying degrees of autonomy and that complete autonomy does not exist.

It was heartening to me as a teacher educator that all three of the teachers felt that their teacher education played a significant role in their development as autonomous teachers. I dare not say or think that this is true of all teachers. Each semester as I teach early childhood education classes, I feel that only a handful of my students really get it. What I mean by "really get it" is that they feel it in their being. All three of the teachers

interviewed had an innate respect for children. They had all learned about child development and how children learn through education classes, research, and professional experiences but the respect they felt for children came from deep within. It was as if they could not live with themselves if they did not do what they believed was best for children. This was illustrated when all three of these teachers suffered major consequences for their autonomous actions. Each of the teachers have engaged in their own personal search for serenity as autonomous teachers. There is a sense of compromise in that search, but giving up was never a part of their actions. They were all trying to survive as advocates for children without losing themselves in the process. This seems to involve a dance between what is acceptable in education and what is right for children.

It was also heartening that early childhood experiences impacted at least two of the participants own felt teacher autonomy. This reinforces my belief that autonomous teachers can influence a student's autonomy for life.

Although I already knew that relationships with others is important, I had not realized how important a role they played until I did this study. As an autonomous teacher, I realize now more than ever how important it is to seek out others who are autonomous. Just talking with these three teachers helped me with my own felt autonomy in that I did

not feel quite so isolated and alone in this world of education.

I don't know if disequilibrium actually promotes autonomy. I know that it promotes learning. It can also be a test of one's autonomy. Disequilibrium might be like the saying, if it doesn't kill you, it makes you stronger.

This study is only a beginning in trying to understand what influences the development of autonomy in early childhood teachers. This was and continues to be my question as a teacher educator who is trying to make a difference as an advocate for children. If nothing else, maybe Joy, Lark, and Kira have given a voice to autonomous teachers. Maybe through the sharing of their stories, others can find their own voices.



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APPENDIXES

Appendix A

Joy



Libby: What led you to become a teacher?

Joy: I was thinking about that last night. My husband and I were dating at the time. I think that I ...Originally I went into music. Because I just loved it in high school and I thought that's what I really wanted to do and we thought that we would have more time to spend with our family. That it would be a job that wouldn't be quite so stressful and we would be really laid back. And it hasn't turned out that way at all. The first three years that we taught we didn't have any kids and we could spend all the summer, we didn't go to school or anything, we just kind of played in the summer and it was wonderful. And now I look back and think how could we could have been going to class or whatever, but because of the money, Steve's had to tutor every night till 7 or 8 to try to make up the money. So, and I've stayed up there till probably 6 or 7 every night when I taught music and I had show choirs and went real early every morning. But it didn't pan out, but I think that's probably why we went in to it.

Libby: So, you had already started dating?

Joy: I think we were even engaged. Our second year of college we were engaged.

Libby: Both of you talked about what you wanted to do for a living.

Joy: And Steve's mother was a teacher and I'd always wanted to teach music I guess all through high school so that's what I decided to do.

Libby: Had you had any other experiences? Were your school experiences positive or negative?

Joy: In music they were. We were talking about this. I cannot even remember any of my high school teachers, they do not stand out to me at all. I can remember about two elementary teachers that I really, really liked. So it wasn't that I don't think that made me go in to it. I don't know.

Libby: So once you went in to music, how did you get from there to where you are now?

Joy: Well, I stayed home with the kids. I taught for three years and then when the kids were born I stayed home with them so gosh, I guess nine years. And they while they were little I started working at St. George's preschool with the kids just kind of on a volunteer basis as a parent and I realized I really loved working with that age children. And so I started talking with the director there who had her master's in Early Childhood and she encouraged me to go back and start all over again. And then when they were in kindergarten I was a parent volunteer in there one day a week and in first grade. I did first grade one day a week and kindergarten one day a week. So two days of the week I was up there all year long. For probably two years I did that. So I taught three days a week music and then two days a week I was in kindergarten and first grade classrooms and that's when I knew that that's what I wanted to do. But I really never had that feeling about the music but the Early Childhood I just knew, it just felt right and I just knew it was something I was going to love to do. I remember coming home and saying I can't believe they pay people to do this, this is so much fun. So anyhow, I started out to go back to college. I had to have nine hours to decertify in music. So I went ahead and took it all in Early Childhood knowing that that's probably what direction I was gonna go in and when I went to talk to I guess it was, I can't remember who I talked to, whoever was the head of it at the time. I think he lined it out to get your Early Childhood certification it was going to take about 47 hours and to get a master's it was only about 57 you just would have to take graduate courses instead so I decided to do that. So I did my certification and master's at the same time. But the first class I had was with Karen Brown and I absolutely love her. I mean the first day of class I came home and said this is

it because there were questions that I had when I taught music that I didn't like about the way I was teaching. When we went through the first time, it was real, you have to get control of your classroom and don't smile until November and that was not my personality and didn't enjoy the three years that I taught music very much. I look back on it now and I think how stupid. I had a principal and she was wonderful but she wanted them to be quiet and then even in the music classroom and when you changed from one song to the other she wanted me to devise some kind of plan that they would stay quiet and I think now you know adult choirs don't do that when they switch from one piece of music, everybody stops and talk and that's part of the fun of the classroom. I think I would do things completely differently now but, that first day of class when Karen started in about constructivism I just went ah that's what was wrong with my teaching. You know how you just have these questions that just didn't seem to fit right. I couldn't put a name to it but I knew what I didn't like about it and the minute I heard her I knew that that's what I wanted to do.

Libby: Did she do it in lecture or did she tell a story?

Joy: Both, but she, the first class I had was the reading language development and beginning reading and she started out talking about constructivism and how children construct their own knowledge and that was the first time I'd heard anything about it. I remember thinking, oh my goodness this makes so much sense. I would go home and try to tell it to my husband who's also a teacher and at first he was going you are nuts this does not make any sense, but the more articles he would read with me and he realized it made so much sense. When you've observed kids for a long time that is what they're doing. But it was mostly lecture, yeah and she had some stories about how she taught and people had a lot

of questions that semester you know trying arguing with her and she always was so intelligent in her answers. She always had researched it first and never just said it's this way because it works and I feel like, I tell my husband, you've got to have some kind of research to back you up, what you're saying. And she could pull out an article about it every time say this is why, read this and see what you think. And I see teachers all the time say well this works just because I've done it this way for 15 years and that's not the answer. You better be able to show some reason why it works. And it was all grounded in a solid theory of education that's almost to me it's indisputable, I don't know how anyone could argue with it. So that was probably, oh I talked to her a lot and she encouraged me to stick with it too. I think she would be a really big influence probably my first. And she had been I think in a position, I remember her talking about some other teachers in the building kind of thinking she was nuts and she would just kind of close her door and do her thing and later they would start to come down and ask her questions because they could start to see that it was working. But I knew, and I remember her saying too that she questions why she went back to school that things didn't make sense to her and I was thinking that's exactly where I am. And when I started to read the articles that she gave, they just made sense.

Libby: When you taught music what age level did you work with?

Joy: Middle school. I had sixth, seventh and eighth graders. And I really like that age pool. I think that if I had known then what I do now about children and how they develop I would have loved that more than I did. But, I was just so intent on we're not going to hear a pin drop in here and I was miserable.

Libby: When you were in that situation and you were doing things that didn't fit your personality,

that you didn't really believe in, what was going through your mind, what were you telling yourself?

Joy: I thought I was a bad teacher, because the lady that taught music with me would have this grade book and you know she did the thing with one check mark and two check marks by their name and then three check marks which I cannot stand that kind of stuff and I would do that because I didn't know anything else. I was 21 years old and did it and I would think, first of all it doesn't work and made me feel bad, it made them feel bad and I just kept thinking there's got to be a better way to do this. And then I would think I must not have control of this classroom very well to even have to be using this. But I could go next door and they were louder in her room than they were in mine. But for some reason I couldn't see that all I could think was I'm a terrible teacher, I can't seem to get this together and every little disruption drove me crazy because it seemed to me they were saying you're not doing a very good job or you wouldn't have those kind of things. Which now I think they are normal things that go on all the time, but it just bugged me because I thought well, and I can remember I had a first year to do that entry year teaching and I remember my principal saying to the professor well I'd like for her to be a little more quiet when they switch from one song to another and he just died laughing and he was telling her well adults don't do that and that that was pretty unrealistic. And I really was concerned about that I remember and I would go home and think, I can't get control of these kids, what is the deal. And I think now I didn't enjoy it, I could've enjoyed them so much and what I missed because I was so worried about that.

Libby: So then you had your children and you decided to go into early childhood. Did you go back into music to work and go to school or how did you do that?

Joy: No, one year I taught part time music at St. George's, kindergarten through third grade and I went to school at the same time and I was a volunteer all in that one year. The first two summers I took 9 hours each summer in early childhood then I took night classes too and then the third year I just quit everything and went to school full time. All day and all night, I took like 17 hours at a time. So, it took me about three years I think to finish the whole thing, but I did that while the kids, one was in first grade I think and one was in kindergarten. And then I guess I did it the next year too, but I never went back to teaching just that little part time. Luckily I had a husband that would work so I could do that so I just went to school full time.

Libby: What role did your family play in your decision to teach?

Joy: Gosh, I don't think they did at all except maybe my husband. My parents wanted me to stay in music at the time when I first started. Really in music you either go performance or education and there wasn't really a lot and I didn't think I'd be able to get a very good job in performance. but they probably encouraged me to get the education side of that. But, other than that I think it was probably more my husband. Because he was real interested in it and so was I.

Libby: So, when you went into, when you decided to start studying early childhood education was your husband supportive of you going back to school?

Joy: Oh yeah, he thought it was great and we share everything. We go home at night and rehash it all. He reads everything I read. He said the other day it's made him a better high school teacher from reading it all too. Oh yeah, in fact when I told him I wanted to do my doctorate he said great, go for it, whatever you need to do. But, I feel bad because he hasn't been able to go back and finish his because I always depend on him to bring the

money in but, he's never complained about that he's been real supportive the whole way. he wanted me to.

Libby: Do you remember any early experiences that effected your decision to teach? Any. I don't know, I know the main part was when you got with your husband now and the two of you talked about, but was there any other factor you think?

Joy: I know I loved my music teachers al the way through school so they were probably a big influence. I took piano from a lady, Martha Lyons. that I think she's in charge of the student teachers at some college now. She was wonderful. And I went to Franklin High School and they had a really good music program. I think my teachers influenced me there a lot. I would have to say the choir directors there. But I didn't want to do high school, I never have wanted to do high school. I always wanted to do elementary and I don't know why. You know, I have a really interesting question. I think, well we talked about this the other day too. I don't think I even thought about other careers very much at the time. And you know I told Steve it makes me so mad if I had been...I could have a doctor or lawyer, but it was pretty much teaching you know there weren't a whole lot of choices it doesn't seem like for women back then.

Libby: What year was this?

Joy: Let's see I graduated from high school in 78 and it seemed like everybody kind of was going into something like that. My friends were all going to be drama teachers or music teachers. Probably my friends influenced me a lot too. All of taem are in that field somewhere just about. I don't think I even thought about any other career.

Libby: Do you think you didn't. what I'm hearing is that you didn't think about because you didn't see other options.

Joy: Right, I don't think I did. I really don't. Isn't that strange. But when I started back on early childhood I almost started out going back to law school. But, I didn't think of that out of high school. I don't know if I even thought of any of that out of high school. But, you know I think that's a bad time to have to make those decisions, you're not old enough to know what you're doing. I don't think it even occurred to me to do anything else.

Libby: When you thought about, when you went into early childhood, but you were also thinking about going to law school, what played a role in your decision to go into early childhood?

Joy: Probably being in my kid's classrooms. This was before I ever went back, while I was staying at home I thought you know I'd like to do something completely different, but then once I got in the classroom with the kids I knew that's what I wanted to do.

Libby: Would you say those were constructivist classrooms?

Joy: No, well the preschool was. The preschool was really good. I'm glad you brought that up. My daughter was in the kindergarten where they changed centers every 15 minutes and she would ring the bell and they would move to the next thing and I was a parent volunteer, since I had taught before she kind of gave me I think more responsibility than she normally would. It was my job to make sure that they got everything done. The kids weren't finishing anything and it drove me crazy. Because she would ring a bell and the stuff was not finished and they were frustrated and then they would move to the next thing. And I remember thinking they're not learning anything from this it's just a big waste of time for 15 minutes and so I had a lot of questions about that well, that's when I first enrolled in those classes because I kept thinking I don't think this is a very good way to do this. And then she would keep the kids down on the floor for probably 45 minutes and they were kindergartners and they had just come from an opening exercise where they



had been sitting for 15 minutes and they were laying on the floor and she was you know get up and that kind of stuff the whole time and I was thinking you kept them down there too long no wonder they're not listening to you and then she would have to explain her centers for the whole week which I was there on Monday and it would go. it would take another 30 minutes to explain all the centers and she would get real frustrated when no one was listening and I didn't know what the problem was and I remember thinking boy. I'm not sure about this. And it sounds like a horrible teacher. but she was really probably one of the better teachers at the school. And at the time I thought it was a really good class but. now I look back at it and think whew, and now I think I had a lot of questions about that and then I had Karen at the time and I started asking questions about what I was seeing in my own kid's classrooms. Because Janine was one of the faster ones and so she would get finished and then she would end up having to try to hurry and help all her little friends that didn't finish and I felt so sorry for them. And see that still drives me crazy. Because there are tons of people who still do it like that. But that was probably one reason why I went back to. but her preschool. both of the kids went to St. Mary's preschool and it was wonderful. It was really developmentally appropriate and maybe that's why I could see the difference because I had seen it done so well in preschool.

Libby: Did you ever ask that kindergarten teacher any questions about the concerns that you had?

Joy: No, no too much. Now the next year, I knew better. my son had a different one and she did it the same way. But. I remember her talking, there was one little boy in the class that was so bright and see it was bad because I was in these classes at the same time. but he was like one jump ahead of her all the time and it drove her crazy because he was so creative that she recommended that kid for D1 And I know it was because he was always

ahead of her and always talking out of turn because he was just so into it and she said he was just too immature and that he needed that extra year because he didn't know when to talk and when not to talk and she saw that as this child's not ready to go on and it made me want to throw up because I could see how bright he was and I remember talking to her about it, do you really thing D1 is the best place for kids like that and we really kind of I could tell we were going to have a disagreement so I just never said anything else about it. She was real big into D1 programs which I don't agree with either and it was real hard for me to not say anything because my kids went to school there and I knew I might be wanting a job there so just kind of didn't say anything, but those things bothered me. And she did it the same way, every 15 minutes they were moved to the next thing. And she had a master's in early childhood which really surprised me.

Libby: Do you know where she got it?

Joy: Uh huh, some college.

Libby: Do you remember any early experiences that effected your decision to teach? Any, I don't know, I know the main part was when you got with your husband now and the two of you talked about, but was there any other factor you think?

Joy: I know I loved my music teachers al the way through school so they were probably a big influence. I took piano from a lady, Martha Lyons, that I think she's in charge of the student teachers at some college now. She was wonderful. And I went to Franklin High School and they had a really good music program. I think my teachers influenced me there a lot. I would have to say the choir directors there. But, I didn't want to do high school, I never have wanted to do high school. I always wanted to do elementary and I don't know why. You know, I have a really interesting question. I think, well we talked

about this the other day too. I don't think I even thought about other careers very much at the time. And you know I told Steve it makes me so mad if I had been...I could have a doctor or lawyer, but it was pretty much teaching you know there weren't a whole lot of choices it doesn't seem like for women back then.

Appendix B

Kira

Libby: First thing I thought I'd ask you what led you to become a teacher?

Kira: I always wanted to be a teacher. I always wanted to be a teacher. I'm the youngest of seven. I have three older brothers and three older sisters and I guess I was probably two. Yeah I was only two yeah I remember my older brother got married. He was eighteen. And so I had nieces and nephews. I mean I was four when my first nephew was born and so I was just little miss teacher kind of from the beginning. We grew up on a farm and I have two sisters that are teachers and a brother that taught and two sister in laws that are teachers and so I have a lot of teachers in my family. And that's just always what I wanted to do. Mainly because I like kids so much. Not as much that I felt love to teach anybody but you know because I loved children from the very beginning. Even though I was four I always felt like my nephews were below me. I mean I felt sort of a responsibility to them. I felt like they were little I you know just always.

Libby: Felt mothering to them?

Kira: Mm hrm. Kind of well nurturing. I'm just kind of a nurturing. I've has parents tell me that before. That I'm nurturing.

Libby: So was there a point like in high school or in collage that you thought o.k. what do I want to do or never questioned it?

Kira: I never questioned it. I just always knew that's what I would do. And I always felt really lucky because I had friends who didn't know what they wanted to do. And I couldn't. it's hard for me to relate to that because I always knew. And is hasn't even been until I've really gotten into the profession and I love it buy I thought gee I never really thought about what I wanted to do. I just always knew and would I do something else and no I wouldn't but never even considered. I never even ever considered it. I have a brother

that's always tried to get me to become a pharmacist and yuck. That's not what I want to do.

Libby: What role did your family play in your decision?

Kira: A big role. I mean think this is their influence. I say a big role but I knew I think. I think because I came from a loving nurturing environment. We have a really close family. We still get together really regularly and I don't know you hear about families that have squabbles and things like that and we never did never do. Just a real loving constant family and I feel like that made me who I am inside which played a big part in what I wanted to do. Maybe somehow return that gift to other people.

Libby: What about early childhood experiences? Did they play a role?

Kira: Oh well I was probably eight probably. My first nephew was born when I was four and then one the year after and then one the year after that. So they were stairstepped and I was probably eight and they were or nine and they were probably five, four, three and at Christmas every year well the first year they were five, four, and three I would have them. I would dress them up. And remember one year I had. I covered boxes wrapped boxes as Christmas presents and I cut out holes for their head and their arms and left the bottoms so they could just put them over their heads and they sang and I played the piano. And they sang this little song and we rehearsed it for weeks and it was just one song and every time they would come over we would rehearse and at Christmas I dressed them up and we did it. And so we would give programs I guess you know for the rest of the family. One year I dressed them up like candles with trash bags and little flames on their heads.

Libby: Was that kind of a tradition?

Kira: Yeah, kind of. Well they grew up and they got bigger than me and wouldn't do it

anymore. I always trying to...

Libby: Were you around them on a constant basis?

Kira: Yes. Yes they were like brothers. All the time. And there were several occasions where they would all be there at the same time.

Libby: Did you play school?

Kira: Uh huh. We did.

Libby: Were you ever the student?

Kira: Well that's interesting. No. But we didn't really sit down and play classroom in school that much I mean we played but we didn't. But no. I wouldn't have taken...that's terrible.

Libby: What was your formal education like?

Kira: Oh in college?

Libby: Uh huh.

Kira: I had some really, really good classes and some really, really bad classes. You mean as an overall rating or?

Libby: Just was it traditional? Was it inovative?

Kira: Some of both. Some of both. I found that my methods classes were a lot more innovative and hands on then any of my others. Most of my methods classes...I had Clara O'Casey. I don't know if you know her. She was my language arts methods instructor and she teaches here I think in eighty in the eighties some time. And she was wonderful and she really lit a fire under me. And I also have my special ed...it's the only true special ed. program and Dr. Land in special ed. She is great and she was the first person who really, she always, her class is adapting materials. How to make. how to take traditional things and make them. make them more hands on for kids who needed and at that point and that

was the point I think I really thought well why do just these kids need it. You know why doesn't everybody get it and from then on and that was her point to. And she really harps on that and that. that's where I think my philosophy started to kind of unfold. Because I didn't really have a philosophy...I didn't have a. I didn't know how I felt about education until as far as constructivism and all that I mean that would have been real foreign to me the time I started school. But it all started to kind of develop then I think.

Libby: Tell me more about that. How the experience for you that when you started your education process...

Kira: I barely remember when I started. I mean started out just straight elementary but that wasn't really enough for me. I wanted to know more and so I took up special ed. and they just started this new elementary special ed. program and it ended up not lasting very long. But several people went through it I think and that. that's what I wanted. I got a degree. I graduated without being certified in anything but then took the graduate hours to finish certification in elementary and MR...and anyway just slowly I mean through various and it was probably just based on a few of my favorite instructors that really believed in what they taught and did it and did it in our classroom.

Libby: How did they do it?

Kira: Will I know that Nancy O'Donnell in our language arts class we wrote journals and we of course monitored her and we had pen pals in the third grade class in Perry and we did all the things she talked about. And so that made. that made an impression on me. We built a file of information in her class. It was really helpful. All of the assignments that she gave us were really practical. And it was the same in the. in the adaptive materials class with Dr. Land. Everything we did in here were things we could use. It made sense.



Libby: Is Clara O'Casey still there?

Kira: I don't. she used to work in the office of the President after she taught language arts and I don't know whatever happened to her.

Libby: Was she a professor or?

Kira: She, she was a

Libby: Like a graduate assistant?

Kira: She was a professor.

Libby: Oh.

Kira: But I don't know...I don't know if she's still there or not I haven't seen her. She sure was good. She, she used to tell us about standing up for what she believed in. I know my first year of teaching I kind of had a hard time and I called her and she told me what she'd say? She said sometimes, what'd she say? Something about compromising. That sometimes you have to, she didn't say sometimes you have to compromise but something about maybe sacrifice but not compromise or something like that you know. She was just telling me how to stand up for, for what I believed in. But your first year that's hard. You're really kind of in a rut your first year and you can't do much. You just kind of have to do what they want and you don't have the ability to do what you want.

Libby: So when you graduated...when you went back and got your certification was that also a master's?

Kira: It worked out to be. I wasn't enrolled in any master's classes yet but, because I didn't know what I wanted. I kind of thought I wanted a master's in special ed. and I even applied to get some of the stuff and I never did go through with that because I decided that wasn't what I wanted. But I took all these hours and then I finally...I finish this May.

enrolled and looked into early childhood but they're master's program they couldn't find anybody who could tell me what I needed to do. And you had to find somebody who would be willing to work with you and it wasn't going to work out. So then I talked to Dr. Castle and decided to go curriculum and instruction and I finished last May and all my hours that I taken..It was great. So it really didn't take me very long. I thought I was going to have to retake a bunch of stuff.

Libby: Do you feel that your teacher education prepared you for what you face in the classroom?

Kira: No. I mean not, I mean some of it did. I mean as far as giving me a philosophy and a belief system and I knew when I went out there what I wanted to do. But, nothing can prepare you for what it's really like. I mean you have to experience it. My students are doing wonderful. Half of it...because of the elementary special but I've...in kindergarten and that was great. I mean it was just hands on, constructivist all the way and...team taught. You know it was great. And I learned so much and that after what I had learned in college from the few instructors that I had really liked I saw it in practice in her classroom and it just all made sense. I mean it just all kind of came together from watching...It might not have made sense to me and might not have been able to do it like that if I hadn't seen it in real life in her classroom. Because I saw it work and that's what really just internalized everything. And that's why I have really strong beliefs that your student teaching experience needs to be a good and positive one because it's really the only experience you have before you go out...

Libby: What teachers have you admired in your life?

Kira: Oh my first grade. Well she taught me first and second grade. We had such small classes in the school I went to that first and second grade were in the same class. I mean we were

very separate it wasn't like multi age like you do now I mean first grade was on one side of the room and second grade was on the other. But, and she was very traditional. I mean there was nothing constructivist about that classroom at all but I admired her because I knew she liked me. I mean I could really feel that she cared about me. And she's the main one from my really from my elementary years. There weren't any high school teachers that I, I mean you know I liked them all but there weren't any just real special ones. And the two that I mentioned from college...and Dr. Castle and I mean I really admired her in college too.

Libby: What did you like about her?

Kira: I felt like in my graduate work her classes were the only classes where I really got something valuable and they were a lot of work but the work I felt like I benefited from. I mean I tried hard in her classes and I had other classes where they didn't mean enough for me to try. And you know in your graduate work in graduate by that time you think it isn't going to benefit me why should I try hard you know. But I did in her classes. I tried harder for her than the other classes.

Libby: Was it because the work was meaningful or your relationship with her?

Kira: Both probably. The work was meaningful and she, I mean she expected it. I mean she didn't expect anything less than your best. But yet she didn't, she didn't get that across in any kind of a demanding way at all.

Libby: Are there any colleagues or mentors that have influenced you?

Kira: Laura Sands when I taught with her very much so because in my first half year of student teaching...and I felt like in this class fourth and fifth grade...and they were doing...they could barely read...that was written in print he was having to copy it in cursive and he

couldn't even read the print. And I felt like that was terrible and every day I'd leave that school and drive over to Linda's room and I would just cry or I would just tell her everything you know and she really got through to me.

Libby: Any other colleagues?

Kira: Well my first year that I taught there were five of us entry year teachers and we all had the same belief system you know. We all were just raring to go. We kind of felt like we were in a school that maybe at the time we felt like everybody was just a bunch of old teachers and ...younger ones came in and maybe weren't very appreciated. That's kind of what we felt like and they were. we would have meetings you know and we'd meet secretly in somebody's room and cry on each others shoulders.

Libby: Do you still do that?

Kira: The one's of us that are there we do. There are three of us now that are there and we don't, we don't have the need to cry on each others shoulders so much but if there's ever anything that happens they're the one's we go to. One of them he and I are really close and our classes buddy up...we get our kids together every year. And the teacher next door to me teaches first grade. She's been my neighbor for...and she and I are pretty close. And she does some neat things. And the neat thing about her is she's probably I mean she does things a little bit more traditionally than I do but she is so good at so many things things I feel like I'm not sometimes and she shares her ideas and I share my ideas with her and she is not. she is so accepting of whatever I want to do. She doesn't care if I do things more differently than her you know. She just doesn't care. She can walk in my room and the kids will be going haywire and she doesn't. she never judges you know. She just goes oh it looks like you're having fun in here. That's what's neat about her and you need a neighbor

like that. You know you don't want somebody breathing down your neck all the time.

She's been great. We like each other.

Libby: So why do you teach the way you do?

Kira: Oh gosh I don't know. I think because...I've seen kids in a situation. I've seen kids in both kinds of situations. I've seen what they can learn and how much they enjoy it. And I never had a class like that when I was growing up. I never had a class where I could write you know in school. Well I loved to write and I would go home a lot...I would go home and write but I wish so much that I had been able to do that in school where I had a teacher that would have encouraged me in being creative because I only wrote words I could spell and my stories I still have some of the stories I wrote when I was a kid. ...and the stories kids write now sound so much...because they use their own words. They use the words that they've heard.

Libby: Could you say that again?

Kira: The stories I wrote sound like a basal reader and the stories that kids write nowadays don't because they use the word you know I mean they're not limited now to the words they know how to spell they use the words they know and they words they heard...

Libby: How do you decide on the curriculum used in your classroom?

Kira: I pretty much just do what I want. You know I stick with basics the stuff that...I cover all that but, I just pretty much do what the kids are interested in. You know it's not something I predetermine...I mean I have a few set things that I like to cover because they're things that all kids like you know...and rain forests and things like that but every year it's different. And so we try to cover the same skills and the same things that are in the PASS objectives but every year it's a totally different way.

Libby: So how, can you be more specific in how that actually takes place?

Kira: Well the kids pretty much decide what they want to learn about.

Libby: How do they decide?

Kira: Well it just happens. It just, somebody will bring in a something and they'll say will you please read this book about the shark or something and we'll read it..we go to the library and we're checking out books...and then I'll make some centers or something like that. we'll try some other concepts that go with what we're doing and we write about...and we have math about... and we keep going and see what else happens.

Libby: It's thematic in emerging?

Kira: It's thematic yeah.

Libby: Do you ever have more than one going on at a time?

Kira: Mm hmm. Sure. And sometimes there'll be groups and some groups of kids will be learning about sharks and some groups of kids will be...

Libby: How are the rules devised in your classroom?

Kira: The kids make them.

Libby: How does that process occur?

Kira: I. we. I don't do it on the first day. I wait several days after school starts to give them some experience some time anyway before they. if you ask them on the first day they say your typical pat you know rules. But we have just some experiences in room first and I don't ever say the word rule. I say what are some things that we can do to make our room a safe, happy place? And then I'll write down what they tell me and I post it. ...and they vary form time to time I've had kids go up and ask me...and I'll write the child's name by whatever he or she said. And then also asking then what are some things we can do to

make our classroom a safe, happy place their answers are usually positive. You know but even if they're negative I'll write them the way they say them. But I've had kids. I had one little boy last year add one to the bottom and his rule was have fun in first grade. ...nobody had said that and he thought of it later and I put it up there because it was cute.

Libby: How many do the usually come up with?

Kira: Oh it varies from year to year. Somewhere around twenty. I mean you'll have kids kind of say the same thing several different times so we try to...and they don't say don't hit don't. don't kick, don't. don't. don't. don't do all these things then I'll say what's one something we can say that covers all of those. ..but the kids always, always, always come up with words...you know they cover everything. They know. They know what they're supposed to do. And what it takes to function in a community and what things have to happen for everybody to be happy and feel that respect.

Appendix C

Lark



Libby: This is Lark and this is the first formal conversational interview. Lark, think about what led you to become a teacher.

Lark: I was always going to be a teacher. I don't remember wanting to do anything else.

Libby: Really?

Lark: Yes, I remember, well I remember knowing that I was going to be a teacher, a missionary and a nurse. Interesting. I liked autobiographies as a child. Clara Barton was one of my favorites.

Libby: So out of the three how did you decide to be a teacher?

Lark: Well I actually kind of ended up being all three anyway.

Libby: Oh?

Lark: Oh, she's scared now! I remember just always playing school... I realized I loved it, I loved school.

Libby: You said you were a missionary and a nurse also?

Lark: Well, in my own way of thinking. And this is in the pretty big picture not... this is going to be harder than I thought it was. O.K. let me try. It always mattered to me to do the best I could and to do, although I try not to get... at this point in life it being right, I always knew the difference between what when, what benefitted life and what didn't benefit life. And so to me that, I don't this, the way I see what I'm doing is as a spiritual discipline even, in that everything is related to everything else and this is just one way to express. I guess, the essence of ones self. I don't know... you can't tell but I'm real interested, I'm Indian, I'm a Choctaw and I've always been interested in natural remedies as opposed to intrusive other kinds of things. I think the natural route is the one I want to take and I think that might by why, why I um, I don't know if this sounds right or not but it's what I

think, my teaching is kind of... because it comes from within and that's from within me and from within the kids and from within what is created by that community together. ...different every time... But my mother was a teacher in the women's school halls. She and my father met at some college. And they both have always had very high regards to education. The highest regard and ... just always trying to, I don't know it's a difference between, we never talked about being better than other people. Because dad always felt somehow, I don't know that my son saw a bumper sticker the other day it was a license plate and I saw it, we were at a stop light ... and he saw this license plate and it said my grandkids are better than yours. And I looked at it and like I do most things I just looked at it and it registers and I think about it and maybe I'll say something and maybe I won't but I didn't say anything, I just sat there and I thought about it and then I thought about where we were going, what I needed to remember and my son said to me, he's almost 15 he said, all of a sudden he sat and he said, I don't like that. I said what and he said that license plate. And I said oh I saw that and I said what's interesting is I don't like it either but it was, you know it's the feeling of belonging too, that wasn't there, it wasn't like you know this community of grandparents and we all love our wonderful grandchildren and you know life's terrific but it was putting ones self above and being better than, the calling attention I guess to, to that in a way that didn't make any sense personally. I just feel so many things it's your job to find out.

Libby: So when you remember when you decided that I'm going to get a degree ... was there a conscious time when you made the decision or did you just...

Lark: I always knew I was a teacher and not that I would be a teacher, I always knew I was a teacher. A critical difference maybe. I was going to go in to special education because I

told you that the nurse, the missionary, the teacher in me has always been melded pretty well together. That's just always been me and when I was in high school I remember wanting to go into special ed. Instead of you know as education and my parents probably just went kind of nuts. They've always, they were really concerned and they sat me down and talked to me and told me why they did not think that would be a good decision for me. And I thought they, you know I listened to them but I still you know when you just really pretty much always thought through things yourself and then you...

Libby: They sat you down and told you you shouldn't go into special education.

Lark: Well, yeah and I you know really resisted what they were saying but they told me that I was so sensitive that they felt it would no be a good choice for me because I get so involved and so caught up in well, any body's dilemmas. I used to bring home you know all the little birds to die that I found in the yard and street and dogs with broken legs and stuff like that and they just thought, and I was always very emotional so they just really felt very strongly, both of them, ...I can't remember having another discussion with them like that in my whole life. I knew there were reasons why they felt that very strongly. And so they thought taking me to a special workshop would you know where mentally handicapped people hang out, worked and congregated would help deter me but it just made me know that I just was definitely here to do my work. So, I really don't know how that, how I resolved that within myself except that I have always trusted my parents even though I haven't always agreed with them. Always trusted them. But I remember, and to I always wanted to teach Indian kids because my father is half Choctaw and half Irish. My mother was born in Mulhall and just been kind of an Oklahoma farm girl, Pennsylvania Dutch roots and you know just kind of a Guthrie girl really, Coyle I guess, and when she

and my father met he was very dark.. Just the darkest of the darkest Indians and she's very fair with blue eyes and her hair was dark but I'm sure that they must have endured some things in their early marriage and in their you know courting and their life together that were probably discriminatory although I don't know about that because I just don't know about. I mean if it happened I don't know but I can't imagine looking at photographs of them, he very dark and she very light, I can't imagine that it did not happen but she came from a very loving family who loved him dearly, they still do my mother's been dead for eleven years and still my father is just one of their greatest loves. So it was, I grew up in a family of total acceptance and as I was really different and my parents would laugh, very lovingly laugh and say you know we don't know and my father still to this day says that we don't know what happened when she was born there were quite a few babies there and somewhere, somewhere in this world today there is a calm little girl looking for her real parents and we got this one. And we've taken her and we've loved her and we've done the best we can with her but we just don't know how it happened. Because I'm really different than all my family that so very accepted and so very safe in that. They didn't ever understand what I was talking about on the same, I don't know levels they were to use but even when they couldn't understand what I meant or what I felt or what I was trying to express they would always try and be very, they were always unconditionally loving and accepting but, they would roll their eyes sometimes and my father's comment often would be she's out there in the moon and the stars again. You know like God help us Mildred. Sometimes he'd say it that way. She'd say I know dear. And they'd just kind of look at each other like we're doing the best we can but they loved the differences too. It was really, it was a ... because I didn't have to be who anybody else thought I needed to

be I think hardly ever. I also had a real lot of challenges and obstacles too but I really knew I was always loved totally. A good feeling.

Libby: So in looking at what led you to become a teacher you've mentioned or referred to your heritage, your parents and their influence and

Lark: I think I would have to say it was ... a couple I'm thinking of right now are one just growing up in a public school and realizing that all children were not treated equally and I never did like that. I had Jewish friends, they were perceived as less than and I hate to say that but in retrospect I'm pretty sure and by less than I mean they were going to hell and we weren't. That's less than. That never felt right. And I guess I, I guess I always noticed some extra things the teacher made in the ... powerful position that it truly is. Because you can really make a difference on the long term.

Libby: So in deciding to become a teacher do you feel you were conscious of all of these factors?

Lark: I think I've always been conscious. I think I've always had a direction and one thing has seemed to lead to the next quite beautifully and then I, when I reach whatever the next thing would be I would always notice what I'd just learned that had helped me with that place in life. It's happened all my life. I don't know if you call that synchronicity, I don't know what you would call it. Just always had a direction and although I didn't know what, you know I didn't have conscious goals about I want to this next, I want to do that next. Contrary to that I did not have direct goals like that but my work led me to the next step always. Just really always been in love with the work. It's always mattered a great deal. It's been a source of great meaning and pleasure. Real pleasure. And real heartache I might say too. I guess the way to say it more succinctly would be it's always been, the process has always been the important thing. Not the end product, the process. And I

think that it's been a process of life of course and it still is ... continues to be but in the classroom it's the process that we go through daily, hourly it's the process that builds people. Not checking off task at the end of whatever day.

Libby: O.K. well in answering what led you to become a teacher you've also talked about what role your family played in your decision to teach and, and that was my next question and also do you remember any early experiences that effected you decision to teach and you've also talked about that. Do you have anything to add in that area?

Lark: I think a need for authenticity came early in my life. And I think probably took me about 48 years to resolve. I remember being six years old and I told you about my Jewish friends before and I remember being you know in, and I always loved my church and the people there and I grew up in a Baptist church. And well a couple of things. You know Baptists don't dance. Well we didn't in those days anyway. And there were very strong moralistic about why one didn't dance and why one didn't do this and why one didn't do that etc. and my parents both worked at the print shop, family business, and my dance lessons were on Friday for quite a while I remember and I took them since I was three. So it was a big deal. And you know we were Baptist but I took dance lessons so that doesn't seem like it would be that big of a deal but it was. And my parents sometimes on Friday with getting all the jobs, you know all the commercial printing out, all the jobs they had, deadlines, could not break away with payroll and this that had to be done on Friday afternoon to get me to my dance lesson. Which wasn't even very far from the shop, which is where we went after school. And I remember thinking it quite special that the Baptist minister would come pick me up and take me to my dance lesson. That is still quiet special to me. That memory that, and he took flack for it too. But, you know everybody.

all of us knew that there was nothing wrong that we were doing it was wonderful. It was grace, it was beauty, it was expression, it was everything wonderful. There was nothing that could be wrong about an experience like that with the most wonderful dance teacher in the world you know, and an old piano player, live music and stuff it was just grand. And he would take me to my dance lesson and I don't know why that made such a difference to me but it really did. And I knew that people thought less of him for doing that and I knew that he was living according to his own, I guess you would call it moral autonomy. I mean now I have words for it. I didn't then I just thought this was great and it touched me more than I could verbalize all that. But then, and another thing happened around church too, it's interesting. In my church there's lots of discussion about why Jews were going to go to hell and why you know there was only one way and I just never felt like that was true. I mean it just didn't feel right when I knew people intimately. That they were wonderful people, had wonderful hearts, wonderful lives, you know kind parents, kind thoughts with good friends. It never clicked that that could be true. It always clicked that that could not be true. And so I would talk about my, talk to my parents about it at a really early age. I remember doing it at six but, I think we probably talked about it a lot all the time and I remember learning a word that I never forgot and was hypocrisy. And it was, as I understood it as a six year old, what I guess my questions were how can someone, because I really listened. I always paid attention and I knew what I've learned at church and it was that God is good. God is benevolent. God love us. The love meant a lot to me because I knew about love and God loved us no matter what and I don't know, did you go to a Baptist church?

Libby: Mm hmm.

Lark: You know what I'm talking about then. I could go on. I never much got in to doctrine then. But all these things didn't make any sense. They didn't go together. It wasn't it just never fit and so when I talked to my parents about it they said something like I remember probably their explanation was something like well, there's a word for that. And we always had spelling games and we always you know I think I grew up in a print shop I could always read I think and I grew up proofreading before I could even read and there was just always a lot of emphasis on I don't know maybe it was perfectionism but doing the best you can do in where ever you are and they, it's kind of hard to go back this far, it's getting kind of cloudy. I just remember they said something like well sometimes people say one thing and do another. And that has always, I guess maybe it was important to because I finally clarified some things at the age of 48 that are being able to really do what you know is right and what you feel is right, not only for children but for yourself and it all meshes beautifully together. There's no conflict in my thinking and that, that's a good place to get to.

Libby: Do any other early childhood experiences come to mind, stand out?

Lark: I always got to spend time doing what I wanted to do. I was a daydreamer and they let me. That's probably one of the things I thank them most for. I used to play in the woods in between my grandma and granpa's house and my uncle's house and, with my cousin who's just a day older than I and we always, I don't now we did all kinds of things. We just, we got to play. I got to play as a kid and they that's essential. I learned a lot. And I think kids, whenever you asked me if I consciously remember. The conscious, I think kids



real thrill to get to facilitate the process of them growing in to who they are. It's great everyday in the classroom. It really is, I love it.

Libby: Were rewards and punishment ...

Lark: In my life? Hm mm. Isn't that funny? That's rather important. Huh, I'm glad you asked that. No. No there was, oh well, no we just all worked together. We all, we all had a shop to run, we all had a house to keep, we all had you know pets to take care of and we all had our own things that we felt were important to do. And maybe that's why we're all so different, that it did always work, there was always that you know that, I guess basis or respecting who each person was. Something slipped into my mind just for a second and it was good I wanted to tell you. Oh shoot. What did you ask me?

Libby: About rewards and punishment.

Lark: oh, related to that, you know I told you we had a family business?

Libby: Mm hmm.

Lark: And I grew up in a community. I mean, it was a pretty big town, Ponca City in the 50's and there were certainly a lot of people that I didn't know but in that downtown community and in the neighborhood of course, but the downtown community my little sister and I were just, you know we were just frequent fliers on the street and you know we'd go to the drugstore for a coke, we'd go to the dime store ... and you know we'd have 50 cents to spend on little china donkeys or puppies and stuff and we would just, we just really had fun and we didn't have a lot of money but you know we just had fun with little stuff and every Friday, this was of course before my dance lesson because we had to help do this too, we would take the payroll to the bank and we would walk back with all the cash.

Libby: How old were you?

Lark: Oh, second grade. This is reflective. This is good. I want this tape. I need to write that on the contract too, remind me.

Libby: O.K.

Lark: So where was I? Well, I was in the second grade and third grade and fourth grade and fifth grade and sixth grade and you know all the way up we would take the payroll to the bank which was almost two or three blocks away on the main street of town and we would just walk and all we'd have is the payroll bag, the zipper money bag, and we'd you know I'm sure swinging along and you know because we just had fun doing it and we knew it was an important thing to do but they also knew we could do it and we always did it and everybody always knew we did it so. Heaven knows what kind of system they had up you know maybe somebody from every store called him and said they're here now. You know, I don't know what they did but I never thought they didn't trust me. We always knew and occasionally we would be a little late coming back and so my mother would call the drugstore, the girls are here, yeah they're getting a lime coke is there anything you want. It's just a community and maybe that's why, that's probably partially why, that's probably maybe why I think community is the only way to grow up. And if you don't have one where you live maybe you can have one where you really live. Inside a classroom. So that's about personal responsibility too, isn't it? It's about personal responsibility and a sense of community, a sense of trust, always being listened to and I never ran the show. I always a part of the picture. A very important part of the picture. I think that appears to have spilled over in my life because one of the things I tell my father and my sister is God if I die and you're here don't let Will put what I'm scared he's going

to put on my gravestone. She always said the world doesn't revolve around you. True.

True. So really I didn't grow up spoiled at all but I grew up having a very important place

in a, in beautiful, beautiful feeling.

Appendix D

Consent Form

## CONSENT FORM

"I, \_\_\_\_\_, hereby authorize or direct \_\_\_\_\_, to perform the following research procedure:"

The procedure is to participate in conversational interviews for the purpose of obtaining information about how early childhood educators perceive their development of autonomy as teachers. Both scheduled and spontaneous conversational interviews will be recorded by phone, in person, and by mail. The participants will also be encouraged to engage in written correspondence with the researcher, based on general questions of clarification and elaboration concerning the interview questions. This is to serve as an extended form of dialogue. After the preliminary drafts are written, the participants will be given copies of the text that concern their own personal story. They will be requested to read, reflect and comment on this text. Dialogue about their reflections and comments will take place between the researcher and the participants. Through such dialogue, consideration for additional comments and / or deleted comments will be negotiated.

The duration of the subjects participation will be determined by the length of time it takes to gather the data. It is projected by the researcher that it should take no longer than two months once the interviews begin.

The code of ethics outlined by the American Psychological Association (APA) will guide the confidentiality of this study. This code of ethics instructs researchers to protect their subjects from mental and physical harm and that the best interests of the subjects must be kept foremost in the researcher's mind. No names will be used in the written text of the study. The audio tapes will be kept in the researcher's locked file cabinet for the duration of the study. Upon completion of the study and approval of the dissertation the

audio tapes will be erased.

Possible benefits as a result of participating in this research procedure are the benefits that come from reflection. It is hoped that through these reflections, the subjects will gain a greater understanding of their own perceived development of teacher autonomy. The subjects will also aid society through their participation, by adding to the educational research that is relied upon for progress.

"This is done as part of an investigation entitled

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"The purpose of the procedure is to gain a further understanding of how early childhood educators perceive their development of autonomy as teachers."

"I understand that participation is voluntary, that there is no penalty for refusal to participate, and that I am free to withdraw my consent and participation in this project at any time without penalty after notifying the project director.

I may contact Libby Ethridge at (918) 225-4108 or Kathryn Castle at (405) 744-7125. I may also contact Jennifer Moore at University Research Services, 001 Life Sciences East, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK 74078; Telephone: (405) 744-5700.

I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy has been given to me."

"Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_ (a.m./p.m.);"

"Signed: \_\_\_\_\_"

"Witness: \_\_\_\_\_"

"I certify that I have personally explained all elements of this form to the subject before requesting the subject to sign it."

"Signed: \_\_\_\_\_"

Appendix E

I.R.B.

OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD  
HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW

Date: 02-22-96

IRB#: ED-96-084

**Proposal Title:** THE JOURNEY OF AUTONOMOUS EARLY CHILDHOOD  
TEACHERS

**Principal Investigator(s):** Kathryn Castle, Elizabeth Ethridge

**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.

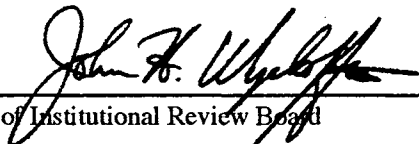
APPROVAL STATUS PERIOD VALID FOR ONE CALENDAR YEAR AFTER WHICH A  
CONTINUATION OR RENEWAL REQUEST IS REQUIRED TO BE SUBMITTED FOR BOARD  
APPROVAL.

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

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

Signature:



Chair of Institutional Review Board

Date: March 7, 1996



Appendix F

VITA

VITA

Elizabeth Ann Ethridge

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Thesis: The Journey of Autonomous Early Childhood Teachers

Major Field: Curriculum and Instruction, Early Childhood Education

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Muskogee, Oklahoma, February 7, 1965, the daughter of Joe and Joyce Ethridge.

Education: Graduated from Wagoner High School, Wagoner, Oklahoma in May 1983; received Bachelor of Science degree in Elementary Education and Early Childhood Education from Northeastern State University, Tahlequah Oklahoma in May 1986; received a Master of Education degree with a major in Reading at Northeastern State University in December 1988; candidate for the degree of Doctor of Education from Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma, July, 1998.

Professional Experience: Assistant Professor, Department of Early Childhood Education, Northeastern State University, Tahlequah, Oklahoma, August 1996 to present.

Teaching Assistant, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma, August 1994 to May 1996.

Kindergarten teacher - 1 year and Chapter 1 Reading teacher - 2 years, Cushing Public Schools, Cushing, Oklahoma, August 1991 to May 1994.

Transitional-first grade teacher - 4 years and First grade teacher - 1 year, Grove Public Schools, Grove, Oklahoma, September 1986 to May 1991.