THE TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF OKLAHOMA CHILD CARE LICENSING SPECIALISTS

By

SHERRY GALE AVERILL

Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education

Oklahoma State University

Stillwater, Oklahoma

1970

Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate College of the
Oklahoma State University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the Degree of
MASTER OF SCIENCE
December, 2006

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OF OKLAHOMA CHILD CARE

LICENSING SPECIALISTS

Thesis Approved:

Dr. Barbara Sorrels

Thesis Adviser

Dr. Deborah Norris

Dr. Mona Lane

Dr. A. Gordon Emslie

Dean of the Graduate College

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education is one of the major issues in the United States at this time. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2002), 11.6 million or 63% of children under 5 years of age are in some type of regular child care in the United States, primarily because their parents work or attend school. The daycare homes and centers which enroll these children, as well as other programs such as Head Start and Early Head Start, are licensed by the Department of Human Services in most states. Providers must meet certain minimum requirements to be licensed, and subsequently undergo periodic inspections to maintain their license. Who determines these requirements and how are they enforced? Each state has its own rules and regulations as well as a hierarchy of staff members to create and enforce these policies.

This paper will focus on the professional licensing workers in the Oklahoma State Department of Human Services (DHS) Division of Child Care. According to the job description posted by DHS, a child care licensing specialist is required to have a bachelor's degree in an unspecified discipline. There is no requirement for child development or early childhood knowledge. The basic purpose of the position is stated as:

> Positions in this job family are assigned responsibilities involving providing professional services to child care facilities and children. Services include on-

> sight monitoring of child care facilities to ensure compliance with licensing requirements; reviewing and recommending/approving case actions; and investigating complaints involving violations of licensing requirements, including abuse and neglect of children in both licensed and unlicensed facilities; and assisting child care providers in meeting minimum requirements and attaining optimum quality by providing on-going technical assistance and consultation to the family (State of Oklahoma Office of Personnel Management, Feb., 2006).

Licensing inspectors typically have a heavy caseload of child care centers and homes to monitor as well as paperwork necessary to document their work. Most states, including Oklahoma, license an increasing number of child care centers and homes each year; however, almost half of the states responding to survey conducted by Harold Gazan (1997) were not employing additional licensing personnel.

Licensing specialists are required to visit each site on a regular basis; the time spent at each location depends on the number of violations they observe and the assistance needed by the child care provider. Inspectors generally check health and safety criteria; they may leave "educational" coloring sheets or generic parent information for the provider. The information is sometimes inappropriate and, since not all facilities have resources to copy materials, it may be of little use. Wilkes, Lambert and VandeWiele (1998) conducted a study on technical assistance to family child care home providers; they found that providers not only require technical assistance in understanding the licensing process, but appreciate guidance as well. They also need assistance in seeking resources for the various aspects of their child care programs.

Description of Problem

Much has been written about the educational qualifications of child care providers/teachers, but there is negligible information about the qualifications of those who license and inspect child care centers and homes. Licensing specialists in Oklahoma and many other states are required only to have knowledge of the health and safety regulations; although some have a background in early childhood, they are not required to have an understanding of child development or the components of early childhood curriculum. Staff who regulate child care centers and homes often have degrees in other disciplines, and have little understanding of the role of early childhood education in the licensing process (Gazan, 1998). If the individuals who license and inspect child care centers and homes had more knowledge of children's growth and development, they could provide guidance and information in important developmental areas, as well as ensure that child care environments meet health and safety requirements.

The fastest growing group of students in colleges and universities are nontraditional or adult students (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002). Adult learners aged 25 and older now comprise approximately 63% of the graduate student population (The Chronicle of Higher Education, 1997). These adults exhibit significant differences in their academic and personal lives from the traditional young student (Kasworm, 1990). Acquiring more education is a challenge for adults who have family, employment and civic responsibilities, but the results can be extremely beneficial to the individual, family and community.

The purpose of this study will be to understand and describe the educational experiences of 45 child care licensing workers who are currently or were formerly

enrolled in the Early Childhood Education master's program at Oklahoma State University. What changes, both personal and professional, are derived for child care licensing specialists who pursue their graduate degree in early child education?

The Research Question

In a phenomenological research study, one overarching question is explored (Cresswell, 2003, p. 105). In this investigation, the primary inquiry concerns the return of working women to graduate school. What is the nature of change or transformation in child care licensing graduate students completing their Master's degree in Early Childhood Education at Oklahoma State University? Four central questions will be asked in order to understand the nature of this change:

(a) How do child care licensing specialists in an early childhood graduate program describe their decision to return to school?

(b) How do child care licensing specialists in an early childhood graduate program describe their reentry experiences?

(c) How does returning to graduate school change these women's lives?

(d) How does the return of child care licensing specialists to graduate school change the quality of services at the Department of Human Services Child Care Licensing Department?

Definitions

Certain terminology will be defined to clarify the concepts that form the basis of this study.

1. **Meaning perspectives** are those rule systems that control our ways of thinking and perceptions of people and ideas.

2. **Meaning schemes** are the concrete expression of meaning perspectives; our ideas and perceptions are translated into specific forms of action (Mezirow, 1991, pp.5-6).
3. **Pedagogy** is derived from the Greek word "paid", meaning "child", and "agogus", meaning "leader of". This translates to the leading or teaching of children.
4. **Andragogy**, originating from the Greek word "andra" for adult, means the leading or teaching of adults (Knowles, 1984, pp. 5-6).
5. **States of existence** are defined as those goals we hope to attain in our life; examples are an exciting life, freedom, family security, health, etc.
6. **Modes of behavior** are those personal characteristics that we want to develop and include traits such as independence, honesty, loyalty, and forgiveness.

Theoretical Framework

The theory of transformative learning in adult education has gained much attention in recent years. Transformative learning theory evolved from the work of well-known adult educators Paulo Freire and Jack Mezirow as they endeavored to help lower social economic groups become more successful through education (Christopher, Dunnagan, Duncan, & Paul, 2001). Mezirow (1985, p. 142) states that he thinks of learning as

the extension of one's ability to make explicit and elaborate (spell out), contextualize (to make associations within a frame of reference), validate (to establish the

truth or authenticity of an assertion), and/or act (to perform) upon some aspect of one's engagement with the world.

In other words, the goal of transformative learning is to support individuals in assessing their current perspectives, and through further education, to provide opportunities to change their viewpoints. The theory of transformative learning is based on the premise that one's current perspectives and approach to life are a result of each individual's experiences, thoughts, culture and knowledge. When we analytically examine our current views, we can look at things in new and different ways, and take action to adjust our lives accordingly.

The traditional approach to adult education is to support learners in attaining knowledge; teachers are regarded as expert conveyors of information. This subject-oriented learning involves the learner in acquiring new knowledge and skills. In transformative learning, learners may acquire new information, but are also encouraged to develop their reflective judgment (Mezirow, 1991, pp.100-101). Thus, transformative learning assists learners in assessing their current beliefs and attitudes to life, and through education, provides an opportunity to alter one's ways of thinking.

Transformative learning involves changing our meaning schemes and perspectives. Meaning schemes include the specific knowledge, beliefs, values, judgments or feelings we use in interpreting a situation. Meaning perspectives are those rule systems that govern our cognition and perception (Mezirow, 1991, pp.5-6). Meaning schemes are the concrete expression of meaning perspectives, and translate general expectations into specific forms of action. For instance, if punitive discipline for children is central to an individual's meaning perspective, specific discipline techniques can be

recognized as meaning schemes stemming from that perspective. An example might be a parent's decision to spank their child or a teacher's decision to use time out for a toddler. Both meaning schemes and perspectives are rooted in our individual cultures and are usually significantly restructured during transformative learning.

Reflection as a Tool for Transformation

We make meaning of the world by consciously thinking about and reflecting on the events we have experienced throughout our lives. Mezirow outlines three ways in which we derive meaning from our experiences through reflection (Cranton & King, 2003). Content reflection is the examination of the content or description of a problem; for instance, we may decide that a particular child development practice is not appropriate. We are reflecting on what we feel, think or perceive. Process reflection involves checking on the problem-solving strategies we are using. We might check to make sure we have all the information concerning the practice we have deemed inappropriate and that we have not misinterpreted any information. Premise reflection is the questioning of the problem itself. We must become aware of why we perceive, think or feel about the situation, and decide whether good or bad is an adequate concept for judging the practice we are concerned about. Through premise reflection, we can identify and judge our beliefs.

Through content and process reflection, we can change our meaning schemes. Through premise reflection we can transform meaning perspectives as we identify and judge our beliefs. The most significant learning is that which enables the learner to understand and shape his or her behavior to better anticipate and control the real world.

Mezirow (1991, pp.168-169) outlines ten elements that are present when perspectives are altered. These are:

- a disorienting dilemma
- self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame,
- critical assessment of role assumptions/sense of alienation from social expectations,
- recognizing that others share similar experiences,
- exploring options for new roles, relationships, and actions
- planning a course of action
- acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing plans
- provisional attempts at trying new roles
- building competence and self-confidence in new roles
- reintegration into society based on the new perspective

These elements do not always occur in this order. Bennetts (2003) examined the impact of transformational learning on individuals who were a part of a fellowship plan sponsored by the Second Chance Trust in southern England. Small grants of money were offered to people who desired to further their education in order to benefit themselves and their communities. Most of the participants explored options for new roles and planned a course of action very early in the learning process. Respondents in this study reported significant transformations in the following categories:

- self-transformation;
- coping with/instigating change in self and others;
- transformed relationships;

- increased educational drive;
- career improvement;
- quality of life.

Mezirow adopted some ideas of his transformational theory from Jurgen Habermas, a well known German philosopher and theorist (Mezirow, 1991, p. xiv). Among these is the concept of intentional learning (Mezirow, 1991, p. 64). Three types of intentional learning contribute to the process of transformational learning. These are described by Cranton and King (2003) as instrumental, communicative, or emancipatory. Instrumental learning is based in reality and can be measured or proven/disproven. Problem solving in the instrumental domain is done through hypothetical deduction. We respond to a situation by formulating hypothetical courses of action, anticipating the consequences of each, acting upon the most reasonable idea, and testing its validity by the results of our actions.

When we reach agreement with others as to what we consider the facts, communicative learning is taking place. We do not question why the facts are so, but just come to an understanding within the learning context. We use reason, and weigh evidence and supporting arguments rather than simply giving credence to authority or tradition.

Emancipation is freedom or awareness of emotional, language, cognitive, cultural and environmental forces that limit our options and control over our lives. When we become aware of how these forces affect not only what we are experiencing, but how and why, we can take action based on these insights. When we analyze the origin of the rules and conditions in our lives, we are examining our assumptions and thus are engaged in

emancipatory learning. Individuals can participate in any of the three types of learning--instrumental, communicative or emancipatory, or a combination of types.

Marilyn Laiken (1997), an educator of adults in Ontario, Canada has successfully used transformational learning theory in her graduate courses. She assumes a facilitative role in helping her students to (1) develop the concepts of systems thinking, (2) develop personal mastery, (3) examine mental models, and (4) build a shared vision as a community of learners. Learners are encouraged to draw from their life experiences while gaining knowledge from the class; they can then apply this knowledge to their lives at work. Laiken notes that as learners become more empowered, more critical self-reflection and transformative learning occurs.

Summary

Adults develop progressively toward more sophisticated meaning perspectives. These meaning perspectives are usually more comprehensive, perceptive, adaptable and candid than less developed viewpoints (Mezirow, 1997). An individual's perceptions are often changed when they are afforded the opportunity to reflect on and apply knowledge to their everyday life experiences. Critically reflective thinkers move from theoretical analysis of ideas to critical self-reflection, thus arriving at a stronger sense of self-understanding. By applying the theory of transformative learning to adult education, learners can become more empowered to gain knowledge and apply it to their daily lives.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Andragogy

In a review of the research relating to adult learning, two theories dominate the literature. Although transformative learning theory is the basis for this study, a review of the literature would not be complete without mention of the andragogical approach to adult learning. Andragogy is defined as the process of developing one's learning effort so as to increasingly expand the ability to become independent and self-directed as a learner (Mezirow, 1985). The term "andragogy" was first used by the German educator, Alexander Kapp in 1833. In the late 1960s, Malcolm Knowles used the term to label his theory of adult education in the United States (Rachal, 2002).

Knowles' interpretation of the andragogical theory is that adults differ in their learning style from children in several ways. Children usually acquire a foundation of specific learning which leads them to think autonomously. This includes the ability to recognize cause-effect relationships, use informal logic in their thinking, control their emotions, develop empathy toward others, use their imagination and eventually, to think abstractly (Mezirow, 1997). Until recently, pedagogical practices dominated the educational field, extending even to adults. Children are typically, although not always, taught in a pedagogical manner (Knowles, 1984, p. 8). They are acquiring vast amounts of knowledge from birth through their high school years. As they progress through

school, children are increasingly likely to be taught by teacher-directed methods and activities. However, depending on the educational context, adults learn differently. As individuals mature, 1) their self-concept moves from one of being a dependent personality toward being a self-directed human being; 2) they accumulate a growing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasingly rich resource for learning; 3) their readiness to learn becomes increasingly oriented to the developmental tasks of their social roles; and 4) their time perspective changes from one of postponed application of knowledge to immediacy of application, and accordingly, their orientation toward learning shifts from one focused on the subject to one focused on the problem (Davenport & Davenport, 1985).

When adults learn in the company of other adults, they find themselves engaged in a stimulating, passionate and productive activity. "Adults in interaction constitute a community of knowers as well as a community of learners" (Pohland & Bova, 2000, p.139).

After criticism was directed at Knowles' theory that adult and child education was entirely different, he did alter his view of adult education to concede a continuum between pedagogy and andragogy ranging from teacher-directed to self-directed learning (Davenport & Davenport, 1985). He conceded that the learning approach could better be defined by the learning context rather than by the age of the learner with either andragogical or pedagogical approaches being appropriate for children and adults depending on the situation.

Early Research

There is little empirical literature pertaining to adult education. Much of the early research questioned adults' learning abilities. Could older people learn as well as younger people? The results often made it seem that adults were less capable learners, when in reality the adults had less education and less opportunity to develop the skills needed to be successful on standardized tests (Merriam, 2001). Several studies indicated that adults can acquire and utilize new skills and information (Gilbert, Rogers & Samuelson, 2004). Although some age differences have been noted in the executive processing functions of an adult brain, the extent of the difference depends on certain biological and cognitive factors, and hence are very individualized (Head, Raz, Gunning-Dixon, Williamson, & Acker, 2002). Certainly some adults perform better academically than traditional young students as confirmed in a recent study by Carney-Crompton and Tan (2002).

Strengths of Adult Learners

The strengths of adult learners have been well documented in the literature. Research has shown that nontraditional students are perceived by faculty, as well as by other students, to be more ambitious, conscientious and self-sufficient. Adult students are also perceived as more competitive and assertive (Ross-Gordon, 2003). These are characteristics related directly to adult learning theory.

On entering a university setting, adult students have to adjust to the role of student (primary adjustment). Once they are comfortable in this role, they can use their new knowledge to manipulate the system to their advantage (secondary adjustment), such as substituting one class for another, etc. (Merrill, 2001).

Bradley and Graham (2000) propose four ways in which adult students succeed.

1. Adult students focus their learning on skills and knowledge that are applicable to their life circumstances.
2. Adult students, because of their age, have a more complex knowledge base on which to draw.
3. Adult students are involved with their families, communities, and careers. This more authentic involvement provides a direct connection from the classroom to more meaningful real-life experiences.
4. Adult students make the most of class time to interact with faculty and peers. This allows them to make meaning of the material immediately after it has been presented.

Motivators

What do adult learners need and/or expect from higher education in order to be successful? What instructional and assessment methods best help them to attain their goals?

Not only do adults who return to school experience learning in a different way, but their values concerning what is most and least important in their lives seems to change. Bauer and Mott (1990) examined the life themes and motivations of 16 re-entry men and women. This inquiry dealt with conceptions of adult learners toward the progress made and rewards expected from continuing their education. Students used the Rokeach Value Survey to report an assessment of their values representing states of existence such as exciting life, freedom, family security, health, etc., and values representing modes of behavior, for example independence, honesty, loyalty, forgiveness, etc. The current

personal values of these adult students were compared with values held five years previously. The values in each category changed significantly after these adult students re-entered school.

Motivation in adult learners can be intrinsic, driven by the desire for personal growth, or extrinsic, influenced by financial and/or career related circumstances (Harvey, 1995). In Coker's (2003) study of African American females who pursued higher education degrees, the women reported both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. They aspired to be role models for their children and others in the community, and also wanted to increase their marketability in the workforce, thus raising their standard of living. Most adult students report that either a career change or requirements to maintain or advance in their current profession, is their primary reason for acquiring further education (Kasworm, 2003).

Research indicates that mentoring relationships foster the development of a sense of confidence in a new learning environment (Hardcastle, 1988) and have a positive effect on academic success and personal development. Bauer and Mott (1990) reported that while several respondents interviewed in their study mentioned casual associations with academic advisors, graduate sponsors and other university personnel, none communicated the availability of a mentoring relationship with a professional advisor in their field. Padula and Miller (1999) conducted a qualitative study of women graduate students aged 32 to 48 years who returned to school to earn doctoral degrees. Their findings suggested that, although these women felt it would have been helpful to have mentors while continuing their education, the faculty at the university did not fulfill this

role. It was unclear whether this lack of mentoring was due to a lack of response by the faculty or unrealistic expectations of the students.

Barriers

Adults encounter obstacles not shared by many young, single graduate students. Adults must often assume multiple roles; in addition to that of student, they may have responsibilities related to children, aging parents, spouses and employers. In a study by Home (1998), sixty percent of the women respondents were employed full-time. The majority studied part-time, allocating approximately 19 hours per week to their education. Sixty-six percent had one or two children under the age of 13 years. A smaller number were caretakers, spending an average of 11.5 hours per week caring for family members with special needs.

Fairchild (2003) classified common problems of adult students as situational, dispositional or systemic barriers. Situational barriers included availability to their children, finances, and job responsibilities. Parents feel guilty when time is taken away from their children and jobs. Lower income women reported more stress and strain. Financial concerns drain time and energy from students who must pay for child care to attend class, as well as meeting basic family needs.

Dispositional barriers involved role conflict, role overload, and role contagion. Role conflict arose when students were faced with simultaneous, incompatible demands, such as a parent who must miss class to care for a sick child. Home (1997) related one woman's experience with role conflict. Her child became ill on the day of her seminar presentation, and she could find no one to provide care, nor did she feel that she could

miss the class. She asked a classmate to watch her child during her presentation, then immediately took her child from the university to the hospital.

Role overload is seen as insufficient time to meet all demands. Many students may have difficulty estimating the time required to consult faculty, conduct research, write papers and complete other homework (Home, 1997). Individuals may have to work longer hours at their job, or use time for responsibilities other than homework and studying.

In role contagion, a student is preoccupied with one role while performing another; for instance, a mother may be worried about her teenage daughter's problems. In Home's (1998) study of adult women students pursuing master's degrees, she found that women with children younger than thirteen years experienced the most role overload and role conflict.

Systemic barriers included the factors involved in attending school as an adult learner, usually on a part-time basis. The institution may do little to meet the needs of adult students in scheduling office and/or class hours. Some older adults may have difficulty participating in on-line or distance-learning classes because of lack of technological skills. It may be difficult for older students to find a cohort with whom they share social and emotional similarities, thus easing the discomfort they might feel about "fitting in" while attending college classes as an adult. Writing essays and research papers, as well as taking examinations also produced strong anxiety for many participants in a study by Merrill (2001). Anxiety was focused on uncertainty pertaining to the level and depth of work expected by the instructors.

Although adults who return to college programs face various barriers, they bring many positive qualities which enable them to engage in a rich educational experience. They possess a wealth of knowledge and skills already, in addition to having a focus and determination that many younger students do not yet possess.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Phenomenological Studies

This was a qualitative phenomenological research study. A phenomenological study focuses on one specific phenomenon of interest; the subjects describe common experiences that have occurred in their lives. The aim is to determine what an experience means for those individuals who are then able to provide a comprehensive description of it. The researcher following a phenomenological approach makes a disciplined and systematic effort to set aside his own opinions regarding the phenomenon being investigated in order to conduct the study as much as possible free of personal bias and beliefs. Knowledge of the phenomenon from prior experience and professional studies is also reserved in order to be receptive in listening to and hearing research participants describe their experience of the phenomenon being investigated.

The procedures employed are intended to describe and understand phenomena rather than to predict or control them. A somewhat small sample of participants is studied in order to develop patterns and relationships of meanings (Moustakas, 1994).

In qualitative research, the results are descriptive in nature, and are presented in words or pictures rather than numerical data (Padula & Miller, 1989). From the individual descriptions, real meanings are derived, in other words the fundamental nature or structure of the experience. To this end the researcher (1) reads the entire description

of the situation straight through to get a sense of the whole. (2) Next, the researcher reads the same description more slowly and distinguishes the transitions in meaning with the intention of discovering the precise meaning. From this procedure, the researcher obtains a series of meaning units or constituents. (3) The researcher then eliminates superfluous information, and clarifies or develops the meaning of the units he has established by relating them to each other and to the sense of the whole. (4) The researcher reflects on the given units, still expressed essentially in the concrete language of the subject, and comes up with the essence of that situation for the subject. Each unit is systematically examined for what it reveals. The researcher converts each unit, when relevant, into the language of psychological science. (5) The researcher then integrates the insights achieved into a consistent description of the structure of learning.

Participants in the Study

Participants for this phenomenological study were graduate students employed by the Oklahoma Department of Human Services Child Care Licensing division. They included:

- those who enrolled, but subsequently withdrew from the program (14)
- those who are currently enrolled (6)
- those who have completed a Master's degree (26)

E-mail addresses were obtained from Julie Hathaway, DHS professional development committee chair, who expressed interest in the study and its benefit to DHS.

Letters of invitation were sent via e-mail to the 46 prospective subjects requesting that an online survey be completed (see Appendix A). All pertinent information contained in a letter of consent was included in this invitation. The invitation also stated

that by logging on to the computer and completing the questionnaire, consent for participation was given by the subject. Confidentiality was maintained by assigning each subject a number; names were not be used in the coding of data. All written material was stored in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's office.

Interview Instruments

Electronic data collection was chosen versus focus groups based on the recommendation of the DHS professional development committee, who cited time constraints, distance for travel, and gas prices as principal concerns. The questionnaires were developed through information discovered in a review of the literature, particularly the data pertaining to adult women reentering college, and through the researcher's experience in attending classes with a group of students from DHS. During group discussions in classes and seminars, the researcher had the opportunity to hear anecdotal stories relating to the school, work and life experiences of this cohort of students.

The questionnaires were posted on a secure, designated web site. The initial questionnaire was requested from each student who had been enrolled in the Master's program (see Appendix C). After the data had been analyzed, the subjects who responded to this questionnaire were separated into four categories:

- licensing specialists with previous early childhood education and/or experience,
- licensing specialists without previous early childhood education and/or experience,
- supervisor/administrators with previous early childhood education and/or experience,

- supervisor/administrators without previous early childhood education and/or experience.

Two participants from each of these four groups were chosen randomly for the follow-up questionnaire (see Appendix D). A second letter of invitation was then sent to eight of the original respondents (see Appendix B). Phone interviews were requested from all participants in the event the researcher needed to clarify the data or collect any additional information. Copies of the compiled data were sent to each participant for further input.

Data Analysis

The researcher read through all the data to obtain a general sense of the information and to reflect on the content. Detailed analysis began with a coding process. Each answer was scrutinized to create coding categories; once the categories were established, the information was then sorted into the appropriate grouping.

Triangulation was achieved by multiple contacts with the participants to ensure that the essence of their experiences has been captured. After the text was analyzed by the researcher and faculty advisor, follow-up phone calls were made to participants for clarification. A written record of the results was then e-mailed to the participants with an invitation for further feedback.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Questionnaire #1

Questionnaire #1 was designed to ascertain information concerning the sequencing, format, and benefits of courses; barriers and motivators in attending graduate school, and effects on the participants' families. Of the 27 students who responded to the initial questionnaire, 5 completed only the first page (demographic information) of the questionnaire. Twenty-two respondents—all women—completed the questionnaire in full. Twenty of the women had completed their degrees; two were currently enrolled; and two had begun the program, but were not currently enrolled.

The demographic information showed an interesting pattern. Of those responding, 15 (68.2%) were in the 46-55 year-old age group, 5 (22.7%) were in the 36-45 year-old age group, and 2 (9.1%) were in the 25-35 year-old age group (see Figure 1). Thirteen of the women had children living in the home, and one had grandchildren living in the home (see Figure 2). The ages of the children ranged between 3 and 27 years with 50% falling in the teenage category (see Figure 3).

The respondents were asked to identify their position in the DHS Child Care Licensing Department. Ten (45.5) classified their positions as Licensing Specialists, four as supervisors (18.2%), six as administrators (27.3 %), and two as other positions

(9.1 %) (see Figure 4). The number of years employed at DHS ranged from 8 to 35 with a median of 18 years (see Figure 5). Five of the students had previous experience as a child care teacher; one had been a child care center director; one had taught four-year-olds in a public school; five had a bachelor's degree in early childhood; twelve had a bachelor's degree in another discipline; one was a former counselor in schools and community assistance program; and four had no experience or education in early childhood (see Table 1). Some participants had a combination of experience and education; for instance a prekindergarten teacher may have a degree in early childhood or a child care teacher might have no early childhood education.

Motivators

The reasons for pursuing a master's degree varied (see Table 2). Twelve of the women specifically cited the DHS licensing department's scholarship offer to assist with the financial burden of pursuing an advanced degree. Another recurring reason for twelve of the women was the opportunity to gain further education and knowledge of early childhood practices. As in Coker's study (2003), the women in the current study were motivated to pursue an advanced degree for both intrinsic and extrinsic reasons. Obviously, the opportunity to gain further education with a financial scholarship from the Department of Human Services was a deciding factor for many of the students. However, many of the women also stated intrinsic reasons such as "to help do my job better" and "to have more current early childhood information to share with providers."

Since they were working full-time, all of the students took only 1-2 courses each semester. All but one student took classes through all classroom formats: compressed video, internet, weekend courses, and traditional classroom. Eleven students felt they

learned more effectively in a traditional classroom, either with lecture/discussion or interactive formats. However, the preferred methods of taking classes were almost evenly divided among traditional (7), internet (6) and weekend courses (8). This may be due to the time and financial constraints of travel to a university site for traditional classes offered weekly.

Improvements in Program

Two major themes emerged from the question about possible improvements in the program. Nine of the twenty-two students expressed the opinion that the thesis/creative component requirement of the program needed improvement. Eight other students reported that the courses offered needed improvements in sequencing, proximity to their home location, how often the course were offered, etc (see Table 3).

Respondents were asked how the sequencing of classes could be improved. Five women stated that students would experience less stress if the more difficult classes were taken during the latter part of the program. Three students felt that research and statistics courses should be taken early in the program to aid in their understanding of the professional reading that was required. Depending on when the student enters the program, there may be little choice as to what course to take next in the sequence. Not all courses are offered each semester, so a student may have to wait several semesters for a particular course to come up in the rotation. With limited instructors and classrooms, this may be a difficult situation for university administrators to change. Other suggested improvements included offering classes more often and learning about the creative component/thesis requirement early in the program. Six of the students had no improvements to recommend regarding sequencing (see Table 4).

The courses cited as most beneficial in helping students understand children's growth and development were assessment, curriculum and early childhood theories (see Figure 6). The answers were varied in regard to a particular assignment or project that changed the student's view of early childhood education. All of the students cited particular courses rather than projects, but one recalled a specific project. She described an activity in her assessment class saying, "we used dramatic play materials to create a learning environment to teach children". Several students wrote that their practicum stood out for them as the most memorable experience. The practicum requires that students spend 60 hours in an early childhood care setting planning and implementing activities with young children, thus giving the student the opportunity to experience first hand the challenges faced daily by child care teachers.

Barriers

The personal barriers faced by these women students echoed those stated in previous studies with time being the most crucial element. Sixteen women cited the challenge of balancing family and work responsibilities with the time intensive requirements of graduate school. All of the participants experienced situational, dispositional and/or systemic barriers as described by Fairchild (2003) (see Table 5).

One example of a situational barrier is limited availability to one's children. One student describes her experience in these words: "At first my youngest child cried frequently and asked why I was studying all the time". Another situational barrier is financial in nature. Although DHS offered a scholarship to pay most of the expenses, payment of mileage to attend class was discontinued at some point during the program.

With the cost of gasoline between $2.00 and $3.00 a gallon, this turned out to be a significant expenditure when driving the long distances required for some students.

Dispositional barriers include role contagion, role overload, and role conflict. Role overload was noted in all responses. Balancing time for family, work, school, church and civic responsibilities was at times overwhelming to these women. One participant said,

> "Probably the biggest challenge was the large amount of time it took to study while holding a full time job, being very active at my church, and having two children who were very active in many activities. Also, I often had to drive 6 or 8 hours round trip weekly for classes and go to work the following morning, which was pretty tiring!"

Role contagion makes it hard to concentrate in one area while having significant challenges in another area. Four students reported they had personal and family health/mental health issues with which to deal, including surgeries and family deaths, while they were attending school.

Systemic barriers are those institutional factors which reentry students face when returning to a university to pursue a higher degree. While some older students may have difficulty finding a cohort of students with which to share experiences, this group of students did not face that barrier. Many of the respondents stated that they had wonderful support from colleagues who were going through or had completed the program. The major university barriers noted by the students were lack of a mentor, not understanding the sequencing of classes, and not having enough information about the thesis/creative component.

The difference in the number of visits with student advisors, even for those who had graduated, was surprising. The number of face to face meetings ranged from zero to "too many to remember" with the median number of visits totaling four to five. Most students did have some contact with their advisor through phone or e-mail. While some students described their advisors as being inaccessible, others had high praise for the support and encouragement they received. Several students had satisfactory experiences with their advisors; many stated that their advisors were slow to respond or unresponsive. This may be due to advisors who are overloaded with other responsibilities or possibly, as stated by Padula and Miller (1999), the students may have had unrealistic expectations.

Fifteen (68.2%) of the women felt they did not have a mentor available to them during the graduate program, and that it would definitely have been helpful for them to have a person to communicate with regarding the specifics of the program; that is, what to expect in a particular course, how to access materials and information, and especially to help clarify the thesis/creative component. Five of the seven women who felt they did have a mentor described colleagues at work who advised them based on their previous experiences, and also gave them the encouragement needed to persevere. One student described her mentor as "offering support, empathy, sympathy and sternness—whatever I needed at the time." Two of the women did list their advisor as a mentor who was frequently in touch and always available to give them any needed information and encouragement. According to Hardcastle (1988), mentoring relationships help students develop a sense of confidence in learning environments; the students in this study certainly voiced this need.

The biggest barrier directly related to the program was completion of a thesis or creative component. Many students expressed their dissatisfaction with what they felt was a lack of direction concerning this requirement of the program. Merrill's study (2001) showed that writing research papers produced strong anxiety in college students. Likewise, the thesis/creative component requirement of the program seemed to be the element of the program that students were most apprehensive about. Many were confused about exactly what was required and how to begin. Most felt they did not have sufficient support from their advisors. Following are a few excerpts from the questionnaires:

- "One of my biggest challenges in completing the program was in understanding the creative component and the process involved. I think it would have been helpful to have had a workshop or course on what it is and the steps needed for completion."
- "It might be helpful if the creative component was taken in conjunction with an actual class that meets on a regular basis."
- "If there was a way the creative component could be made less stressful, that would be a big improvement."

The challenge of completing the thesis/creative component requirement of the program is reflected in the number of hours that students reported spending on this project. The majority worked for 2 or 3 semesters and estimated spending 50 to 800 hours on their thesis or creative component. While seven students could not estimate the number of hours they spent, those who did reported a median of 300 hours.

Support

All of the women reported having support from spouse, children, other family members, or friends. This support included child care, help with domestic duties, and encouragement. Many also mentioned support from their colleagues at DHS, and their employer's financial support.

As far as university support, eight of the twenty-two respondents (36.4%) perceived the university library staff as very supportive, particularly in finding and procuring professional journal articles. Two students viewed both their advisors and instructors as very supportive, while five students mentioned only advisors, and five others mentioned only instructors. Three students said they had only minimal support from the university. Examples of university support needed by students included more responsive advisors and a better understanding of the creative component/thesis requirement (see Table 6).

Although the commitment of time to earn a master's degree was a barrier to these women, the majority said the impact on their families was positive. Spouses, children, other family members, and friends were proud of their accomplishment. Ten of the respondents talked about the pride their families felt in their achievements, and eight voiced their view of themselves as role models for their children. In the words of one respondent,

> "This was a personal goal I had set and wanted to complete, so now my family, especially my grandchildren, … can see that any goal they set can be accomplished, no matter what age they are."

All of the women responded positively when questioned about their enjoyment of the program (see Table 7). Gaining knowledge in the field was mentioned as enjoyable

by eleven students, while thirteen felt that meeting and working with co-workers, professors and other early childhood students made their classes an enjoyable experience. Despite the barriers faced by these reentry students, they reported that exchanging ideas with other students and professors was an enjoyable and thought-provoking experience. As Pohland and Bova (2000) concluded, when adults learn in the company of other adults, they find themselves engaged in a passionate, productive and stimulating experience. The knowledge gained helped these women in their professional duties as well as in their personal lives as parents.

Questionnaire #2

The invitation to participate in the follow-up questionnaire was sent to eight of the original respondents: two licensing specialists with previous early childhood education, two licensing specialists without previous early childhood education, two administrators with previous early childhood education, and two administrators without previous early childhood education. The questions on this survey instrument dealt with the impact of obtaining a Master's degree on the participants personally and professionally, and any effects on the childcare licensing process and the DHS system. There were more similarities than differences between licensing specialists with and without early childhood education/experience; the same was true for administrators with and without early childhood education/experience. There were some differences between licensing specialists and administrators, which was probably due to differences in their work roles.

Changes in Perception of Self

Involvement in the Master's program had a positive effect on the participants' views of themselves (see Table 8). Administrators, with and without previous early

childhood education/experience, viewed themselves as more capable and professional, with more knowledge in their field. They felt able to participate in discussions more freely and to debate issues with more confidence. These women also reported more confidence in their abilities to read about issues and to communicate in writing. One mentioned becoming more organized and focused due to the simultaneous demands of school, home and work. Licensing specialists with and without early childhood education/experience also perceived themselves more positively due to the program. As they completed the program, they gained more confidence in all areas and began to view themselves more as professionals; they also began to see themselves more as teachers or mentors rather than just regulators of licensing requirements.

All of the women reported gaining more self-confidence in their roles in the licensing department. Licensing specialists felt more confident that they are providing usable, up to date information to providers. Administrators felt they have a better understanding of child development and could apply the knowledge they gained during the program to their work. They also reported the ability to use research in working on new initiatives, and more courage in answering questions from other DHS administrators, legislators and the general public.

The perception of the role of child care licensing specialists was changed for seven out of the eight respondents. Students reported feeling more confident of their abilities to consult with providers to solve problems rather than just enforcing child care regulations.

Changes in Perception of Licensing

A change in the perspectives of participants regarding different aspects of child care licensing was apparent in the responses to questions three, four and six of the second questionnaire (Table 9).

Six of the eight respondents felt that the way problem-solving was addressed in the Licensing department had changed due to the knowledge and skills they gained during the Master's program. Several stated that the ability to research a subject, to look at what other states are doing and evaluate the results, helped to bring forth different possibilities for the difficult questions they sometimes face.

Involvement in the Master's program changed participants' perceptions of quality environments for children. The practicum experience helped students understand the challenges faced by providers on a daily basis. Administrators without early childhood education/experience reported more significant transformation in perceptions of quality environments. They mentioned the importance of education for teacher/providers, teacher/provider relationships with children, different types of curriculum and assessment. Both licensing specialists and administrators with an early childhood background stated that they already realized the importance of quality programs.

Perception of the child care licensing process itself was changed for all but one of the respondents. While licensing specialists thought minimum licensing requirements should be raised, one voiced the concern that some providers would not be licensed if standards were raised. Administrators with an early childhood background were the most vocal about their change in perception of the licensing process. They were concerned about the enhancement of regulations to help promote more quality programs; they see the value of research before decisions are made. They also voiced the realization that

providing quality programs must be intentional; it is difficult to help providers understand that they can implement good curriculum and programming while still maintaining child care health and safety requirements.

Systemic Changes

Five of the eight students stated that the major systemic change effected by DHS employees' participation in the Master's program is the mandatory training requirement for all DHS licensing staff to participate in a practicum program. Another student mentioned the on-line training program required for all child care teachers and providers (ELCCT) as a change stemming from the Master's program, while still another said that all providers had been made aware of special needs subsidies and the training now required when special needs children are enrolled (see Table 10).

Future Plans

All participants said they would encourage others to enter the program, although they would caution them about the time and effort required for successful completion of the program.

As to future plans, six of the eight employees plan to stay with the department until retirement, and then do adjunct teaching or consulting. One student said she would like to teach in an early childhood setting, and another would like to work as a child development specialist (see Figure 7).

Theoretical Conclusions

The questions in the second questionnaire were designed to determine what transformative learning experiences, if any, were experienced by the students during their participation in the program. The results of the research showed a definite

transformational change in licensing specialists and administrators who participated in the study.

Mezirow lists ten elements that are present when transformational learning takes place. Of these ten, five were present when students experienced the practicum course.

- The practicum was a disorienting dilemma for most of the participants.
- Assumptions about the role of the child care teacher/provider were questioned and assessed.
- They recognized that other students shared a similar experience during the practicum.
- They explored options for new roles and relationships with centers and providers.
- They planned a course of action which resulted in a practicum experience for all DHS licensing employees.

The students who completed the practicum course definitely voiced a change in their beliefs about the role of the child care teacher/provider. The opportunity to "walk in another's shoes" helped all of the participants to see the challenges faced daily by those who work with young children, and also to see the possibilities for improvement in teacher/provider qualifications. Several students described their practicum in similar ways:

- "The practicum part of the degree was a true professional life-changing experience for me. It made me understand how difficult it is to be perfect every day."

- "I now see the challenges of everyday programming. I am most concerned about the lack of meaningful conversation with children. Most conversation dealt with managing behavior or transition times."
- "The practicum was incredibly enlightening."
- "My practicum was really helpful in understanding the reality of early childhood."

According to Mezirow, meaning schemes and perspectives are changed by:

- content reflection—reflection upon what one feels, thinks or perceives;
- process reflection—reflection on problem solving strategies; or
- premise reflection—identifying and judging our beliefs.

Content and process reflection change one's meaning schemes; premise reflection changes one's meaning perspectives. As a result of the change in meaning perspectives (the role of the teacher/provider), the participants have changed their meaning schemes (the information and technical assistance given). As different views of developmentally appropriate early childhood practices emerged, the interactions between licensing specialists and providers changed.

Students described a change in meaning schemes through content reflection throughout their answers to questions one through six. Their feeling, thinking and perception of themselves were transformed as they progressed through the program. Students reported more confidence in their knowledge of early childhood which resulted in a feeling of confidence in their professional roles. The perception of the licensing process itself was changed as students reflected that while the licensing process needs to be more in-depth, perfection in the daily management of a child care setting is not a realistic goal.

Process reflection involves a change in problem solving strategies. This was illustrated by students who stated that they now are able to look at the "bigger picture" and consider all the options before a decision is made. They are using research to help problem solve situations; they know they must have all the data to make the best choices. One student experienced a change in her problem solving strategies by adjusting the way she responds to providers. She stated that she "must gain an understanding of the caregiver's challenges before she can find ways to help her understand the goals for the children. "

In premise reflection, we experience a change in the identification and judgment of our beliefs. One student reflected on her view of the licensing process as follows:

> "I think my program participation has validated my belief that providing quality programs is not by accident. There is intentionality to providing good programs. It can be difficult to juggle what is needed for licensing and a good program. The two goals must be blended rather than just trying to follow one or the other. The health and safety requirements are important as is the curriculum and other aspects of good programming."

Table 11 contains examples of reflection by the participants in the program.

Three types of intentional learning contribute to the process of transformational learning. Mezirow classifies learning as instrumental, communicative or emancipatory. One can participate in one type or a combination of types of learning at the same time. Instrumental learning is based in reality and can be measured or proven/disproven. When we reach agreement with others as to what we consider the facts, communicative learning is taking place. Emancipatory learning is freedom or awareness of emotional, language,

cognitive, cultural and environmental forces that limit our options and control over our lives.

The instrumental learning gained in reading and writing in the early childhood research domain was seen in responses from all participants. Students reported not only gaining in knowledge of early childhood practices, but in the skill to research issues by themselves, and the ability to use the research in formulating work-related decisions.

Communicative learning was evidenced mainly in the answers to the question in the first questionnaire concerning enjoyment of the program. When we discuss ideas and debate issues with others, we can either validate our own beliefs or change our way of thinking. The exchange of ideas during class discussions, hearing the different viewpoints of professors as well as fellow students, fostered the communicative learning which took place for these students. One participant talked about "sharing thoughts with others in class discussions" while another mentioned the "dialogue and discussion in class" as contributing to their understanding of early childhood practices.

In emancipatory learning we examine the rules and conditions of our lives. Emancipation is freedom or awareness of those factors that limit our options and our control over our lives. When we become aware of how and why these forces affect us, we can take action based on these insights. These students experienced emancipatory learning relating to themselves and their roles in the DHS licensing system.

- Students have learned that are no limits to what they can achieve.
  - "I now know I can DO anything—if I can do what I did for grad school."
- Students have learned that interactions with providers could be expanded and improved.

♦ "Now I see myself as more able to consult with providers and explain Licensing's expectations to them."

- Students have learned that they are capable of providing child development information to child care center and home caregivers.

  ♦"It has made me more confident in my knowledge of child development."

  ♦"It has given me the confidence that I am providing information to providers that they can use and that is current."

- Students have learned that they can continually learn through interactions with others in the child care field.

  ♦"I can learn from others in the field and I continue to do so."

  ♦"Although I had worked with high risk children in the past, I needed more education."

Some students experienced a combination of learning types. When early childhood knowledge was gained (instrumental learning), they were able to participate and learn from an exchange of ideas (communicative learning), which often resulted in emancipatory learning. Examples of the three types of learning can be found in Table 12.

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CHAPTER V

IMPLICATIONS

This study provided additional information on the reentry experiences of adult women who return to a university program. Using a phenomenological method of research enabled the researcher to describe the experience using the words of the participants. The results of the study can be used to help pave the way for future graduate students. More and more women are returning to school for a variety of reasons. At this point in time, a cohort of Early Head Start/Head Start teachers and administrators are also enrolled in the Early Childhood Masters' Program at Oklahoma State University.

The courses in the Early Childhood Master's Program are offered in a variety of formats, and it is important to continue to do so. In recognition of the challenges faced by adult students returning to school, we need to find ways to lower the barriers. One way is to increase the number of internet, weekend, and compressed video courses. This will alleviate the time it takes for most students to travel the distance required for traditional courses that meet once a week in Stillwater or Tulsa.

The anxiety and uncertainty in completing a thesis or creative component was one of the most stressful parts of the program. Clearly additional support is needed in this area. Some students suggested that the creative component/thesis should be an actual class that meets periodically for questions, feedback and assistance.

The powerful relationships formed by this group of students were apparent throughout the questionnaires. Not only have they supported each other through the program, but they feel pride in each other's accomplishments. In one student's words,

> "Even though many of our co-workers think licensing workers spend most of our time visiting with providers and playing with children, I think the Master's program has provided DHS with a unit of highly skilled and highly educated workers. It makes me proud for the unit."

They also extended their support to students outside the DHS system. Due to the number of DHS employees in the program, some classes were almost entirely comprised of these students with only two or three others. The author experienced the encouragement and collaboration which was extended to those others in the class who were not a part of the DHS system. Professional relationships were formed during the graduate program which can only benefit the early childhood profession in Oklahoma.

The need for a mentor was perhaps the most significant implication of this study. More than sixty-eight percent did not feel they had a mentor to guide and support them through the program. Even though the students felt supported by each other, the fact that many students in this cohort began at the same time prevented them from having the benefit of someone to answer their questions and give them advice. They expressed a need for information concerning sequence of courses and what to expect in different courses, as well as for someone to provide them with encouragement and guidance throughout the program.

A major systemic change in the DHS Licensing Department is the practicum training requirement for all current and new employees. This training was instituted due

to participation in the Master's degree program by DHS employees. Valuable experience is gained by all personnel working with child care center and home providers because the DHS staff member can see "first-hand" the challenges faced daily by those who care for a group of young children.

Conclusion

More research is needed in the area of transformational learning. It is apparent that the practicum experience changed meaning schemes and perspectives. The participants were able to assume a different role, thereby changing their perspective through actual experience. Although other transformational learning took place, we can't be sure exactly how or when it came about. It may be useful to use a case study form of research in order to try and ascertain exactly how and when transformational learning occurs.

Twenty-six students from the Department of Human Services Licensing Division graduated from the program and six are currently enrolled. This is strong testimony to the fact that adults can successfully complete higher education degrees while working full-time and fulfilling family obligations. The students attending classes with the researcher were highly motivated and competitive in achieving high grades as reported in previous research. They also showed persistence in obtaining their goal even though some had significant medical and other personal barriers.

Of forty-six students who originally enrolled in the program, fourteen have not graduated and are not currently enrolled in classes. A future study could provide valuable information to ascertain the reasons why this group of students has not been able to continue with the program.

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APPENDIX A

Sherry Averill

19880 E. Fox Run Circle

Owasso, Oklahoma 74055

August 15, 2006

Dear student/graduate:

You are invited to participate in a graduate research study concerning the nature of change in Oklahoma child care licensing specialists who participate in the OSU Graduate program in Early Childhood Education. Information is being sought pertinent to your experience as a graduate student at OSU and the effect on your daily life. The principal investigator is Sherry Averill, B.S.; the thesis advisor is Dr. Barbara Sorrels.

The Department of Human Development and Family Science at Oklahoma State University supports the practice of informed consent and protection for human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you will participate in the present study. You are free to withdraw your participation at any time.

You will be asked to complete an on-line questionnaire at a secure, designated website. The questions pertain to your experiences as a student in the Early Childhood Education graduate degree program at Oklahoma State University. Follow-up telephone interviews may be requested to clarify answers or collect any additional information that is needed. A copy of the findings will be sent to each participant for any additional feedback on the data collected. This information is important in order to document the

benefits for child care licensing personnel of higher education in early childhood. **There are no known risks associated with this project which are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.**

Your participation is solicited, but is strictly voluntary. The data collected will be held in strictest confidence with access limited to the researcher and advisor. The data will be stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher's office. I assure you that your name will not in any way be associated with the research findings; the information will be identified only through a code number. Consent for participation is given by logging on to the website and completing the questionnaire.

If you would like additional information concerning this study before or after it is completed, please contact me by phone or e-mail. Thank you very much for your time. I appreciate your interest and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Sherry Averill, Graduate Student	Dr. Barbara Sorrels, Advisor
19880 E. Fox Run Circle	OSU-Tulsa, 305 North Hall
Owasso, Oklahoma 74055	Tulsa, Oklahoma 74106
saverill@tulsacc.edu	sorrelb@okstate.edu
(918) 376-9648	(918) 594-8169
(918) 697-9513	

For information on subjects' rights, contact Dr. Sue Jacobs, IRB Chair, 415 Whitehurst Hall, 405-744-1676.

APPENDIX B

Sherry Averill

19880 E. Fox Run Circle

Owasso, Oklahoma 74055

September 1, 2006

Dear student/graduate:

You are invited to participate in a ***follow-up survey*** for a graduate research study concerning the nature of change in Oklahoma child care licensing specialists who participate in the OSU Graduate program in Early Childhood Education. Additional information is being sought pertinent to your experience as a graduate student at OSU and the effect on your daily life. The principal investigator is Sherry Averill, B.S.; the thesis advisor is Dr. Barbara Sorrels. ***A $25 Wal-Mart gift card will be awarded to each participant who completes this survey.***

The Department of Human Development and Family Science at Oklahoma State University supports the practice of informed consent and protection for human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you will participate in the present study. You are free to withdraw your participation at any time.

You will be asked to complete a follow-up questionnaire at a secure, designated website. The questions pertain to your experiences as a student in the Early Childhood Education graduate degree program at Oklahoma State University. Additional telephone interviews may be requested to clarify answers or collect any additional information that is needed. A copy of the findings will be sent to each participant for any additional feedback on the data collected. This information is important in order to document the benefits for child care licensing personnel of higher education in early childhood. **There**

are no known risks associated with this project which are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.

Your participation is solicited, but is strictly voluntary. The data collected will be held in strictest confidence with access limited to the researcher and advisor. The data will be stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher's office. I assure you that your name will not in any way be associated with the research findings; the information will be identified only through a code number. Consent for participation is given by logging on to the website and completing the questionnaire. The website address is **http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.asp?u=78962603613.**

If you would like additional information concerning this study before or after it is completed, please contact me by phone or e-mail. Thank you very much for your time. I appreciate your interest and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Sherry Averill, Graduate Student
19880 E. Fox Run Circle
Owasso, Oklahoma 74055
saverill@tulsacc.edu
(918) 376-9648
(918) 697-9513

Dr. Barbara Sorrels, Advisor
OSU-Tulsa, 305 North Hall
Tulsa, Oklahoma 74106
sorrelb@okstate.edu
(918) 594-8169

For information on subjects' rights, contact Dr. Sue Jacobs, IRB Chair, 415 Whitehurst Hall, 405-744-1676.

APPENDIX C

DHS Questionnaire #1

Demographic information:

E-mail Address (where you wish results to be sent): _____

Telephone # (where you would like to be contacted for follow-up interview):

_____

Age: ___25-35 ___36-45 ___46-55 ___56 or older

Number of children living in your home? _____Ages_____

Number of grandchildren living in your home? _____Ages_____

Position in DHS: ___Licensing Specialist ___Supervisor ___Administrator

Title:_____

Number of years employed by DHS: _____

Background in early childhood prior to entering Master's program:

___Child Care Teacher

___Pre-K Teacher-Public School

___Elementary Teacher-Public School

___Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood or Child Development

___Bachelor's Degree in other discipline (Specify field of study _____)

___No experience or education in Early Childhood

1. Why did you decide to pursue a Master's degree in early childhood education?
2. On average, how many classes did you take each semester?

   ___One ___Two ___Three
3. What, if any, improvements could be made in the sequencing of classes?

4. Describe the classroom format that enabled you to learn most effectively?
5. Did you take courses by:

   ___Compressed video ___Internet

   ___Weekend courses ___Traditional Classroom
6. What is your preferred method of taking classes?
7. Which classes were the most beneficial in helping you understand children's growth and development?
8. Does any particular class assignment or project stand out for you as one which helped to change your perspective of early childhood education?
9. How many visits did you have with your advisor?
10. How long did you work or estimate you will work on your thesis/creative component?

    # of Semesters_____ Estimated hours_____
11. What did you enjoy most about the program?
12. What challenges or barriers did you encounter as you pursued your degree?
13. What types of personal/family support were available to you as you worked toward your degree?
14. What types of university support were available to you as you worked toward your degree?
15. What additional support would have been helpful?
16. Was a mentor available to support you during your graduate studies?

    ___Yes ___No

17. If yes, what was the most effective thing your mentor did to assist you with your program?
18. If no, would a mentor have been helpful? ___Yes ___No
19. How has your decision to go to graduate school impacted your family?
20. What improvements need to be made in the program?

APPENDIX D

DHS Questionnaire #2

E-mail address (where you wish results to be sent): _____

Telephone # (where you would like to be contacted for follow-up interview):

_____

1. How has your involvement in the ECE Masters' program changed your view of yourself?
2. How has your involvement in the ECE Masters' program changed your perception of your role as a child care licensing specialist?
3. How has your involvement in the ECE Masters' program changed your thinking about quality environments for children?
4. How has your involvement in the ECE Masters' program changed your perception of the child care licensing process?
5. Has your participation in the ECE Master's program given you more self-confidence in your role at DHS?
6. Has the knowledge you have gained in the ECE Master's program helped you to problem-solve situations related to you job? How?
7. What systemic changes have been made within the DHS agency as a result of licensing specialists and supervisors pursuing a master's degree in early childhood education?
8. What advice would you give to a colleague who is thinking about pursuing his/her master's degree?
9. What are your future professional plans?

TABLE 1

Background in Early Childhood Prior to Entering Master's Program

Background in Early Childhood	Response %	Response #
Experience		
Child Care Teacher/Director	27.3%	6
Pre-K Teacher—Public School	4.5%	1
Elementary Teacher—Public School	0%	0
School and Community Assistance Counselor	4.5%	1
No experience in Early Childhood	63.6%	14
Education		
Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood/ Child Development	22.7%	5
Bachelor's Degree in other discipline	77.2%	17

TABLE 2

Primary Reasons Listed by Participants for Entering Master's Program

Reasons	**# of responses**
Scholarship (financial support from DHS)	13
Increase knowledge in early childhood education	9
Further education (obtain higher degree)	7
Promotion (further professional goals)	4

TABLE 3

Suggested Improvements in ECE Master's Program

Theme	Example
Creative component	Creative component worst part—would like to take additional courses instead
	Not adequately prepared for thesis/creative component
	More examples/explanation of creative component
	More specific help with thesis/creative component
	Make creative component less stressful
	Consider the value of thesis/creative component for distance students
	Creative component should be an actual class that meets at least once a month
	Students need to know from the beginning what they will do for their thesis/creative component
	Advisors who know the process and are willing to guide students through creative component
Course improvements	Classes should be online, weekend or compressed video with more sites
	Road map of courses needed
	Increased selection of course format for distance learners
	Classes that are closer to me
	Give students a better idea of course sequencing

	The number of accepted classes to fulfill some of the requirements was somewhat limited
	Better communication between staff and students
	Expansion of literature review class
Other	Provide advisors/mentors who are available to students
	Bring in past students to share their experiences and give advice
	Those with a Bachelor's degree in child development should have the option to pursue their Master's in adult education
No improvements	It was a good program and worked well for me
	None

TABLE 4

Sequencing of Classes

Theme	Key Concepts
Basic classes first	First classes in rotation sometimes most difficult
	Nice to know what skills build on one another
	Recommend basic child development classes be added
Statistics and research classes first	Laid the foundation for everything else
	Provided information to use in other courses
	Helped students write papers in other classes
	Would have helped me to take it earlier
Other	Creative component class information earlier in program
	Classes offered more often
	Meet with advisor prior to enrolling

TABLE 5

Barriers to Completing Master's Degree

Barriers	# of responses
Time for responsibilities of home, family and work	16
Travel to classes in Stillwater, Tulsa and Oklahoma City	4
Creative component/thesis guidelines unclear; time for completion	3
Medical/health barriers	3

TABLE 6

Personal and University Support

Key Concepts	Examples
Personal/Family Support	Family members helped with childcare
	Family tried not to make demands while I studied
	Children helped with homework and research
	Parents helped on weekends
	Friends and family available when I needed to vent
	Coworkers very supportive
	Emotional support from colleagues
	Financial support from DHS
University support	Advisor extremely supportive
	Professors willing to explain concepts
	Library resources on-line
	IT staff
	Support staff very helpful and knowledgeable

TABLE 7

. Enjoyable Experiences of Students in ECE Master's Program

Theme	Example
Knowledge gained	Learning about current theory and practice
	Linking theory to practice
	Learning to research a topic
	Dialogue and discussion in class
	All, but practicum was an eye-opener
Camaraderie with others	Meeting with professors and other students
	Getting to know other students
	Working with faculty and fellow students
	Going through classes with co-workers
	Relationships with other students and Faculty
Other	Variety of format of classes
	University atmosphere
	Sharing information with child care providers
	Gained more confidence in myself

TABLE 8

Change in Perceptions of Self Due to Enrollment in ECE Master's Program

Theme	Change in perception
View of oneself	Example
Licensing with prior education/experience	Working toward a career goal
	More confident in knowledge of ECE
Licensing w/o prior education/experience	See myself as more capable
	See myself as a teacher more than a regulator
	See myself as part of a bigger picture
	Building confidence in myself
Administrators with prior education/experience	More confident in professional roles
	More organized and disciplined
	More confidence in tackling large projects
	Participate in discussions more freely
	More competent and able to debate with others
Administrators w/o prior education/experience	Considered a more credible and professional person

	Understand research and use in my professional role
	Quality of my work improved

TABLE 9

Change in Perception of Licensing

Theme	Change in Perception
Environments for children	Understand the importance of teachers
	See the challenges of everyday programming
	Able to provide more technical assistance
	Unwilling to settle for minimum requirements without trying hard to change things
	Understand importance of assessment
Child care licensing process	Perfection is not a realistic goal
	Requirements are not stringent enough
	Providing quality programs not an accident
	Think about how to enhance quality child care
	See the value of research before making decisions
Problem solving	Learning how to research has helped
	Changed my way of thinking and reading information
	Better knowledge of resources
	Explore more creative ways of solving problems
	See a broader picture than before
	More objective in viewing others' ideas

TABLE 10

Changes in DHS System

Change	Example
Systemic changes	Practicum program mandatory training for all staff
	Participants have received promotions
	Special needs subsidy
	ELCCT training

TABLE 11

Changes in Participants' Meaning Schemes and Perspectives

Change	Example
Content Reflection	More confident in my professional roles
	Licensing process needs to be more in-depth
	Perfection is not a realistic goal in daily operation of a center
Process Reflection	More organized and focused
	Can ask the hard questions and find answers
	See more possibilities when problems arise
Premise Reflection	Used to think traditional preschool programs with a lot of desk time were on track-I don't think so anymore
	Now that I have more knowledge of different programs and resources, I have a hard time settling for less quality in programs
	See the importance of research and how it can help us develop better care for children

TABLE 12

Transformational Learning Changes

Change	Example
Instrumental Learning	More attuned to building in research or identified outcomes
	It has changed the information I give my providers
	Spending time in a child care setting leads to a better understanding in daily routine
Communicative Learning	Sharing thoughts with others in class discussions
	Dialogue and discussion in class
	Meeting other ECE professionals and learning from them
	Different viewpoints expressed
Emancipatory Learning	I now know I can do anything
	See the importance of research
	I think about how the project will benefit children and families

FIGURE 1

Ages of Research Participants

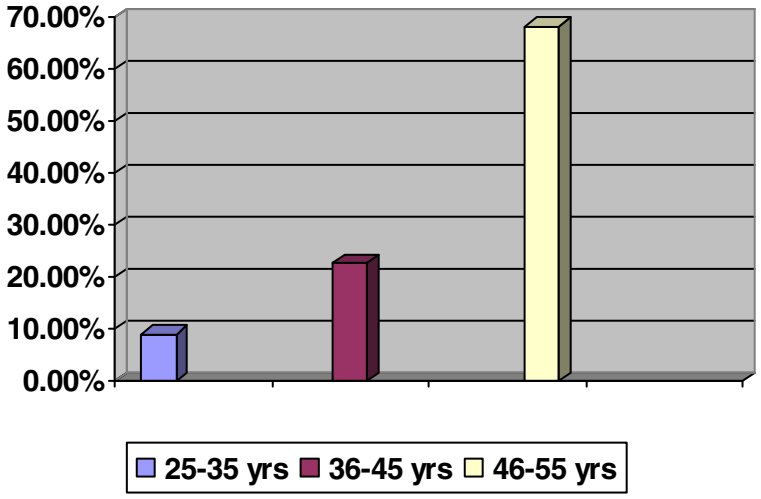


FIGURE 2

Percentage of Participants with Children in Home

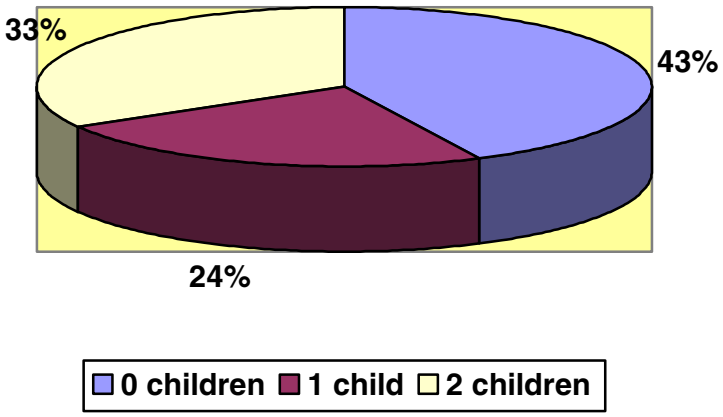


FIGURE 3

Ages of Children in Home

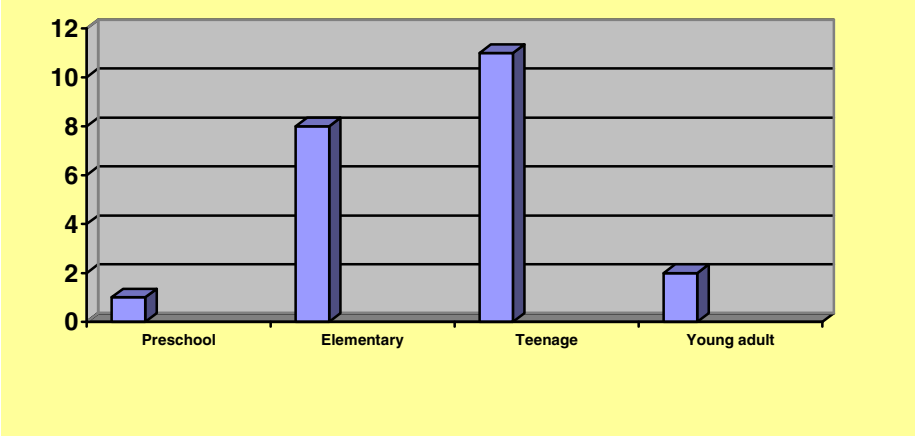


FIGURE 4

Position in DHS

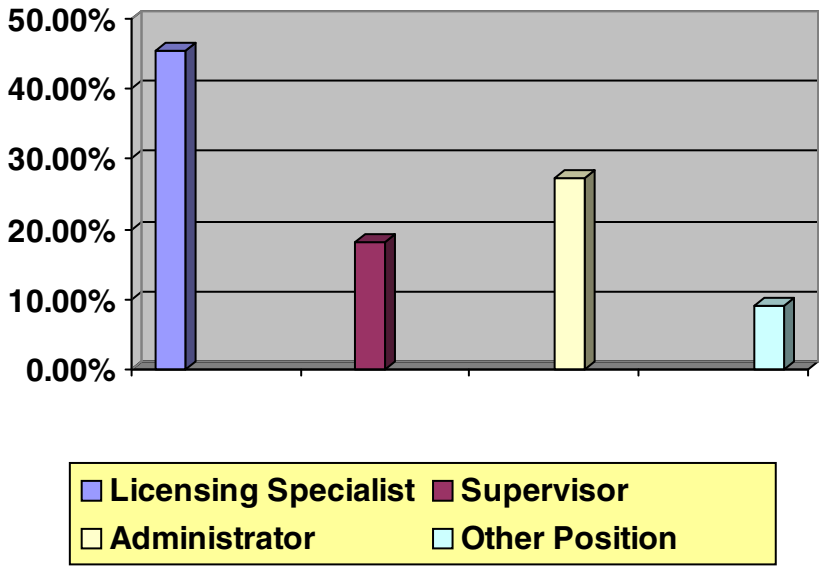


FIGURE 5

Length of Employment with DHS

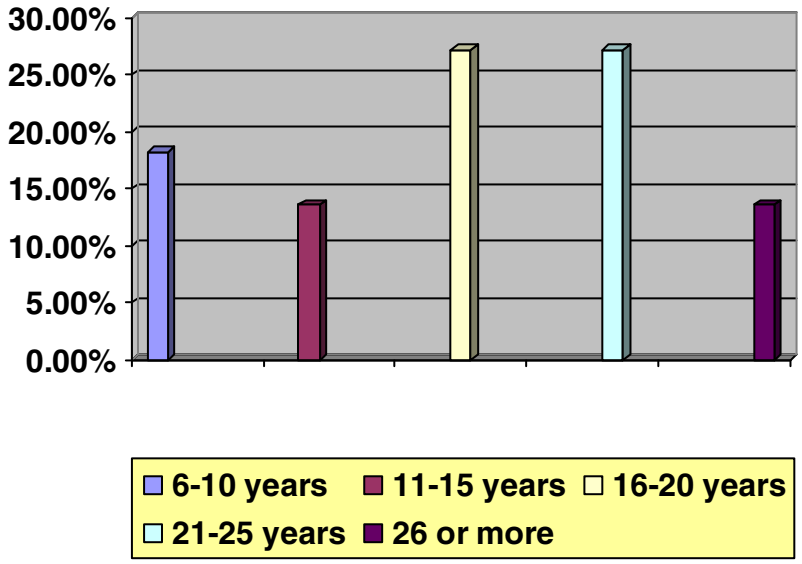


FIGURE 6

Courses Reported Beneficial in Understanding ECE by Percentage

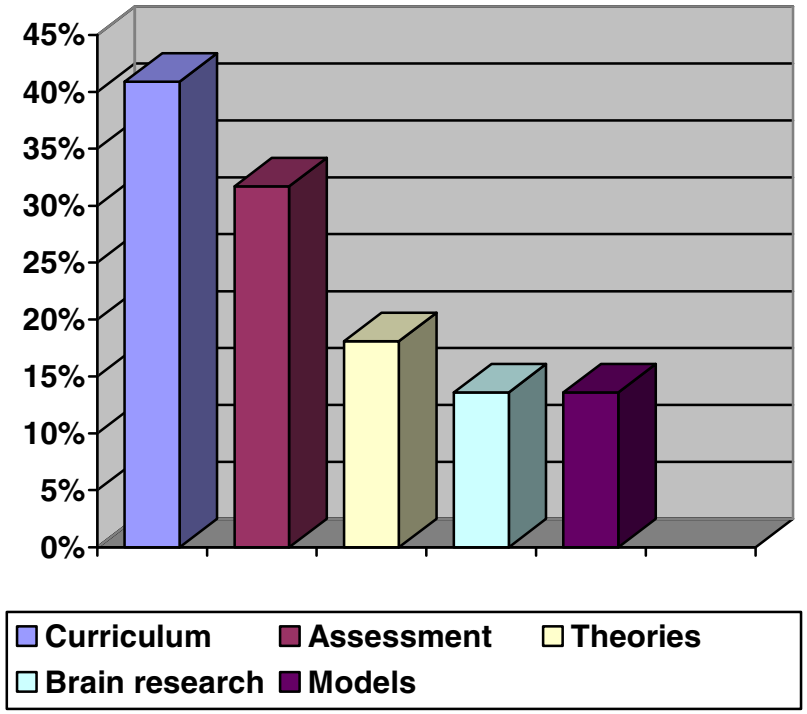
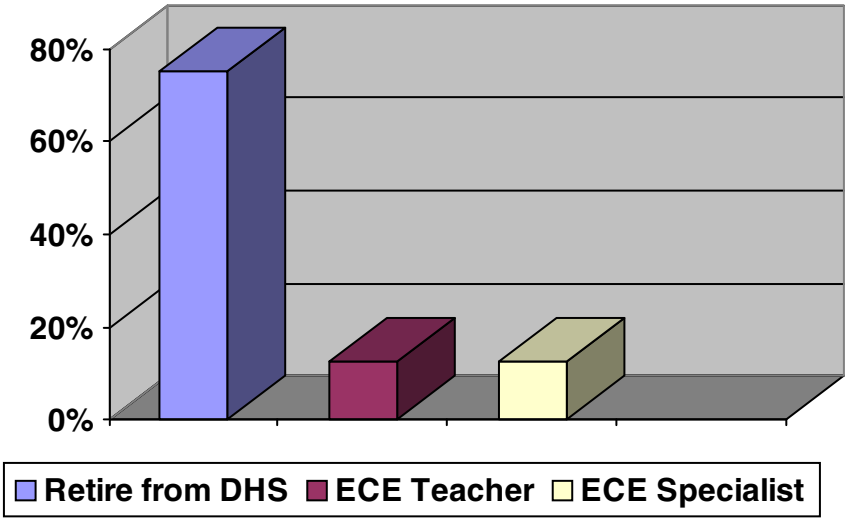


FIGURE 7

Future Plans of Graduates



VITA

Sherry Gale Averill

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Science

Thesis: THE TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF OKLAHOMA CHILD CARE LICENSING SPECIALISTS

Major Field: Early Childhood Education

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Gainesville, Texas on October 30, 1948, the daughter of George and Jewel Marie Langley.

Education: Graduated from Kingfisher High School, Kingfisher, Oklahoma in May, 1966; received Bachelor of Science degree in Elementary Education from Oklahoma State University in May, 1970. Completed the requirements for Master of Science degree in Early Childhood Education at Oklahoma State University in December, 2006.

Experience: Lead Teacher, Community Action and Development Head Start, Claremore, Oklahoma, 1993-1996

Mental Health/Disabilities Specialist, Community Action and Development Head Start, Claremore, Oklahoma, 1993-2000

Child Development Specialist, Tulsa Community College, Tulsa, Oklahoma, 2001-2006

Professional Memberships: Name: Tulsa Child Care Resource Center, National Coalition of Campus Child Care Centers

Name: Sherry Gale Averill Date of Degree: December, 2006

Institution: Oklahoma State University Location: Stillwater, Oklahoma

Title of Study: THE TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF OKLAHOMA CHILD CARE LICENSING SPECIALISTS

Pages in Study: 75 Candidate for the Degree of Master of Science

Major Field: Early Childhood Education

Scope and Method of Study: The purpose of this study was to understand and describe the transformational educational experiences of Oklahoma child care licensing workers who are currently or were formerly enrolled in the Early Childhood Education Master's program at Oklahoma State University. In this phenomenological study, twenty-two participants described their experiences relating to their reentry into higher education.

Findings and Conclusions: There was a significant change in transformational learning of the participants in the study. Personal benefits, as well as benefits to the Department of Human Services' Child Care Licensing Division, were documented. Implications for improvement of the Human Development and Family Science graduate program at Oklahoma State University were discussed.

Advisor's Approval: Dr. Barbara Sorrels

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date:	Thursday, July 20, 2006
IRB Application No	HE0684
Proposal Title:	The Transformative Learning Experiences of Oklahoma Child Care Licensing Specialists
Reviewed and Processed as:	Exempt

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved Protocol Expires: 7/19/2007

Principal Investigator(s)

Sherry Averill
19880 E Fox Run Circle
Owasso, OK 74055

Barbara Sorrels
700 N. Greenwood 304 N. Hall
Tulsa, OK 74106

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

☑ The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Beth McTernan in 415 Whitehurst (phone: 405-744-5700, beth.mcternan@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,

Sue C Jacobs

Sue C. Jacobs, Chair
Institutional Review Board