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Attitudes And Beliefs Of North Dakota Early Childhood Educators Toward Gender Constructs

Janelle Jean Ferderer

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ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS OF NORTH DAKOTA EARLY CHILDHOOD
EDUCATORS TOWARD GENDER CONSTRUCTS

by

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Bachelor of Science, Minot State University, 1988
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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

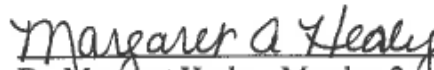
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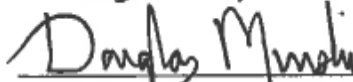
Grand Forks, North Dakota

May
2017

This dissertation, submitted by Janelle J. Ferderer in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done and is hereby approved.


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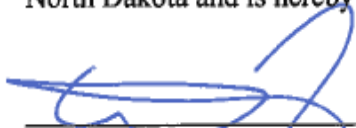

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PERMISSION

Title Attitudes and Beliefs of North Dakota Early Childhood Educators
 Toward Gender Constructs

Department Educational Leadership

Degree Doctor of Philosophy

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Date: April 21, 2017

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community and for every individual to be respected, valued, and treated fairly and without prejudice.

Most of all, I have to thank my mother, Nyla Sauter, for instilling in me a love of learning and teaching me the value of education. I know she would be so proud of this accomplishment if she were still here with us. Her words and presence came to me when I felt like giving up and gave me the determination to keep going.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the attitudes and beliefs about gender and gender diversity held by certified practicing early childhood teachers in North Dakota Department of Public Instruction approved preschool programs. Selected children's books were used to elicit qualitative responses that provided insight into teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and practices regarding gender.

The theoretical framework for the study was based on Vygotsky's theories on the Zones of Proximal Development (ZPD) and the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO), which focus on the importance of the role of educators' influence in the social development of young children. The methodology for the study was based on constructivist learning theories and the constructions of attitudes and beliefs held by teachers that lead to competencies and practices that influence the construction of attitudes and beliefs in young children.

The method of the study entailed interviews which elicited responses about attitudes and beliefs about gender and gender diversity in young children, and current levels of cultural competence in addressing them. The results indicated a hierarchy of complexity regarding gender and gender diversity and that as gender topics become more complex, comfort levels decrease. Implications are that teachers are in need of professional development and resources in order to address gender issues in their classrooms.

Search Words: early childhood education, diversity, social justice, cultural competency, attitudes, beliefs, gender constructs, gender roles, transgender

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The following study is the product of a process of evolution beginning with a topic proposal initiated in April of 2016. The original proposal contained an identical theoretical and conceptual framework as will be described; however, the initial topic of study focused on several areas of diversity in early childhood classrooms including ethnicity, socioeconomic status, religion, disability and gender. At that time, the advice of the dissertation committee was to focus on one area of diversity, specifically gender. Based on current events and the recent focus on gender issues in our state and country, the decision was made. A thorough review of the literature provided the direction to re-focus the study specifically toward gender issues.

Research on other types of diversity remained relevant to the newly refined topic, including evidence that the attitudes and beliefs of teachers are relevant to classroom practice. The methods teachers use to address and respond to diversity, including gender diversity, directly impacts the social construction of the attitudes and beliefs of their students. In order for teachers to assess and understand the implication of their attitudes and beliefs, they must first gain insight into what their attitudes and beliefs are and how they influence their responses in the early childhood classroom.

The terminology “gender constructs” emerges from literature and the interviews and data collected. In conducting the interviews and analyzing the data, a hierarchy of

ideas emerged to comprise and encompass a variety of gender issues, which seemed to increase in complexity as the participants considered them. This hierarchy of gender constructs will be described in detail in subsequent chapters. By way of introduction they include gender roles, diverse families including same-sex parents, gender non-conformity and transgender. The term “constructs” is intended to imply that gender itself is a socially constructed concept developed throughout an individual’s lifetime.

Early Childhood Education in North Dakota

North Dakota’s growing population and the trend toward state-funded pre-k programs present an obvious need for practitioners to thoughtfully engage in instruction and practices that will benefit all children. In the plethora of guidance related to the establishment and operation of early childhood programs, there is little mention of diversity related to gender other than the advocacy of Universal Designs for Instruction that addresses learning diversity. “Too few Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) teacher preparation programs adequately engage students in serious learning about culturally responsive and anti-bias education or in the self-reflection and growth that this approach requires” (Derman-Sparks, LeeKeenan, & Nimmo, 2015, p. 15). It is important that all educators take a reflective approach to their practice with children and families in order to understand how their subject positions in discourses can perpetuate, consciously or unconsciously, the social inequities that prevail in society. (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006).

The population of North Dakota is ethnically homogenous. According to the NEA, the majority of teachers in the United States are white (Dilworth & Coleman, 2014). The most recent statistics from the United States Census Bureau (n.d.) indicated

that of the current North Dakota population of 739, 482, the ethnicity is nearly 90% white only. Of the remaining 10%, half are classified as Native American, with 3% Latino or Hispanic, 2% Asian, and 1% mixed race. Children under five years of age make up approximately 6.9% of the population, or 51,025 children. In addition, North Dakota is politically conservative, and 80% identify as Christian based on the Gallup poll. Until the June 2015 Supreme Court ruling, same sex marriages were banned in North Dakota (CNN Library, 2015).

There is evidence that demographics are changing. According to Derman-Sparks et al. (2015), “The diversity among children attending early childhood programs continues to increase, as a reflection of the nation’s changing demographic realities” (p. 4). According to 2011-2012 U.S. Census data, there were 48.7 million students enrolled in the public school system and the ethnicity/race demographics were: White 51.5%, Latino 24.3%, Black 15.4%, Asian 5.1%, Multi-Racial 2.5%, and Native American 1.1% (Orfield, Frankenburg, Ee, & Kuscera, 2014). This change has been used to argue for greater awareness of cultural differences and cultural sensitivity and new ways to address pedagogy.

Given the wealth of diversity in our nation’s public schools, it is no wonder that instructional theory is advocating a shift toward a pedagogy that emphasizes a comfortable and academically enriching environment for students of all ethnicities, races, beliefs, and creeds (Lynch, 2012). Culture, by definition, can be referred to as “a dynamic system of social values, cognitive codes, behavioral standards, worldviews, and beliefs used to give order and meaning to our own lives as well as the lives of others” (Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba, 1991, p. 8). Personal culture determines how both teachers and students

think and behave, and what values and attitudes they bring into early childhood classrooms. “Together students and teachers construct, mostly without being conscious of doing it, an environment of meanings enacted in individual and group behaviors, of conflict and accommodation, rejection and acceptance, alienation and withdrawal” (Gay, 2010, p. 9).

However, as Hunter, Pearson, and Gutierrez (2015) argued, the change in demographics should not be the impetus for change in pedagogy or increased attention to the need to address diversity in our classrooms. Change is inherent in any culture, and “children’s diverse ethnicities, cultures, religions, languages and family structures bring both vibrancy and complexity to our communities” (Derman-Sparks et al., 2015, p. 9). Diversity is “an opportunity to promote anti-bias in early childhood programs not a problem to be dealt with” (Derman-Sparks et al., 2015, p. 23).

If we consider culture to be an all-encompassing conglomeration that makes up the essence of our existence in the social world, we must also consider the many facets that influence our culture. The worlds of young children are much smaller than that of adults and consist mainly of the family circle until they enter an early childhood classroom. At that point in their lives, they become exposed to extended influences on their culture through the structures, people, and events experienced outside of their home environment. “In many respects, early childhood education, as a microcosm of the broader society, operates to perpetuate the status quo in society; that is, through everyday practices it maintains the social order or power relations that currently exist in the world” (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006, p. 169). In order for early childhood program leaders to successfully create policies and provide resources to practitioners, it is

imperative to assess the nature of the teachers' current attitudes and beliefs about social justice, diversity, and gender in their classrooms.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the attitudes and beliefs about gender held by certified practicing early childhood teachers in North Dakota Department of Public Instruction approved preschool programs in North Dakota. Selected children's literature was used to elicit qualitative responses to assess teachers' beliefs and attitudes regarding gender in order to understand the need for professional learning and growth for teachers and school leaders.

Because of the tremendous influence that early childhood teachers have on their students, it is crucial for them to be aware of their attitudes, beliefs, and potential practices regarding gender in their classrooms. It is important to understand their own cultural differences and analyze their "cultural attitudes, assumptions, mechanisms, rules and regulation" (Gay, 2010, p. 28). Young children are in the process of developing lifelong attitudes and beliefs about themselves and others, and look to teachers as More Knowledgeable Others (MKOs) as they extend their social and cultural circles beyond the home and family.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study was based on Vygotsky's theory of sociocultural development, and the Zones of Proximal Development. Vygotsky's theory stresses the "fundamental role of social interaction in the development of cognition" (McLeod, 2007, p. 17). Cognition not only relates to the acquisition of academic or other demonstrable skills, but also to the development of social thinking and the formations of

the attitudes and beliefs that guide thought process and behavior (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996; Underwood, 2007). Vygotsky's theory of sociocultural development proposes that human development begins as an egocentric process (Daniels, 2001). Elementary mental functions, such as attention, sensation, perception and memory precipitate the development of higher mental functions through social interaction (McLeod, 2007). An important aspect of Vygotsky's work is the influence of a tutor, referred to by Vygotsky as an MKO, or More Knowledgeable Other (Daniels, 2001). As young children seek to make sense of the world and learn to navigate it, they look to those around them for cues and instruction as they develop higher language and cognitive skills. In many cases, the MKO is the parent or teacher, but it may also be a peer group or even electronic devices. Many young children have learned their alphabet by watching Sesame Street or by using an application on a computer or other electronic device.

A second integral aspect to Vygotsky's theory is the Zone of Proximal Development, or ZPD. The ZPD refers to area of development between what a child can do independently, and what can be achieved with guidance from the MKO. The ZPD is the critical area in learning and where children are most sensitive to instruction (Vygotsky, 1978). An often-cited example is that of a child learning to complete a jigsaw puzzle. The child is unable to complete the task alone, but with help from a parent, the child is able to develop strategies to complete the task. This theory is relevant to the development of social strategies and concepts as well. How MKOs respond to gender diversity will be observed and internalized by the student.

The third aspect of Vygotsky's theory relevant to this study is the development of independent thought and language and their internal connection, and how language is

developed through social interactions. Two critical roles of language are for adults to transmit information to children, and as a tool for intellectual adaptation (Vygotsky, 1962). Language and verbal interactions are part of the experience of learning and developing thought and skills as well as attitudes and beliefs. Three forms of language, according to Vygotsky, include social speech, private speech, and silent inner speech. Social speech is external and used to give and receive information from others. Private speech is an intellectual function that is directed to the self and it is the beginning of silent speech, or the self-talk of the inner voice. As young children move through the Vygotskian levels of speech and inner language, the individuals surrounding the child are directly influencing the development of cognition and thinking.

Vygotsky believed that “private speech is a product of an individual’s social environment” (McLeod, 2007, p. 4). Young children are absorbing the language and processing the behavior of those around them at all times. The development of the sense of social justice is being formed as children learn from the adults and others around them. Practitioners in early childhood care and education programs, therefore, influence the development of young children through the language they use and the experiences produced. Beliefs, attitudes and values held by individuals were formed during the developmental period, and are perpetuated through language and experience (Underwood, 2007).

A great deal of time and energy is focused on education by educators, theorists, politicians, administrators, and parents in the name of doing what is best for children. It is an arena of diverse thought, as diverse as the children affected by the results. Feelings, attitudes and beliefs are formed over a lifetime, with indelible foundations developed at a

young age. With formal education beginning at earlier stages of development, it is imperative for all concerned with the education of young children to be mindful in all aspects of the endeavor (Cardona, 2005; Garmon, 2004).

Essential studies related to early childhood education and gender indicate, first of all, the need for practitioners to be self-aware of their own attitudes, beliefs and biases (Cahill & Adams, 1997). Teachers' attitudes and beliefs are an important factor in the judgments they make and actions they take in their classrooms on a daily basis (Pajares, 1992). Teachers play an important role in children's development of gender roles and identities. For example, how they respond to children teasing each other about crossing gender lines, how they may respond to a transgender student, or perhaps a student practicing a religion different from the majority of the students, will become a part of the student's construction (Martin, 2013). In order for teachers to engage in thoughtful practice, it is important for them to consider how they may react or feel in a situation that may be new or uncomfortable to them (Brinkman, Rabenstein, Rosén, & Zimmerman, 2014).

Attitudes and beliefs shape human behavior, and only through transformational experiences do attitudes and beliefs change (Morris, 2003). For teachers of young children, it is essential to examine deeply held attitudes and beliefs and consider how they influence our interactions and experiences with young children. Based on long-held theories of human development, a majority of brain development occurs by the chronological age of 8 in typically developing children (Garhart Mooney, 2013). Experiences occurring during this developmental period have lasting effects. Each adult

was once a young child whose attitudes, beliefs and behaviors have also been shaped from an early age.

Gender Diversity

To begin the discussion about gender constructs and diversity in early childhood, it is necessary to consider diversity and gender as many-faceted terms. In the global world, there are a multitude of factors that form each individual's attitude and belief system and influence their behavior based on the constructs they have embodied. Factors influencing one's construction of the world around them and their own identity include but are not limited to socioeconomic status, culture, religion, family composition, ethnicity, community, schooling and gender (Martin, 2013). It is important to view each individual child, and adult, as a whole. "People create and negotiate their gender, racial, ethical, sexual, and class identities" differently and research indicates that these constructs are "fluid, multidimensional, personalized social constructions that reflect the individual's current context and sociohistorical cohort" (Frable, 1997, p. 139). The current study narrows its focus to gender constructs; however, it is important to keep in mind that the nature of gender constructs is multifaceted.

Gender has been studied widely and various theories exist regarding the nature of gender development (Brinkman et al., 2014; Mansh et al., 2015; Martin, 2013; Ruble et al., 2016). The American Psychological Association defines sex as the biological status of an individual based on genitalia, chromosomes, and internal reproductive organs, and is male, female or intersex (American Psychological Association, 2015). Gender, however, "is considered to be socially constructed in discourse and is a dynamic process referring to the cultural inscription of bodies into masculine and feminine characteristics"

(Robinson & Davies, 2007, p. 129). Gender identity is each individual's sense of being male or female and can be seen as existing on a spectrum from totally female to totally male (Pepper, 2012). Gender performance is related to the actions and visible performative factors socially considered to be masculine or feminine, while gender roles are socially constructed expectations in the context of one's surroundings (Lamb, 2013) (see Figure 1 for Gender Constructs).

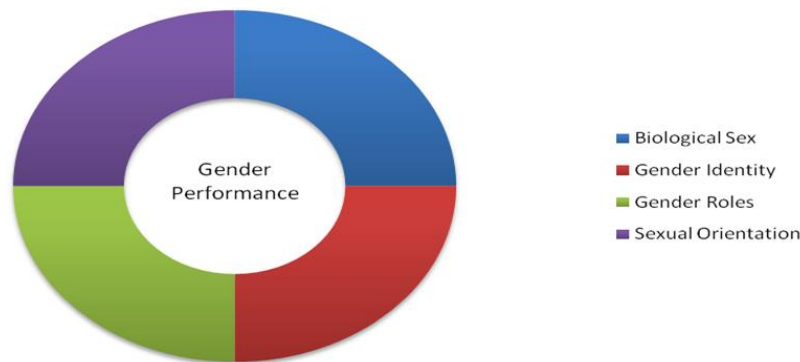


Figure 1. Gender Construction

Sex, gender, and gender performance, while related, can differ from each other, which can sometimes be considered gender nonconformity (Gottschalk, 2003). Sexual orientation refers to “one’s enduring sexual attraction to male partners, female partners, or both. Sexual orientation may be heterosexual, same sex (gay or lesbian), or bisexual” (American Psychological Association, 2015). Transgender “is an umbrella term that incorporates differences in gender identity wherein one’s assigned biological sex doesn’t match their felt identity. This umbrella term includes persons who do not feel they fit into a dichotomous sex structure through which they are identified as male or female. Individuals in this category may feel as if they are in the wrong gender, but this perception may or may not correlate with a desire for surgical or hormonal reassignment” (Labuski & Keo-Meier, 2015, p. 2).

Research Questions

1. What are the attitudes and beliefs about gender and diversity held by teachers in early childhood classrooms in North Dakota?
2. What are the implications for school leaders regarding the provision of resources and professional development for teachers regarding gender?

Assumptions

It is assumed by the researcher that early childhood teachers are interested in their own constructions about children and gender, and have a desire to improve practice to create safe and healthy environments for all children. It is further assumed that participants will be honest and forthcoming in their responses to the stimulus material.

Background of the Researcher

Ever since grade school, I have been a proponent for social justice. I was always defending others who were bullied and it caused me to be ostracized myself. Although I also had the need to be accepted by my peers, I always felt that doing the right thing was more important than being popular. When I started high school, I became a student helper in the special education classroom which, at that time, was self-contained, meaning they had their own classroom separate from their peers without disabilities. The students were often referred to by peers as the F-Troop because everyone assumed that their report cards must have contained all Fs. I spent more than a little time trying to get my peers and classmates to “see these kids differently,” but I do not think they ever took me seriously.

The opportunity to work with these students opened my mind to the vast spectrum of individuals there must be in this world. Having been born and raised in a very small

rural town in North Dakota, it was a big realization for me because I had not been exposed to a great deal of diverse populations that I remember. The times I do remember made a lasting impression on me and I still think about them to this day.

Around the same time, while I was in high school, my niece was born with severe Cerebral Palsy and developmental delay due to extreme complications at birth. I witnessed all that my brother and his family went through to care for and provide the best they could for their daughter. It was one of the influences that guided my decision to become a special education teacher with my Master's Degree in Severe and Multiple Handicaps because I could see that this population was very underserved and there were few teachers in this field. I felt that had they taken the time to reflect on why they felt the way they did and to educate themselves on what children, even those with significant disabilities, can actually do, they would realize that these children are entitled to the same opportunities as any other child.

I started my first career-related job as a teacher in a preschool special needs classroom in my hometown and have spent the last 28 years working for the same special education unit. I am now the director of the unit, but my passion is still for the students and the diversity they represent. As the director, I feel I am able to influence the quality of services provided for these students in more ways than I would be able to on an individual student basis. I see my role as one of leadership and education for other teachers, administrators and students to promote inclusion and social justice for the students in our care.

In my practice, I have accumulated a large amount of experience and have been in situations that have caused me to reflect on my practice and my responses toward

children from diverse groups and their families. I have come to realize that not everyone in the field of education feels the same way I do. Students with special needs can present a financial and personnel burden to school districts and sometimes it is difficult for leaders to see past these potential barriers and see the students as individuals.

The recent explosion of gender equality situations in our schools has been fueled by the media and has caused educators to address issues they may be uncomfortable with for a whole host of reasons. However, the fact remains that all students are entitled to the best education we can provide for them, regardless of ethnicity, gender identity or special needs. That is the nature of the public school system. We do not pick and choose who comes through our doors, and I believe it is our job as educators to make sure that each and every student receives an education appropriate to his or her needs.

In conversations with peers and colleagues, it is evident that not many of them have thought about gender roles and gender bias in the classroom, and they hope they will never have to deal with these issues as an educator. However, in all likelihood they will, or may already have. I feel it is imperative for leaders and teachers to reflect first upon their own attitudes and beliefs in order to address gender and gender bias appropriately. Even more important than policies and procedures is the impact teachers and school leaders have on the healthy development of children in their classrooms and schools. The responses to and examples set by those in power have a lasting and significant impact on the well-being and development of social justice concepts for all children. The review of the literature will demonstrate the significant role of early childhood educators on the construct development in young children. By examining and reflecting upon our own beliefs and attitudes, we are able to thoughtfully promote the

concepts of anti-bias and social justice for the next generation. It may have to start with leaders, laws, policy and procedures as did most forms of integration, but we need to have a place to start. I chose to start with the teachers of our youngest students with whom I have worked for 28 years because I understand the nuances of the early childhood teachers' world. It is true that this is the age when many constructs are developed, so it is our role as educators to help them develop a worldview that will help them be successful, caring adults in a greater global society one day.

Definition of Terms

Anti-Bias Education (ABE): An approach that includes addressing constructs of personal and social identity, social-emotional relationships with people different from oneself, prejudice, discrimination, critical thinking, and taking action for fairness with children (Derman-Sparks et al., 2015).

Bias-free: An environment, classroom setting, or program that is free of prejudicial behaviors (Morrison, 2012).

Construct: an idea or theory containing various conceptual elements, typically one considered to be subjective and not based on empirical evidence (Dictionary.com).

Constructivism: A perspective that considers identity as being historically and socially constructed across different cultures, rather than being essentialized in human biology (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006).

Culturally appropriate practice: An approach to education based on the premise that all people in the United States should receive proportional attention in the curriculum (Morrison, 2012).

Diversity: A term used to include all people's racial identity, ethnicity, family culture, gender, class, sexual orientation, and ability (Derman-Sparks et al., 2015).

Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP): Practice based on how children grow and develop and on individual and cultural differences (Morrison, 2012).

Developmentally and Culturally Responsive Practice (DCRP): Teaching based on the ability to respond appropriately to children's and families' developmental, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds and needs (Morrison, 2012).

ECE Practitioner: One serving as a teacher in an ECE setting.

Early Childhood (EC): The period of development typically seen in preschool or other early childhood setting ranging from three to six years of age.

Early Childhood Education (ECE): A setting such as a preschool or other education and care institution serving young children (Derman-Sparks et al., 2015).

Gender identity: One's internal sense of being male, female, neither of these, both or other gender(s) (Brill, 2008).

Gender nonconforming children: Children who do not abide by the prescribed gender norms of their culture (Ehrensaft, 2011).

Gender performativity: Describes how individuals participate in social constructions of gender (Butler, 1990).

Intercultural: Transcending one cultural system for another in the context of educational engagement that includes knowledge, abilities, attitudes and sensibility that enable a person to have adequate and effective interactions with other cultures (Hunter et al., 2015).

Intersubjectivity: A Vygotskian theory based on the idea that individuals come to a task, problem, or conversation with their own subjective experiences and ways of thinking. Through discussing their different viewpoints, children can build a shared understanding (Morrison, 2012).

More Knowledgeable Other (MKO): Any person that has a higher level of ability or understanding than the learner in terms of the task, process or concept at hand (Vygotsky, 1978).

Social constructionism: The notion that people's understanding of reality is partially, if not entirely, socially situated (Butler, 1990).

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD): The range of tasks (or concepts) that are too difficult to master alone but that can be learned with guidance and assistance (Morrison, 2012).

Organization of the Study

Chapter I provided an overview of the significance of the study, and a purpose and rationale for examining the attitudes and beliefs of early childhood practitioners in North Dakota. The theoretical framework of Vygotsky's Zones of Proximal Development was introduced and discussed as an important factor in diversity awareness. The research questions were defined as well as delimitations, assumptions and the background of the researcher. Basic terms were defined.

Chapter II will examine the literature in relation to early childhood education historically and in North Dakota as well as constructivist learning theories and the theoretical concepts applied to early childhood education in North Dakota. The areas of

diversity addressed in this study are defined and discussed and the methodology of using constructivist grounded theory is presented.

Chapter III will introduce the qualitative design of the study. This chapter will discuss participant selection, adaptations of constructivist grounded theory, and the use of children's literature, data collection, and analysis.

Chapter IV will provide a description of the categories and themes constructed from the data, including coding methods, data analysis and a description of the results. Chapter V will provide a discussion and summary of the results and will include a discussion of implications for practice in the state of North Dakota.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

“The most important part of education is proper training in the nursery” (Plato, n.d.).

The goal of this qualitative study was to examine the attitudes and beliefs about children and gender held by certified practicing early childhood teachers in North Dakota Department of Public Instruction approved preschool programs in North Dakota. Selected children’s picture books were used to elicit qualitative responses. The gender constructs explored were gender roles, diverse families, gender nonconformity, and transgender.

Following a brief introduction, the history of early childhood education and the philosophies of several major theorists are summarized and information specific to North Dakota early childhood education is reviewed. The sections on diversity help lay the groundwork for understanding children from diverse groups, and discuss other studies that have attempted to examine attitudes and beliefs about diversity and their impact on young children. An introduction to the methodology and conceptual framework will be provided prior to a summary of the chapter and an introduction to the following chapters.

North Dakota is a self-proclaimed conservative state, as evidenced by the political climate going back over two decades. Conservative Republicans have held the legislature since at least 1992 (Ballotpedia, 2015). Having met a great number of teachers, I have learned that many teachers in North Dakota’s public schools are native North Dakotans who were born and raised in the state. The western North Dakota oil boom has introduced

many changes to the state. The influx of jobs and people has affected every sector, including education.

School districts are required to accommodate more students than they have in the past. A critical teacher shortage and overloaded facilities are common problems, especially in the western part of the state. As families from all over the country and beyond flock to North Dakota and school districts scramble to accommodate all children, many schools are understaffed and overwhelmed. At the time of writing the impact of the oil boom appears to be waning; however, the population of North Dakota continues to increase. The December 2015 release of the most recent United States Census shows that North Dakota's population has reached an all-time high of 756,927 (Smith, 2015). As North Dakota continues to push forward in improving educational opportunities and results for students, educators are facing unprecedented circumstances.

North Dakota teachers are a homogenous group. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (n.d.), 97.9% of North Dakota's teachers are white, and 72.7% of them are female. How does living and working in a conservative, homogenous, heterogeneous state affect our values and beliefs and consequently our behavior in the classroom and what we teach young children about these concepts?

Constructivist Learning Theories in Early Childhood Education

Early childhood education has long been considered an important endeavor, intended to prepare children to become adults in the world as it exists at any given time. Ancient Greeks sought to educate their boys to become strong warriors and girls to become strong mothers in order to perpetuate their race (Lascarides & Hinitz, 2011). Hippocrates, Plato, and Aristotle were interested in child development and each wrote

about their theories, delineating slightly different but parallel theories on the stages of development (Lascarides & Hinitz, 2011). While the importance of strong genes and a healthy environment were recognized, the influence of early education and the role of adults as mentors were considered paramount to appropriate development.

In Europe, throughout the Middle Ages and the Enlightenment, educational theories continued to evolve. For the general population, education involved apprenticeship for boys and domestic training for girls. Formal education was reserved for children of nobility after the age of seven. Younger children were thought to be “capable of learning only simple things” (Lascarides & Hinitz, 2011, p. 33). It was not until the Reformation, during the 16th century, that literacy and education for all became prevalent schools of thought (Morrison, 2012). In his *Ninety-Five Theses*, Martin Luther advocated that all children must learn to read in order to be able to read the Bible (Lascarides & Hinitz, 2011). Educational reformer Comenius published several works during this time that promoted educational reform and analyzed the philosophy of education and methods that support early learning (Lascarides & Hinitz, 2011).

In the late 1600s, John Locke published several essays that further support educational practices of today. He was the first philosopher to purport that the adults that children eventually become are a direct result of their environment and early learning (Lascarides & Hinitz, 2011). He also introduced the concept of a developmentally appropriate curriculum by starting with teaching a simple concept and then another to build upon the first in order to foster more complex thinking. In France, Jean-Jacque Rousseau began publishing books relating to the education of young children. Although he was not an educator by profession, his work *Emile* is often regarded as the “beginning

of child study as a field of knowledge” (Lascarides & Hinitz, 2011, p. 52). Rousseau’s other contributions to the developing body of knowledge at the time were the theories of naturalism and unfolding (Morrison, 2012).

The education of young children in the United States has been greatly influenced by these early visionaries and the development of early childhood education in Britain. Mary Wollstonecraft advocated for the education of girls in 1789 in her work *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters: With Reflection on Female Conduct, In the More Important Duties of Life* (Morrison, 2012). Robert Owen’s vision and implementation of the first infant schools in London in 1818 are the precursors to today’s daycare programs and Headstart programs. The infant schools provided an educational environment for children while their parents worked in the mills (Lascarides & Hinitz, 2011). He also began night school programs for parents, believing that better educated parents would improve outcomes for children.

Perhaps one of the most influential individuals in the development of early childhood education is the German Friedrich Froebel, often referred to as the “Father of Kindergarten,” a term he coined which means “garden of children” (Morrison, 2012). In his work, *The Education of Man*, Froebel (1885) discussed human stages of development and the nature of young children in greater depth than any previous scholars or educators of the time. His strong theories about what children should learn during their early years precipitated the idea of educating children outside the home, because many mothers were not promoting these skills in the home.

Throughout the Post-Industrial Revolution, the field of early childhood education continued to develop and gain strength. John Dewey introduced the idea of child-centered

curriculum, promoting that teaching be based on each child's interest rather than a prescribed set of skills and knowledge (Morrison, 2012). Rachel and Margaret McMillan practiced outdoor education and learning about life through nature with their concept of open-air nursery schools. Their first nursery school was also used as a training center for teachers, as the McMillians and others believed that young children required well-trained teachers to facilitate proper development (Lascarides & Hinitz, 2011). During this period, several important theorists developed the underpinnings of current educational thought. Jean Piaget, John Dewey, and Lev Vygotsky each played important roles.

Jean Piaget (1896-1980) wrote volumes regarding his theories on child development and was heavily influenced by the psychological theories of Sigmund Freud (Garhart Mooney, 2013). While Piaget's work has been criticized for being "unscientific," his theory on concrete stages of development remains a cornerstone of current teacher preparation and early childhood curriculum. An important theoretical aspect of Piaget's work was that he believed that it is what children experience, rather than what they are deliberately taught, that creates learning. According to Piaget's theories, children experience learning differently depending on what stage of development they are in (Lascarides & Hinitz, 2011). While Piaget appeared to be considering the learning of concrete skills, his ideas about development and experience can be applied to the social learning of children and the development of their attitudes and beliefs.

The importance of social learning in early childhood education was of paramount interest to American educator John Dewey (1859-1952). Dewey advocated for a more deliberate role for early childhood teachers, rather than a passive role and letting children

guide their own activities (Garhart Mooney, 2013). “Dewey thought that children need assistance from teachers in making sense of their world” (Garhart Mooney, 2013, p. 16). In Dewey’s work, *My Pedagogic Creed*, Dewey stated “education proceeds by the participating of the individual in the social consciousness of the race” and that “education is a regulation of the process of coming to share in the social consciousness” (Lascarides & Hinitz, 2011, pp. 218-219). His conclusion indicates that early childhood programs are not merely institutions of pre-academic learning, but have great influence on social values and the development of social consciousness and behavior.

Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) placed significant importance on the role of language and interaction with adults, or more knowledgeable peers, in the development of the social understanding and behavior of children (McLeod, 2007). In two of his major works, *Mind in Society* and *Thought and Language*, Vygotsky discussed the importance of social interaction on the development of children’s cognitive development and social consciousness. While Piaget supported the concept of concrete developmental stages that are universal to all children, Vygotsky believed that social learning comes before cognitive development (McLeod, 2007). Through interactions with peers and teachers, children develop social constructs and build language skills (Garhart Mooney, 2013). He believed that internalization, or inner speech, is developed through stages of external social speech, private speech which is directed to the self, to inner speech which is the internal process of thinking (McLeod, 2007). His theories support the idea that children learn and internalize based on interaction with others in the Zone of Proximal Development. The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is the stage between what is known and what is unknown. Skills, language, and thoughts are developed during the

ZPD and are influenced by the actions, language and behavior of others. It is Vygotsky's theories that provide the theoretical framework for this study as discussed in chapter one.

Early Childhood Education in North Dakota

Early childhood education plays an important role in shaping our society, and North Dakota is no exception. Recent initiatives and legislation have necessitated that the state look closely at early childhood programs and practices. In 2014, the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction joined forces with the Marsico Institute for Early Learning and Literacy at the University of Denver to conduct an in-depth study examining early care and early education in North Dakota. The study revealed that North Dakota does not have a clear plan to develop comprehensive early childhood care and education, and the early childhood options in the state do not meet demand. By looking to the past, the present situation, and the future vision for North Dakota, early childhood educators can make thoughtful decisions to the benefit of young children in the state.

Early childhood education has only begun to gain momentum in North Dakota. Currently, kindergarten programs are optional for districts. Full-day kindergarten in North Dakota was not funded by the state until 2009 (Mongeau, 2015). Attempts to gain state funding for preschool programs have been a hard sell for the North Dakota Legislature. In 2013, North Dakota was one of only 10 states that did not provide any type of state funding for early childhood programs (Barnett, Carolan, Squires, & Clark Brown, 2013). During the 2013 assembly, an early childhood education funding bill, SB 2229, was voted down. The assembly did, however, provide funds for a study to be conducted by the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction to examine the need for early childhood care and education options in North Dakota. The study results indicated

that there is a high need to expand early childhood care and education facilities in North Dakota (North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, 2014).

The 2015 Legislature reviewed the results and on Friday, April 17, 2015, Governor Dalrymple signed SB 2151 into law. The bill provides \$3 million in grants through the North Dakota Department of Commerce. The grants provide scholarships to children from low-income families who qualify for free or reduced-price lunches. While North Dakota remains one of a handful of states that do not provide fully funded state preschool, the bill has become a catalyst for the development of guidance and policy for early childhood programs. Current guidance on the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction's website include the North Dakota Early Childhood Education Preschool Standards, a guide to selecting a comprehensive preschool curriculum, an Early Care and Education Framework, and guidance on the requirements for school districts to obtain approval for a preschool program (NDDPI). The guidance provided support for choosing curriculum and learning activities that encompass cultural, socioeconomic and ethnic sensitivity as developmentally appropriate practice (North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, 2014). Other types of diversity, including gender and gender bias, are not specifically mentioned in any of the guidance. As North Dakota begins the journey toward provision of high-quality educational experiences for young children, it is imperative for the state to closely examine all aspects of early childhood education and the concept of diversity in developing socially relevant and anti-bias early childhood programs.

Why is it important to apply these concepts to an early childhood classroom at all? After all, it is a commonly held view by early childhood educators that children in

early childhood classrooms are too young to recognize diversity (Boutte, Lopez-Robertson, & Powers-Costello, 2011). However, many studies have demonstrated that the early childhood years are a critical period for the development of lifelong beliefs, values and operational theories of how to negotiate the social world (Cahill & Adams, 1997; Daniels, 2001; Vygotsky, 1978).

Theoretical Concepts Applied to Early Childhood

In his work regarding early childhood development, Lev Vygotsky developed several theories on the development of social attitudes and beliefs. According to Vygotsky's theories, each person holds within them many different attitudes, beliefs and values that are used internally to make sense of, interpret and negotiate their world. These attitudes, beliefs and values begin forming at birth and develop and change over time. Considering the theories of Vygotsky, children are born with the elementary mental functions of attention, sensation, perception and memory (McLeod, 2007). It is through interaction and experience with their environment that the elementary mental functions develop into higher mental functions, processes and strategies that eventually become an individual's "inner speech" that Vygotsky referred to as "thinking in pure meanings" (Vygotsky, 1962). By the age of seven, most children have a developed sense of inner speech that has been influenced and assimilated based on all of the experiences and interactions collectively.

An integral aspect to Vygotsky's theory is the Zone of Proximal Development, or ZPD. The ZPD refers to the area of development between what a child can do independently, and what can be achieved with guidance from a More Knowledgeable Other or MKO. The ZPD is the critical area in learning and where children are most

sensitive to instruction (Vygotsky, 1978). This theory is often related to the development of tangible skills. An often-cited example is that of a child learning to complete a jigsaw puzzle. The child is unable to complete the task alone, but with guidance from a parent, the child is able to develop strategies and complete the task with help. A twist on Vygotsky's ZPD theory is suggested by Hunter et al. (2015) in which they "posit an adaptation to the ZPD to create context for intercultural development as associated with {Zygotsky's} theories and the cultural orientation process" (p. 138). While this association is in the context of pre-service teachers and the process of interculturalization, it suggests that the ZPD is significant in the development of social skills and the effect of teachers' skills and cultural competence on the development of these skills in students.

For the purpose of this study, the ZPD is viewed within the context of the development of social justice and views towards gender constructs. As teachers in early childhood classrooms model behavior toward diverse students, they are demonstrating and teaching young children based on their own Zone of development and in the Zone of the children within their classroom. In order to understand their own Zone and the level of social maturity of the students, teachers must engage in critical self-reflection and have an understanding of their own level of cultural competence and social development within the context of different types of diversity. In order to engage in self-reflection about gender constructs, it is imperative to define gender constructs and diversity for the purpose of the study.

Diversity

For the purpose of this study, the concept of diversity is adapted from Derman-Sparks et al. (2015) *Leading Anti-Bias Early Childhood Education Programs*. We use

this term in its broadest sense: “Inclusive of all people’s racial identity, ethnicity, family culture, gender, class, sexual orientation and ability. Diversity exists in the differences among people and groups. It is not a term that refers to some people and not to others” (p. 3).

Cultural/Ethnic/Religious Diversity

A frequently cited reason for addressing diversity in schools and early childhood education classrooms is the increase in diversity, especially minorities, in classrooms (Gay, 2010; Moeller, Anderson, & Grosz, 2012; Schmidt, 2007). In fact, according to statistical trends, non-Hispanic whites will become the minority between 2040 and 2050 (Marx, 2014). Based on immigration rates, birth rates and the current growth rates of ethnic groups, Black, Asian, American Indian, Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, and people of two or more races will experience significant increases in population in the United States, surpassing non-Hispanic whites for the first time since the United States Census was recorded. Based on these trends, it makes sense that teachers in all classrooms have the ability and disposition to enhance the learning of students from many different backgrounds, ethnicities and socioeconomic groups. Given the fact that the majority of teachers in the United States are white, middle class, and female (Marx, 2014), it is important to examine how the attitudes and beliefs of teachers translate into classroom behaviors and teaching practices.

Many early childhood educators express the belief that children in early childhood classrooms are too young to notice racial differences and that addressing diversity in early childhood classrooms is unnecessary. In fact, many early childhood teachers adopt a philosophy of “colorblindness” in their classrooms and feel that treating all children the

same is a good stance to take when working with young children (Boutte et al., 2011). In an attempt to be “politically correct” by adopting the colorblind stance, they are actually unintentionally promoting racial prejudice and oppression by giving young children the impression that racism is not a concern and requires no social action (Husband, 2012). While early childhood teachers appear to have the best of intentions in their classrooms, it is important for them to look beyond colorblindness and engage in self-reflection in order to improve anti-bias education practices to interrupt the cycle of racism in society by addressing it in early childhood classrooms, where many beliefs and attitudes about racism are formed (Bloch, Swadener, & Cannella, 2014; Boutte et al., 2011; Husband, 2012). In contrast to the concept of colorblindness is the stance of social justice. Tenets of social justice charge teachers with the task of not continuing to remain colorblind and maintain the status quo, but to actively promote equality and fairness by thoughtfully addressing bias and racism in early childhood classrooms.

A significant body of research regarding the development of bias and stereotyping indicates that children as young as four have already developed attitudes and beliefs about race and color (Boutte et al., 2011; Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006; Schmidt, 2004). Play-based studies conducted in early childhood classrooms indicate that bias and stereotypical attitudes are evident in children’s play based on the language they use (Schubert Center for Child Studies, 2014). Other studies have demonstrated children assigning “good” and “bad” labels to dolls and other objects with “good” being white and “bad” being black (Morris, 2003). A study of kindergarten children in Minnesota indicated that over three fourths of the students gave stereotypic answers when asked questions about Native Americans, such as “they are mean” and “they scalp people”

(Moomaw & Jones, 2015). The study revealed that many of these perceptions stemmed from activities in early childhood classrooms related to sanitized stereotypical versions of history during celebrations of holidays such as Thanksgiving and Columbus Day through activities such as making headdresses, peace pipes, totem poles and brown paper bag vests. While it is not considered an intentional strategy for promoting stereotypes and bias, it does affect how young children form attitudes and beliefs. Lack of knowledge about Native American culture, including the sacred significance of certain objects, and lack of reflection on what ideals these activities promote, can contribute to cultural insensitivity and bias. Once again, the results of such studies highlight the importance of teachers engaging in self-reflection and thinking about the messages being absorbed by young children through the curriculum and activities used in early childhood classrooms. The following sections will explain the gender constructs explored in this study.

Gender Constructs Explored in the Study

Gender Roles and Gender Conformity

Teacher attitudes and beliefs have a profound effect on the development of beliefs about gender roles in young children. One example from a study performed in Latin America indicates that by the age of five, boys and girls “already hold stereotypical expectations about boys’ and girls’ academic achievement” (del Río & Strasser, 2013). This “gender gap” has been statistically evident based on higher scores on mathematical tests by males and college graduation rates in mathematical fields of study, most notably in areas where there are strong male and female gender roles and stereotypes (Niederle & Vesterlund, 2010). During the 1970s and 1980s, several studies examined early childhood teacher attitudes and beliefs about gender roles and found that the teachers’ gender role

stereotypes guided their behavior towards children in their classrooms (Cahill & Adams, 1997). Concerted efforts to change stereotypical attitudes and beliefs that influence behavior have been prominent over the past 60 years and have reduced this gap. The number of females in mathematical programs and careers was increasing, and has surpassed the number of males in some countries and areas in the United States (Niederle & Vesterlund, 2010). While many early childhood teachers are aware of how their attitudes and beliefs affect the development of gender roles in their classrooms, many are not. A very common sentiment is “boys will be boys and girls will be girls” and traditional gender roles are often accepted and endorsed without question. However, gender roles and identities are not as simple as they may seem. For some students and families, gender roles and gender identity can be complex and diverse.

Many theories abound regarding the development of gender identity in young children. Based on what we know about development in general, it can be safely stated that gender identity development begins at birth. Many babies in the United States are presented to their parents for the first time wrapped in a pink or blue blanket based on their birth gender. Throughout the early years of development, children think about gender in characteristic ways that become more complex based on their level of understanding (Mansh et al., 2015). “Generally, by age 2 to 3.5, children are able to correctly label their own gender” (Mansh et al., 2015, p. 4). By the age of 3.5 to 4.5 years, gender stability develops and by six years, the age of gender constancy, gender identity can be independent of external features (Mansh et al., 2015, p. 8). Studies have shown that children “begin selecting gender-typed toys as toddlers and may show a visual preference for gender-typed toys even earlier” (Weisgram, Fulcher, & Dinella, 2014, p.

401). Children develop constructs about gender through gender-typed toys introduced as socializing agents (Weisgram et al., 2014). However, it appears that the development of gender identity is much more complex.

Traditional theories of gender identity development include essentialist, developmental and socialization (Brinkman et al., 2014). The essentialist theory ties gender identity directly to biological sex, genetics and hormones, while the developmental theory supports the development of gender identity over time in predictable stages of development as supported by Piaget and Erickson (Brinkman et al., 2014). The theory of socialization “describes accumulation of gender identity as a process that occurs over time due to the influence of others” (Brinkman et al., 2014, p. 837). In their 2014 study, Brinkman et al. discovered that young children adjust their play based on whether other children were present. While they might play with what could be considered gender “inappropriate” toys when they assumed they were playing alone, they would change to an “appropriate” toy if another child joined them, indicating decision-making resulting from the consequences of nonconformity to gender stereotypes (Brinkman et al., 2014).

Another factor to be considered when attempting to understand the development of gender identity is the concept of gender constancy. Gender constancy refers to the permanence of a sexual category (Kohlberg, 1966). Gender constancy develops through a series of stages including labeling, stability, and consistency, meaning that “children are thought to reach a full understanding once they recognize that they will always be the same sex, across time or change in situation” (Brinkman et al., 2014, p. 1121). Factors leading to gender constancy are debated, as are the factors influencing gender identity

development, and we are beginning to understand that gender role and gender identity development can be much more unpredictable and fluid than previously thought.

More and more children and adults are coming forward, who by traditional theories, would be considered gender-nonconforming and do not fit into the binary gender system. More recent perspectives by developmental psychologists, such as Diane Ehrensaft, Ph.D. and Rachel Pepper, have delved more deeply into the development of sex and gender beginning in early childhood. Through their work with gender nonconforming children, they conclude that “gender is not inherently connected to one’s bodily anatomy” and see gender as a “societal construct” (Brill & Pepper, 2008). In this “new paradigm of gender’s being an intricate choreography of nature and nurture, it is not just the role of the parents to teach the children but that of the children to teach the parents—about their internal sense of self as girls, as boys, as others, from what their mind and the organ between their ears tells them” (Ehrensaft, 2011, p. 36). As practitioners in early childhood education, it is imperative to be open to non-traditional perspectives on gender identity constructs in young children in order to serve and protect the beings in our care.

Family Structure and Gender/Sexuality

Over last the decade, diversity in gender orientation and gender identity has made headlines. Currently the LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer/questioning) community comprises approximately 7%, or eight million, of the adults in the United States.

It is not only attitudes and beliefs about gender roles and identity that have resulted in perpetuating stereotypes in early childhood classrooms. Constructs of

sexuality begin forming at an early age as well, and are influenced by teacher behaviors in early childhood classrooms. A 2002 study conducted in Sydney, Australia, based on a survey and qualitative interviews, suggests that when contemplating different types of diversity, most of the teachers held the strongest opinions about sexuality, but felt it was the area of least importance in regard to relevance to their work (Robinson, 2002).

Background information from the study iterates that children come to early childhood settings from different backgrounds and different family structures and may have diverse levels of knowledge about sex and sexuality. “This is particularly so for children who come from lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender families, or from families where parents or caregivers have made conscious decisions to inform their children about sex and sexuality issues” (Robinson, 2002, p. 419). Teacher attitudes towards these families varied, but the majority viewed them as “the other” or deviant or problematic in some way and indicated that they would not address sexuality unless it became necessary for some reason, such as children being teased for having gay parents. The term “ironic” was used to describe the attitudes of teachers who strongly supported social justice in other areas of diversity, such as multiculturalism, bilingualism, and special needs, but dramatically shifted in attitude when contemplating gay and lesbian issues. Once again, the research points out that lack of knowledge and experience are cited as specific reasons for low levels of comfort for many teachers (Robinson, 2002).

A 2006 internet-based study in the United Kingdom looked at the code of silence often surrounding issues of sexuality in schools (DePalma & Atkinson, 2006). While the researchers admitted that participation was low, they discovered common themes among the participants who were trainee primary teachers responding to topics and comments on

a web forum. They discovered that most participants viewed heterosexuality as “normal” and homosexuality as “deviant” and that some felt that discussing sexuality in schools was a way to push a “gay agenda” onto students (DePalma & Atkinson, 2006, p. 340). Many related homosexuality to implicit sexual acts of perversion and supported a “code of silence” relating to “sexually deviant” topics in schools (DePalma & Atkinson, 2006, p. 335). While the study did not indicate the grade levels taught by the respondents, it does discuss the development of sexuality in early childhood by stating that young children “engage in sexual play in early childhood, only learning to hide these behaviors as they become aware of adults’ cultural taboo” (DePalma & Atkinson, 2006, p. 340). This could imply that young children learn from their teachers what is to be considered “normal” and what is “taboo.”

Sexuality is an extremely controversial issue for many practitioners in early childhood education. In the pursuit of social justice and the honoring of diversity, however, issues of sexuality cannot be swept under the rug. Children today are exposed to sexuality at a very young age through television, the internet and interaction with others. LGBTQ parents and families often report feeling marginalized within the school context (Goldberg, 2014). The Goldberg (2014) study looked at LGBTQ families in the context of early childhood programs and their disclosure practices, perceived challenges, and suggestions to programs. The findings indicated that most parents reported disclosure that their child had LGBTQ parents to the school and had not experienced many challenges. Goldberg reported that they had conducted research to find early childhood programs that were inclusive in nature and many reported changing programs because of homophobic attitudes in some centers. Suggestions to teachers included “greater

discussion of family diversity in the preschool classroom,” “inclusion of children’s books on diversity,” and using “inclusive language” in the early childhood setting (Goldberg, 2014, p. 677). Such suggestions may be met with resistance in conservative communities. In North Dakota and across the country, inclusion of children’s books depicting same-sex parents was a point sensationalized by opponents of the Common Core standards, stating that the standards promote “mainstreaming homosexuality, promiscuity and other practices” (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2014, p. 1). This sentiment was also voiced at the 64th Legislative Assembly in North Dakota, and at community level meetings held across the state by the North Dakota group Stop Common Core. Is North Dakota ready to accept sexual diversity in early childhood and other education programs? The answer may depend solely upon the attitudes and beliefs of educational professionals and teachers in these programs.

Transgender

Approximately three tenths of a percent, or about 698,000 people in the United States, identify themselves as transgender (Gates, 2011). While topics of sexuality are generally avoided in early childhood settings, the chances of practitioners having a transgender student or family member as a part of their classroom are increasing as more individuals are identifying as transgender and disclosing to practitioners in early childhood programs. The South Dakota Legislature recently passed a bill requiring all students to use restrooms and locker rooms that match the sex printed on their birth certificate. While the bill was vetoed by the governor, similar bills have been proposed in other states, creating an added area of controversy extending even to early childhood classrooms (Blad, 2016).

Children's perspectives on their own gender identities are also being recognized. In 2014, the YouTube video *Ryland's Story* (Whittington Family, 2014) went viral. Ryland was born deaf and anatomically female. His first words upon receiving cochlear implants and learning to speak were, "I'm a boy." The video depicts Ryland's story of never identifying as a female and being supported by his parents in transitioning his gender expression to a boy at age five. In Alberta, Canada, a 12-year-old transgender boy was granted a new birth certificate that recognizes him as a male (The Canadian Press, 2014). The *Washington Post* featured the story of Kathryn and her family as they struggled to come to terms with Kathryn's vehement insistence that she was a boy since age two (Dvorak, 2012). In her book, *Transitions of the Heart*, Pepper (2012) presented many stories of mothers as they navigated the waters of having a transgender child, and struggled to "understand the gender identity of their children as best they could" (p. 4). For these parents, their choice to love, accept and support their children meant allowing them to transition to the opposite gender, and their experience sheds light on the many issues families with transgender children face. Families of transgender children report that some of their greatest fears and conflicts are related to the school environment, beginning in preschool (Pepper, 2012). In order to develop a common-sense approach, educators must examine their attitudes, beliefs and behaviors related to transgender children. Learning more about transgender children and their stories can help educators gain understanding to help promote an atmosphere of respect and social consciousness for all children.

Bias and Stereotyping

Bias and stereotyping exist not only along racial and cultural lines, but with regard to perceptions about religious affiliations as well. Freedom of religious rights in the United States provide that people not be discriminated against based on their religion, a desirable existence for people who may be persecuted for their religious beliefs in other countries. This does not mean that bias and discrimination do not exist in the United States. According to the Pew Research Center (2015), about 70% of the United States population responding identified as Christian. This indicates a decrease from 78% in 2007. The percentage of people identifying as not being affiliated with any religion and those of non-Christian faiths have shown the most increase (Pew Research Center, 2015). Non-Christian religions, most markedly Muslim and Hindu, are rapidly trending upward, and may be the groups most susceptible to bias because of perceived affiliations with terrorism and political agendas (Hoot, Szecsi, & Moosa, 2003).

A recent poll conducted by Zogby Analytics (Zogby, 2014) indicated that Americans have an overwhelmingly negative perception of Muslims. The study also indicated that most people think that all Arab people are Muslim when, in fact, only about one third are. Negative perceptions are most prominent among older white people, while younger non-white people have more favorable views (Zogby, 2014). While many Muslim children attend private religious school, the majority attend public schools and early childhood education programs (Hoot et al., 2003). Most early childhood teachers questioned reported having little to no knowledge of Muslim religious beliefs (Hoot et al., 2003). Most also expressed discomfort in addressing questions and teasing from non-Muslim children such as “Why do you have a diaper on your head?” and “Do you have a

bomb in your backpack?” (Hoot et al., 2003, p. 87) A post-September 11, 2001 survey of pre-service teachers indicated that most did not have a rudimentary understanding about the Islamic faith, the global influence, or the diverse nature of Islam (Mastrilla & Sardo-Brown, 2002). Also, most assigned negative attributes to Muslims and while they expressed a willingness to be sensitive to diversity in their classrooms, most did not have any idea how to do so with Muslim children (Mastrilla & Sardo-Brown, 2002). Only 5% indicated that they would stress to their students that “followers of Islam are not terrorists” (Mastrilla & Sardo-Brown, 2002, p. 159). A study conducted on first grade teachers indicated that they perceived lower academic competence and more behavior problems among Islamic immigrant students in their classrooms (Sirin, Ryce, & Mir, 2009). Many Muslim children attend public schools and early childhood programs, trying to navigate the drastically different social worlds of their homes and schools. Teachers in early childhood programs interested in promoting social justice are facilitators in helping all children navigate complicated social issues.

While teachers are not intentionally supporting bias, these implicit biases are promoted unconsciously. Everyone has implicit biases that are formed by a large variety of influences, including media, peers, families and, of course, teachers. For teachers to engage social justice in their classrooms, they “can no longer be dispassionate and distant in their relationships with students, or attempt to avoid controversial topics and harsh social realities” (Gay, 2010, p.). For early childhood teachers, this can be uncomfortable and is often viewed as a “touchy subject” in their classrooms; however, for the greater good of society they must first face their own biases in order to interrupt them (Boutte et al., 2011).

As teachers, we are cultural workers, whether we are aware of it or not. If teachers don't question the culture and values being promoted in the classroom, they socialize their students to accept the uneven power relations of our society along lines of race, class, gender, and ability. (Boutte et al., 2011, pp. 340-341)

Beliefs and Attitudes of Teachers

A large body of research conducted in the 1980s and early 1990s on the construct of beliefs and attitudes as they relate to teacher behavior and practice indicates the importance of teacher beliefs in relation to classroom practice. In fact, it is suggested that beliefs may be the "most valuable construct to teacher education" (Pajares, 1992). Pajares' (1992) review discussed the legitimacy of examining beliefs and the importance of doing so in order to understand teacher behavior. Critics of beliefs studies say that the concept of belief is too global and mysterious to be a valuable construct in educational research. However, the plethora of studies that use belief as a construct demonstrates viable methods to investigate them.

The essential component to examining beliefs is to define the meaning of belief within the context of the study. The term belief can hold different meanings and implications and can travel under alias terms such as:

Attitudes, values, preconceptions, axioms, opinions, ideology, perceptions, conceptions, conceptual systems, preconceptions, dispositions, implicit theories, explicit theories, personal theories, internal mental processes, action strategies, rules of practice, practical principles, perspectives, repertoires of understanding, and social strategy, to name a few. (Pajares, 1992, p. 309)

This suggests that these construct terms generally hold the same basic meaning (Pajares, 1992). Pajares' premise is that it is the confusion between beliefs and knowledge that cause lack of clarity in the construct of belief.

Nespor (1987) asserted that beliefs hold four characteristics: "existential presumption, alternativity, affective and evaluative loading, and episodic structure" (p. 319). In other words, beliefs are deeply held personal truths, are not affected by persuasion, and operate independently of cognition and knowledge. Beliefs and belief systems develop during childhood and are based on critical experiences and images of experiences that shape the way teachers teach (Goodman, 1988). All teachers hold images in their mind about what good teaching looks like, which are formed from early experiences and are the main inspiration for their own teaching practice. It is these images that may have a greater influence on a teacher's practice than actual knowledge about effective teaching practices (Nespor, 1987). Two teachers with similar knowledge are likely to teach in different ways, and both will believe that their way is superior because of their belief in what good teaching looks like (Pajares, 1992). At times, these beliefs can be "insidious" or even "dysfunctional" because teachers may "emphasize and overvalue affective variables and undervalue cognitive/academic variables" (Pajares, 1992, p. 323). In early childhood classrooms, teachers' guiding images and beliefs are put into practice and become the guiding images of their students.

Further studies on teacher beliefs indicate that guiding images and beliefs are the main reasons change is so difficult for educators (Edmundson, 1990; Lortie, 1975). Most students entering the teaching profession have had positive experiences as students. Teacher pre-service programs are much like the schools they come from, so they are not

necessarily required to expand their thinking or change in order to be successful, and therefore they are not required to redefine their beliefs. They are already familiar with the educational process and what it should look like, and they tend to maintain the status quo because it does not occur to them that they are agents of social change (Pajares, 1992). “Students become teachers unable, and subconsciously unwilling, to affect a system in need of reform” (Pajares, 1992, p. 323). Beliefs about good teaching are formed during childhood and survive to guide the professional practices of many teachers, who in turn tend to retain the status quo rather than advocating for change and social justice (Lortie, 1975). Teachers who engage in self-reflection and are open to examining their beliefs are more likely to be agents for change and advocacy for diversity and social justice.

Challenging teacher beliefs is not an easy task. Beliefs are very difficult to change unless a major experience, or “gestalt shift,” causes a conversion. Such shifts are generally not related to acquisition of knowledge or reason (Nespor, 1987). While knowledge and fact may be intertwined, it is belief that guides day-to-day interaction. Common to many definitions of belief in educational research is the component that “belief is based on evaluation and judgment; knowledge is based on objective fact” (Pajares, 1992, p. 307). It is difficult, however, to separate the two because knowledge is a component of belief. One theorist argues that beliefs have a cognitive component, an affective component, and a behavioral component (Rokeach, 1968). Clusters of beliefs become an attitude or a value, which together form a person’s belief system (Rokeach, 1968). As new knowledge is gained, it is interpreted by a belief system formed by a person’s beliefs, attitudes and values (Pajares, 1992). The difficulty in studying beliefs is

that beliefs and belief systems cannot be observed, but must be inferred by what people say and do (Pajares, 1992).

It is of utmost importance to consider the development of attitudes and beliefs in children and the portrayal of attitudes and beliefs in teachers because of the nature of belief acquisition. The perseverance phenomenon of theory maintenance indicates that early information and observation create beliefs that are highly resistant to change and become the raw material used to create inferences about the world for a lifetime (Nisbett & Ross, 1980). “The earlier a belief is incorporated into the belief structure, the more difficult it is to alter” and new information is processed through the lens of these beliefs (Nisbett & Ross, 1980, p. 317). The perseverance phenomenon holds that long-held beliefs are extremely difficult to change. Even when they can be proven to be untrue with convincing evidence, the mind will justify the belief to perpetuate it (Nisbett & Ross, 1980; Pajares, 1992). Connections between attitudes, beliefs, and values guide one’s life whether they are logical or not (Pajares, 1992). The earlier a belief is developed, the more centralized it becomes. The more centralized a belief, the more influential it is in the development of attitude and behavior.

Based on the abundant evidence that teachers’ beliefs affect their teaching practice and in turn the development of beliefs in children, it is clear that inquiry into teacher beliefs is a justified avenue in educational research. Pajares (1992) suggested that teacher beliefs can be measured if the definition of belief and the belief subconstructs are defined and agreed upon at the beginning of the study. It is important to look for connections among beliefs and their implications for a broader belief structure. In order to make inferences about teacher beliefs it is necessary to include what individuals “say,

intend, and do” based on “verbal expression, predisposition to actions, and teaching behavior” (Pajares, 1992, p. 327). It is difficult to make these inferences based on teacher self-reports or surveys, because what teachers purport to believe on a survey may not be what would be observable or evident in conversation. While surveys can detect some inconsistencies, Pajares suggested that “responses to dilemmas, open-ended interviews, and observation of behavior must be included if richer and more accurate inferences are to be made” (p. 327). A qualitative methodology is appropriate to the study of beliefs. This type of research is important because for teachers to even consider questioning their belief systems, they must have evidence that it is necessary. Even though beliefs are a “messy construct,” the personal beliefs of teachers are a crucial component of their teaching practice and have a powerful influence on their students. In terms of diversity, teachers must understand the importance of examining their own belief systems and attitudes about diversity in order to thoughtfully engage their students in developing their own personal belief systems.

Teacher Beliefs about Diversity in Early Childhood Classrooms

Robinson and Jones Diaz (2006) explored the concept of diversity and difference in early childhood education and the role of early childhood educators on the development of values, beliefs and attitudes young children have about those they consider *other*. Their “research highlights that by the time children enter primary schooling their perceptions of difference largely reflect and perpetuate the dominant racialized, gendered, sexualized classed and body stereotypes and prejudices that prevail in the broader society” (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006, p. 4). Children come to early childhood programs with many perceptions of diversity that they have “taken up from

their families, peers, the media and other social sources and negotiated in the representations of their own identities” (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006, p. 4).

Many theories and schools of thought exist regarding the development of values, beliefs and attitudes. Humanists may argue that all human beings are born with an innate sense of self and the “essence of humanness” that everyone possesses as opposed to the feminist post-structural theory that consciousness develops from the social realm (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006). Underwood (2007) examined how attitudes and beliefs develop through values, or what is considered good and right, generally learned in a social context.

Beliefs are “what is held to be true or real by an individual” and “refer to a person’s subjective judgments concerning some aspect of self or of the world” (Underwood, 2007, p. 2). Beliefs are malleable and are formed through direct experiences, interactions with others, observed phenomenon, or from information from an outside source (Underwood, 2007). They are complicated, multi-dimensional and subject to change based on experience and information. Attitudes reflect emotions or feelings attached to people, places, objects, issues, ideas and the like, and may be positive or negative. Stereotypes can be considered beliefs associated with attitudes, which result in behavior, such as discrimination (Underwood, 2007). The formation of personality based on the constructs of attitude and belief formation is subjective and controversial, but the influence of social interactions and experiences cannot be disputed. Attitudes and beliefs are not formed in a vacuum, but are a product of a multitude of internal and external factors, and can be difficult to measure. For the purposes of educational research

the definition of “attitude and belief” is not a concrete truth, but an agreed-upon definition that must be clearly defined as it is used in the study (Pajares, 1992).

Even though the psychology behind the development of beliefs and attitudes is complicated and subjective, it is an important concept for early childhood educators to consider. To contemplate how one’s attitudes and beliefs came to be and how they may influence behavior may be a task many busy early childhood educators may not place highly on their priority list. However, this analysis is a significant factor in predicting the level of cultural and social competence of teachers in early childhood classrooms (Robinson & Jones Diaz, 2006).

Methodology

Studying the attitudes and beliefs of teachers in various educational contexts is not a new concept. What is surprising is that many researchers select quantitative methods (Kahn, Lindstrom, & Murray, 2014; Silverman, 2010). However, it appears to be a construct that lends itself more readily to qualitative methods, based on the nature of human experience.

Many methodologies have been employed for the purpose of getting to the nature of the development of attitudes and beliefs. Many quantitative studies have employed the use of surveys in order to get at the nature of teachers’ attitudes and beliefs about different types of diversity (Cahill & Adams, 1997; Diamond & Hestenes, 1996; Fehr & Agnello, 2012; Goldberg, Kashy, & Smith, 2012; Henry, 1986; Huang & Diamond, 2009; Lee, Yeung, Tracey, & Barker, 2015; Pohan & Aguilar, 2001; Rheams & Bain, 2005; Sanders & Downer, 2012; Silverman, 2010). While surveys may provide a general perspective about the nature of teacher beliefs, they provide only a cursory view into their

beliefs structures (Pajares, 1992). Inherent difficulties with self-report instruments and belief inventories are:

They cannot encompass the myriad of contexts under which specific beliefs become attitudes and values that give fruition to intention and behavior and that qualitative methods are appropriate in attempting to uncover broader belief structures that influence teacher behavior in context-specific situations. (Pajares, 1992, p. 307)

Qualitative methods are of particular importance in learning about teachers' beliefs (Munby, 1984). While qualitative studies have their own set of limitations and cautions, qualitative methods that allow teachers to express and demonstrate the complexity of their own belief systems and how they may relate to their teaching practice are especially intriguing.

For program leaders in early childhood education to support developmentally appropriate and anti-bias practices in the classroom, they must be aware of the social competency of their teachers. The intent of this study is to examine the attitudes and beliefs about gender constructs held by certified practicing early childhood teachers in North Dakota Department of Public Instruction approved preschool programs in North Dakota. Selected children's literature was used to elicit qualitative responses that assess teachers' beliefs and attitudes regarding gender constructs in order to provide a mechanism for targeting professional learning and growth for teachers and school leaders.

Chapter Summary

Chapter II reviewed the literature relevant to early childhood education and studies conducted to examine religious, ethnic, and gender constructs in early childhood settings. The conceptual framework of Vygotsky's Zones of Proximal Development and the More Knowledgeable Other provided a justification for the importance of studying attitudes and beliefs and the need for self-reflection on personal beliefs that translate into classroom practice.

Chapter III describes the methodology that will be used to employ the use of selected children's literature to elicit responses from early childhood education teachers and provide recommendations to assess teachers' beliefs and attitudes regarding gender constructs and provide recommendations for professional learning and growth.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the attitudes and beliefs about children from diverse groups held by certified practicing early childhood teachers in North Dakota Department of Public Instruction approved preschool programs in North Dakota. Selected children's literature depicting four gender-related constructs were used to elicit responses revealing the attitudes and beliefs of early childhood professionals. As the population of North Dakota increases, so has its ethnic diversity as indicated by nationwide trends. According to Derman-Sparks et al. (2015): "The diversity among children attending early childhood programs continues to increase, as a reflection of the nation's changing demographic realities. The children's diverse ethnicities, cultures, religions, languages and family structures bring both vibrancy and complexity to our communities" (p. 9). Derman-Sparks et al. urged educators to view diversity as an opportunity to promote anti-bias early childhood programs, rather than a problem to be dealt with. While an increase in population diversity is often cited as a rationale for examining diversity topics in early childhood education, Hunter et al. (2015) presented an interesting perspective on "embedding interculturalization" not as "an add-on because our students are changing but rather a necessity because intercultural navigation is precisely what teaching is" (pp. 83-84). This chapter will identify the research questions, describe the participants in the study, provide a description and rationale for the methodology,

describe methods for data collection and analysis, and provide an explanation of validation techniques.

Research Questions

1. What are the attitudes and beliefs about gender held by teachers in early childhood classrooms in North Dakota?
2. What are the implications for school leaders regarding the provision of resources and professional development for teachers regarding gender issues?

Participants

Prior to the initiation of this research project, permission was obtained from the University of North Dakota Internal Review Board. A copy of the approval letter can be found in Appendix A. Participants in the study were certified early childhood educators working in NDDPI approved early childhood settings in North Dakota. A list of certified teachers in approved pre-kindergarten programs was obtained from the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction and used with permission from the Department. Information requested was name, location of the program, mailing address, telephone number, and email address. A copy of the open records request approval letter from the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction is included in Appendix A. A total of 264 names were listed.

The 264 participants were grouped based on the quadrant of North Dakota where they taught. Outliers of the Fargo and the Bakken areas were eliminated and smaller rural schools were prioritized. The first batch of invitations to participate was sent to teachers in the northeast quadrant. A total of 13 invitations were sent generating 3 participants who were interviewed. The second batch of 16 invitations was sent to teachers in the

south-central area of the state. This batch generated 3 participants who were interviewed. The third batch was sent to the west central area and no responses were received. The fourth batch of invitations was sent to teachers in the north central area of the state and 2 participants replied and were subsequently interviewed.

First contact was made with all potential participants via email sent to the address listed for each potential participant. The email explained the nature of the study, the expectations of the participants, provisions for consent, the researcher's contact information, and an explanation of privacy precautions. An option to contact the researcher directly for further information was also provided. After seven days, a follow-up email was sent to all potential participants with a re-statement of the information provided in the first email. A sample of the initial email and follow-up email are included in Appendix F.

A total of eight participants participated in intensive interviews with the researcher. The interviews were conducted at the location of the participant's choice, in most cases their early childhood classroom. The theoretical framework of the interviews was based on the work of Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory. An informed consent form was reviewed by the researchers and signed by each participant prior to the start of the interview. A copy was presented to the participant. The informed consent form may be viewed in Appendix B.

Adaptions of Constructivist Grounded Theory

Since its inception, grounded theory has been debated as researchers continued to re-conceptualize the methodology and its epistemology and ontology. Three general camps of grounded theory have taken shape: classic, Straussian, and constructivist

grounded theory (Kenny & Fourie, 2015). These three traditions have several points of convergence and divergence.

Original, or classic grounded theory was developed by Glaser and Strauss in 1967 while researching death and dying in seriously ill patients in hospital settings (Charmaz, 2014). Prior to their development of this theory, most research conducted was quantitative and represented “mid-century positivistic conceptions of scientific method and knowledge stressed objectivity, generality, replication of research, and falsification of competing hypotheses and theories” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 6). Glaser and Strauss essentially “legitimized qualitative research as a credible—and rigorous—methodological approach in its own right rather than simply as a precursor for developing quantitative instruments” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 8). Their approach entails stages of coding, or labeling of data, and constant comparison of codes to codes, codes to categories, categories to categories, and discovering an emerging grounded theory that unfolds through the process of theoretical sampling to the point of saturation (Kenny & Fourie, 2015). Memo writing is used to define and analyze codes and reflect on the data (Charmaz, 2011). Strauss, however, differed somewhat in his conception of grounded theory and along with Juliet Corbin “refined and edited specific aspects of the original (classic) GT” (Kenny & Fourie, 2015, p. 1270). The methodology that emerged is referred to as Straussian grounded theory.

The main divergence between classic and Straussian grounded theory lies in the coding procedures. In classic GT, a grounded theory is discovered through three levels of coding. Strauss and Corbin’s method involves four levels of coding that result in the creation of a grounded theory rather than the discovery of one (Kenny & Fourie, 2015).

While criticized by some for being overly rigid and complicated, Strauss and Corbin (1990) argued that the precise structure was necessary for eliminating researcher prejudices, facilitating systematic analysis, and getting to the “approximate reality” represented by the data. After Strauss’s death in 1996, Corbin continued her work and relaxed the coding formula and moved GT towards a more flexible methodology, specifically constructivist grounded theory (Kenny & Fourie, 2015).

In the early 1990s, Charmaz, who studied under Glaser and Strauss, moved away from the positivism of earlier grounded theory methodology and moved toward a more open-ended approach and coined the term constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2011). Charmaz (2011) rejected rigid coding procedures and proposed that a more creative and fluid method of coding was necessary (Kenny & Fourie, 2015). While Strauss and Corbin’s methods attempted to eliminate researcher perception and bias, Charmaz (2011) embraced researcher standpoints as an integral influence on the data. While the basic tenets of classic grounded theory such as constant comparison, memo writing, and theoretical sampling to the point of saturation are present, the constructivist model reverts to the two-stage model of Glaser and Strauss and represents a more creative and “imaginative engagement with the data” (Kenny & Fourie, 2015, p. 1280). A grounded theory is constructed through initial and then refocused coding based on data collected during intensive interviews that include the researcher’s constructions (Kenny & Fourie, 2015). According to Charmaz (2014), “the endpoint of your journey emerges from where you start, where you go, and with whom you interact, what you see and hear, and how you learn and think. In short, the finished work is a construction—yours” (p. xiv).

The differences between constructivist, Straussian, and classic grounded theory are not only procedural but philosophical as well. Charmaz's (2014) constructivist approach to research differs in that social reality is seen as a relative construction based on many facets, and the research methods are described as constructed rather than discovered and are flexible and responsive to social construction.

The constructivist approach perspective shreds notions of a neutral observer and value-free expert. Not only does that mean that researchers must examine rather than erase how their privileges and preconceptions may shape the analysis, but it also means that their values shape the very facts that they can identify. (Charmaz, 2014, p. 13)

This methodology fits well with the social constructivist views of Lev Vygotsky and supports the theoretical framework of the study, in that views of the world are constructed through social interaction.

Philosophically, the constructivist paradigm is based on the relative reality and mental constructions learned through social interactions and experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). This study is interested in early childhood teachers' attitudes and beliefs about diversity and their construction. Grounded theory provides a method for conducting the study and a lens through which to analyze the data. "Simply stated, grounded theory methods consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories from the data themselves" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 1). Amidst such debate, however, it is important to note that a preoccupation with the ontological and epistemological issues of grounded theory may distract from the simplicity of its purpose: to generate a theory from the data that fits, works and is

relevant within the arena from which it was derived (Breckenridge, Jones, Elliot, & Nicol, 2012). Methodologies consistent with the constructivist paradigm are hermeneutical and dialectical, meaning that they are based on interpreting text and language (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

The data generated were analyzed through a coding procedure of “at least two stages” as proposed by Charmaz (Kenny & Fourie, 2015). Through constant comparison, memo writing, and theoretical sampling to the point of saturation, the researcher constructed a conceptual interpretation of the attitudes and beliefs of early childhood educators in North Dakota.

The focus of this study is the attitudes and beliefs of early childhood teachers regarding the gender constructs of gender roles, same sex parents, gender nonconformity and transgender. The arena of participants is limited to early childhood educators in North Dakota. Constructing a grounded theory based on the data collected would represent a substantive theory rather than a formal, or all-inclusive theory and a constructed interpretation including the researchers’ constructions as they relate to the research process, rather than “accurate renderings” of the world (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Data were collected during face-to-face interviews with the researchers. Selected children’s picture books were used to facilitate discussion about the gender constructs represented.

Book Selection, Data Collection, and Analysis

The choice to use children’s literature as a method for eliciting candid response is closely related to the use of vignettes, or stories, in qualitative research in that the pictures and scenarios are able to evoke feelings and elicit candid responses (Barter &

Renold, 2000) . The use of vignettes and stories in qualitative research stems from the field of sociology. A 1999 Social Research Update from the University of Surrey discusses the use of vignettes and stories in social research (Barter & Renold, 1999). In their distillation of the research on the use of vignettes and stories in social research, Barter and Renold (1999) stated that “vignettes and stories provide a valuable technique for exploring people’s perceptions, beliefs and meanings about specific situations, and are especially useful for sensitive areas of inquiry that may not be readily accessible through other means” (p. 5). The use of vignettes and stories allows participants to respond to specific “short stories about hypothetical characters in specified circumstances, to whose situation the interviewee is incited to respond” (Finch, 1987, p. 105). For participants, vignettes and stories can be used as an icebreaker and can be a less personal method for eliciting responses about topics they may be less comfortable responding to if discussing their own personal situations (Barter & Renold, 1999). Vignettes and stories have also been employed alongside other techniques to complement other methods (Hughes, 1998). Principles important to the use of vignettes and stories are: the story must appear “realistic and plausible” and contain enough information for the participants to understand the context, but not so much information that it leads the response (Barter & Renold, 1999).

In order to explore the attitudes and beliefs about gender among early childhood educators in North Dakota, four books depicting four different gender issues were selected as conversation starters for the study. In the initial topic proposal, it was intended that empirical vignettes would be used as stimulus material. However, the advice of the committee was to use videos depicting classroom situations involving gender diversity.

Acquiring such videos proved to be problematic due to copyright constraints and a lack of suitable material. Because a significant body of research indicated that children's books could be effective tools for teachers with their students, a decision was made to utilize children's books as the stimulus material. The committee agreed with this decision. The books were selected based on the issues depicted, the intended age of the audience, and reviews of other teachers. Based on the literature regarding gender, four constructs emerged including gender roles, gender and sexual diversity in families, gender non-conformity and transgender. The topics of the books were intended to address gender issues ranging from low to high complexity. The four books selected for the study were:

1. Roger, M-S., & Sol, A. (2014). *Of Course They Do!: Boys and Girls Can Do Anything*. Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge.
2. Harris, R. H. (2012). *Who's in My Family? All About Our Families*. China: Candlewick Press.
3. Hoffman, S., & Hoffman, I. (2014). *Jacob's New Dress*. China: Albert Whitman & Company.
4. Herthel, J., & Jennings, J. (2014). *I am Jazz*. New York, NY: Penguin Group.

Book 1 was entitled *Of Course They Do!: Boys and Girls Can Do Anything* (Rogers & Sol, 2014). The book, according to the Amazon.com description:

Using sparse text and large, bright photographs, the book debunks commonly-held gender-myths. Misconceptions are stated matter-of-factly (Boys don't cook.), but when the page is turned, each myth is proven false with playful language (Are you sure?) and a contradictory photo (a male professional chef). This jacketless

book is perfect for young readers as well as read-alouds and will generate discussions about gender-based assumptions around play and work.

(Amazon.com, n.d.-a)

Book 2 was entitled *Who's in My Family?* (Harris, 2012) a New York Times best seller in preschool books. The book, according to the Amazon.com description:

Accessible, humorous, and full of charming illustrations depicting families of many configurations, this engaging story interweaves conversations between the siblings and a matter-of-fact text, making it clear to every child that whoever makes up your family, it is perfectly normal—and totally wonderful.

(Amazon.com, n.d.-b)

The illustrations and text depict many different types of families: nuclear, single parent, grandparent, racially mixed and same sex parents, all enjoying a day at the zoo.

The third stimulus book was entitled *Jacob's New Dress* (Hoffman & Hoffman, 2014) and the book jacket description reads in part:

Jacob loves playing dress-up, when he can be anything he wants to be—a pirate, a bird, a fireman! But he also wants to be himself and wear his favorite thing . . . a dress! Now Jacob has a new dress that he made himself and what he wants most of all is to wear it to school. Will Mom and Dad let him? (Hoffman & Jacket, 2014, book jacket)

The book tells Jacob's story and depicts the angles of parental reactions, peer teasing, and how the classroom teacher addressed the issue with her class. In the end, Jacob wears the dress as kind of protective armor against the bullies. Sarah and Ian Hoffman wrote the book for their son Sam who they describe as gender nonconforming,

“a pink boy—the male equivalent of a tomboy” as a means of providing support for him and other gender nonconforming children (Hoffman & Hoffman, 2014, p. 30).

The book selection for the transgender construct was entitled *I Am Jazz* written by Jennings and Herthel (2014). The book jacket description reads:

From the time she was two-years-old, Jazz knew that she had a girl’s brain in a boy’s body. She loved pink and dressing up as a mermaid and didn’t feel like herself in boy’s clothing. This confused her family, until they took her to a doctor who diagnosed Jazz as transgender and explained that she was born this way.

Jazz’s story is based on her real-life experience and she tells it in a simple clear way that will be appreciated by picture book readers, their parents and teachers.

(Herthel & Jennings, 2014, book jacket)

Jazz Jennings is currently 16-years-old and is an LGBTQ rights activist, author, and television personality.

An interesting caveat to the use of vignettes and stories is that participants may initially provide what they feel is a socially acceptable response, but may reveal how they truly feel after further probing regarding the story (Barter & Renold, 1999). It is anticipated that the incorporation of children’s stories into the study design will provide an unprecedented quality of data regarding the beliefs of early childhood educators in North Dakota.

Data Collection

Data for this study were collected through a series of 8 face-to-face interviews. The children’s books were used as conversation starters to lead to discussions and stories from the participants related to their attitudes, beliefs and experiences related to gender

issues in their early childhood classrooms. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim by the researcher. An interview protocol was used as a guide; however, it was the intent of the researcher to keep the interviews as open-ended as possible in order to discover the attitudes, beliefs and practices of early childhood teachers. A sample of the interview protocol used in this study is included in Appendix C.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed through a series of coding activities. The first stage of coding began with word-for-word transcription of each interview by the researcher. The second stage of coding was a line-by-line analysis of the data and the generation of *in vivo* codes that were chunks of text in the participants' own words. The next phase of coding was to generate a list of initial codes that depicted the meaning of the statements based on the researcher's perception. A total of 88 initial codes were generated. The next phase of coding was axial, or secondary, coding in order to discover patterns in the initial codes. From the secondary codes, further analysis produced a series of categories to which all previous levels of coding could be applied. The final phase of coding was to review all of the data again in order to generate potential theories from the data. Throughout the analysis, the researcher recorded theoretical cues that emerged and recorded gerunds, or the noun form of verbs, in order to discover initial social and psychological process present in the data (Russell, 2014).

Special attention was paid to the "language that the participants use by including *in vivo* codes, to help preserve the participants' meanings of their views and actions in the coding itself" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 134). This is the initial or open coding that is the first stage in constructivist grounded theory development (Kenny & Fourie, 2015).

As the data emerged, the method required constant comparison of data to data, codes to data, codes to categories, categories to categories and so on until theoretical saturation occurred, or no new codes emerged. The researcher incorporated the use of memo writing in order to define and sort codes. Data collected was maintained in a secure manner and kept separate from any identifying information. Microsoft Excel was utilized to record, sort and analyze the data and codes. The following section will discuss the methods of validation.

Validation

One of the differences between constructivist grounded theory and Straussian or classic grounded theory lies in the relevance of the researcher's perspective in that data interpretation is considered to be subjective, based on the researcher's perspective rather than objective, and easily replicated (Charmaz, 2014). The process of conducting constructivist grounded theory research consists of extensive theoretical sampling, and retesting theories and revisiting the data constantly (Charmaz, 2014). As theories emerge from the data, continued theoretical sampling may take place. Validity is subjective and theories are revisited to the point of saturation by reviewing data, and obtaining clarification of data from follow-up interviews with participants to check for understanding.

Inter-rater reliability checks for reliability and validity are used in many methods of qualitative and quantitative research as a form of triangulation of data (Armstrong, Gosling, Weinman, & Martaeu, 1997). However, in constructivist grounded theory, using inter-rater reliability checks may confirm diversity of researcher perspective, or provide a method for negotiating agreements and disagreements in the interpretation of the data

(Armstrong et al., 1997). A form of inter-rater reliability was also utilized, by procuring one or more qualitative researchers to review codes and “discuss and negotiate agreements and disagreements” about coding in a process described as peer-debriefing (Armstrong et al., 1997, p. 1). This study used two peer-debriefers to review the data and emergent codes and themes. On two separate occasions the researcher met with three separate colleagues and reviewed the coding process. Two reviewers were doctoral students and one was a professor. One peer review was conducted early on in the coding process and consisted of the peer review of in vivo codes in order to determine if the initial codes selected by the researcher were in fact valid. The results of the peer review indicated that there was a consensus between peers on the assignment of initial codes. The second peer review occurred approximately 4 weeks later via email. In this instance, initial and secondary codes were shared and reviewed by the peers who indicated what they viewed as the possible categories depicted. There was overall consensus that correlated with the categories assigned by the researcher.

Summary

Chapter III reviewed the research questions, described the participants in the study, provided a description and rationale for the methods and methodology for the study, described methods for data collection and analysis, described problems to overcome, and provided an explanation of validation, rationale and methods.

Chapter IV will present a summary of the data collected and provide a description of the themes and codes emergent from the data. The introduction will discuss the context of the interviews and the background of the researcher and participants. Each gender construct will be discussed and the data in the form of in vivo codes will be presented.

Samples of the coding structure utilized will be presented as well as the structure of the axial coding. A pivot table will depict the codes that emerged from the data collected.

Chapter V will provide a summary and discussion of the results of the study. Each construct area will be summarized in relation to the theoretical and conceptual frameworks. Chapter V will also discuss conclusions drawn from the study, implications for further research and recommendations for practice and leadership.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Chapter IV will report the results of the study. The introduction will discuss the context of the interviews and the background of the researcher and participants. Each gender construct will be discussed and the data in the form of in vivo codes will be presented. Samples of the coding structure utilized will be presented, as well as the structure of the axial coding. A pivot table will depict the codes that emerged from the data collected.

Introduction and Demographics

An important point to keep in mind is the demographics of early childhood teachers in North Dakota. Most recent statistics from the United States Census Bureau (n.d.) indicated that of the current North Dakota population of 739, 482 the ethnicity is nearly 90% white only. Of the remaining 10%, half are classified as Native American, with 3% Latino or Hispanic, 2% Asian, and 1% mixed race. Children under 5 years of age make up approximately 6.9% of the population, or 51,025 children. In addition, North Dakota is politically conservative, and 80% identify as Christian based on the Gallup poll. Until the June 2015 Supreme Court ruling, same sex marriages were banned in North Dakota (CNN Library, 2015).

Having been an educator for nearly 30 years, and having met hundreds of the state's teachers, I can testify that we are a highly homogeneous group. Of the eight early

childhood teachers selected for this study, seven of them were white, female, middle class, heterosexual, Christian-raised women who were either born and raised in North Dakota or have lived here for the majority of their lives. The background of the researcher is similar. One participant was Native American, but also expressed having lived in North Dakota for most of her life. She was raised on a reservation, being the oldest of a large family. The sample excluded the outliers of the Bakken and Fargo areas and focused on the larger majority section of the state. A more detailed explanation of the selection process is included in Chapter III.

While every participant expressed having an attitude of open-mindedness and anti-bias, the simple demographics of our state and the level of exposure to diversity directly influence our perception. Therefore, the results, while extremely relevant to a large portion of our state, cannot be generalized to other states or the eastern and northwestern borders of North Dakota. However, this demographic represents the majority of North Dakota early childhood teachers over the largest geographical area. It is also the demographic that has experienced the least amount of exposure to diversity in its many forms.

Data Collection

Data were collected in the form of face-to-face interviews. Each interview was conducted in the early childhood classroom of the participant, with the exception of one which was conducted in the participant's home, and each interview was recorded in its entirety. All participants indicated serving three- to five-year-old children in a classroom setting. Three of the classrooms were strictly for children with special needs, while the others were mixed. A detailed explanation of the selection process is given in Chapter III.

Seven of the classroom student demographics were mostly Caucasian, and one was mostly Native American.

During the interviews, each of the stimulus books was presented to the participants one at a time in the same order for each interview. The first topic was gender roles, the second was diverse families and same sex parents, the third was gender nonconformity, and the final topic was transgender. The participants were given several minutes, or as long as necessary, to flip through the books before being asked a series of open-ended questions. The researcher engaged the participants and took mental notes that later became memos. The researcher attempted to take memos and notes during the first of the interviews, but this seemed to make the participants slightly uncomfortable, as they seemed to want to peek at what was being written. After the initial interview, very few notes were written down during the subsequent interviews. Immediately after the interviews the researcher used voice recording to capture memos and other impressions about the environment, demeanor, body language, and unspoken nuances observed during the interview. These voice notes were later transcribed and used as memos related to the interview data. Each interview was then transcribed word for word by the researcher.

Data Analysis

Using the written transcripts, memos, and other observational data, each interview was read in its entirety and initial codes emerged in the form of in vivo codes, meaning they were taken directly from the text of the interviews. A spreadsheet was developed using Microsoft Excel and the initial codes were placed in column A. Initial codes, based on the in vivo codes, were placed in Column B. Once the majority of interviews were

initially coded, the researcher began forming patterns based on the initial codes and interview data. The emergent patterns became the axial codes, or secondary codes, and were recorded in the Column C of the spreadsheet. Memos and notes were recorded in Column D. Following several rounds of coding and re-coding the data reached the point of saturation and no new codes emerged. This process of breaking down and putting together the data continued for each interview. Once the coding lists, as depicted in the pivot table, were completed, possible categories were listed in Column E. A sample of the spreadsheet is included in Appendix E.

The categories were homogenized to encompass all four constructs addressed, and while there were a few common categories, it was determined prudent to keep each construct separate for the purpose of reporting the data. The reason for this was that the language used and the application of the participants' attitudes and beliefs changed significantly based on the construct of the topic. For example, the category of political correctness was evident in each construct; however, the statements made about political correctness when discussing gender roles were much lighter in tone and body language than comments about political correctness when discussing the transgender construct. For this reason, data for each construct are reported separately. Further explanation of the coding process is included in Chapter III.

Construct 1: Gender Roles and Stereotypes

The first gender construct explored in this study is that of gender roles and gender stereotypes. The stimulus book for this section of the interviews was *Of Course They Do!: Boys and Girls Can Do Anything* (Roger & Sol, 2014).

Using sparse text and large, bright photographs, the book debunks commonly-held gender-myths. Misconceptions are stated matter-of-factly (Boys don't cook.), but when the page is turned, each myth is proven false with playful language (Are you sure?) and a contradictory photo (a male professional chef). This jacketless book is perfect for young readers as well as read-alouds and will generate discussions about gender-based assumptions around play and work.

(Amazon.com, n.d.-a)

The following figure (Figure 2) exemplifies the coding procedure for this gender construct:

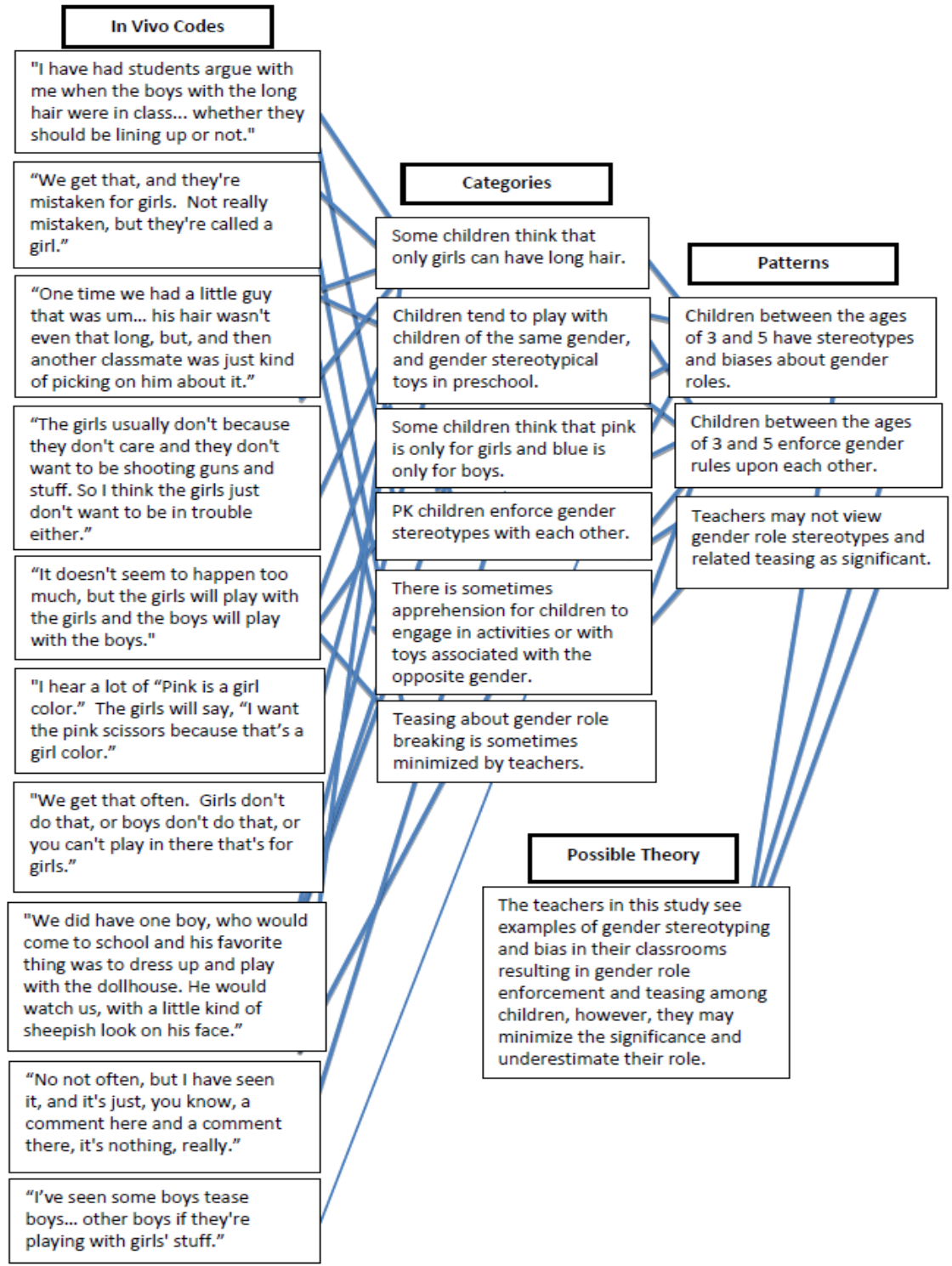


Figure 2. Coding Example Diagram Construct 1: Gender Roles

Without exception, each respondent had positive comments about this selection and stated that they would use such a book in their early childhood classroom without hesitation. In addition, each teacher indicated that they felt that they promoted gender equality in their classroom and did not support or promote any type of gender preference, bias or stereotyping. Four of the veteran teachers indicated that they have noticed a change in this area in that they noticed children demonstrating stricter adherence to traditional gender roles toward each other 15 to 20 years ago, as opposed to currently.

- I taught many years . . . when I first taught it was basically like that... girls' and boys' things were different.
- You know, no . . . maybe years past, but in the past few, no. We have, if we have our cars and tracks out we have just as many little girls playing with those cars and tracks, and our boys play with our doll and Doc McStuffins.
- I'm finding that they play together now more.

Each of the respondents also indicated that they felt that gender stereotyping was prevalent among children in their classrooms.

- I've seen some boys tease boys . . . other boys if they're playing with girls' stuff.
- I have noticed gender stereotyping.
- We get that often. Girls don't do that, or boys don't do that, or you can't play in there that's for girls, or, you know you're wearing a girl color, or that's a boy color, and I'm like . . . Oh my gosh! You've already got that in your brain!

Each respondent discussed at length the influence of parents and the home as the most influential factor regarding children's perceptions of gender roles. The aspects of the home environment cited most often included exposure, culture, parental roles in the home and the influence of siblings. Speculation about increases in diversity in the current generation of parents was also expressed.

- Maybe things they've been told before so things are going to stick in their head.
- Maybe it's the way they were taught at home too.
- I think that this generation of parents, the last couple generations of parents, has been better about, 'If you want to play with dolls, go ahead and play with dolls. If you want to take dance, go ahead and take dance.' And not really putting a lot of limits on their kids.

Parental roles in the home are another aspect of exposure that influences the development of gender constructs in young children. In fact, by age two, children demonstrate an awareness of sex role differences between their parents (Weinraub, Clemens, Sachloff, Ethridge, Gracely, & Myers, 1984). Children whose parents adopt an androgynous approach to gender role orientation tend to develop higher levels of self-worth (Witt, 1997). It is also true that early exposure to gender roles, via parental roles, influences the development of attitudes and beliefs about gender (Goble, Martin, Hanish, & Fabes, 2012; Martin, 2013). Children from families of same gender parents, or parents where the mother works outside the home and the father is in a caregiving role, engage in less gender stereotyping than children from traditional families (Martin, 2013). Data

analysis from the study corroborate earlier findings that show early exposure, even prior to age three, influences the development of gender constructs in young children.

- And they learn how they are going to feel about something by how the loved ones in their lives feel about something.
- I like how they talk about different types of families, because in the school district they are living with many different types of people . . . maybe their mom, maybe their dad, a lot of extended family, maybe their aunts and uncles their grandparents, there's a lot of people usually, and they're very transient so they might move from house to house a lot.
- I think it's just so normal now. For all of us, like it's so normal to see two ladies together with the kids, or two gentlemen with their kids, and most people have a gay friend, so the kids are exposed to people who are gay all the time. I don't think it's a big issue, that's why it doesn't faze them anymore.

The influence of culture is another aspect of exposure that begins affecting gender construct development at birth (Frable, 1997). In this study, six of the respondents work in school districts where the majority population is white middle class. Two of the respondents work in reservation schools where the majority population is Native American. One prominent finding is related to the hair length of boys. Teachers in white schools reported frequent instances where boys indicated that long hair is for girls and short hair means boy. In most Native American cultures, including the tribes of North Dakota, a much greater significance is placed on hair and has little to do with gender (Levenson, 2016).

- Kids think that the boys with the long hair are girls.

- We get that, and they're mistaken for girls. Not really mistaken, but they're called a girl. You know, she's doing this or she's doing that.
- Some, especially with the native culture. Hair is really important in their culture, and so they have long hair.
- I've had, we've had some boys say, 'you need a haircut' to another little boy, but um yeah, that's probably about it and I would say that comes from home, not something that he would have ever come up with on his own.

Each of the teachers interviewed demonstrated some level of awareness of the need to be sensitive to gender diversity and cultural issues, usually in the form of questioning whether their statements would be construed as politically correct. This may be related to a phenomenon frequently seen in the process of qualitative interviews in that the interviewee may see the researcher as the person in power, and may be concerned about saying the right things (Seidman, 2006). Or, perhaps it speaks to the desire to be politically correct. Interestingly, some of the instances of this type of discourse seemed to be related to a kind of verbal backtracking when the respondent reflected on how their statements might have sounded.

- I believe 'those people.' I shouldn't even talk like that, they're born like that.
- That sounded horrible!
- He was a homo . . . homo, is that the word they don't use... gay, how come I said that word.
- Then there are lesbians. Like, most lesbians dress manly, you know, anyway . . . Well not really! I guess not really.

Paradoxically, the respondents generally indicated that they felt they were very open-minded and accepting. While a major theme across interviews was the belief that they themselves were very open-minded, each expressed that they felt that perhaps others were not as open-minded as them, including other teachers and parents of the students in their classes. Where does this paradox originate? If we consider Charmaz's (2014) theories, language has a great deal of significance. Language reflects views and values, not only of our participants, but us as researchers. In paying attention to the language, as well as the body language of the participants, it appears that some conflict is evident in how open we are and how open we should be.

- Well, I'm fine with it!
- I'm not saying that there's anything wrong with it!
- I am pretty open.
- Cuz I'm really an open-minded person who has, like I said, I know a lot of gay people, but that is hard when you're talking about little kids versus adults.
- I think teachers have more open minds when it comes to different things, and just the caring part of it. I think most teachers that would handle that pretty good. I mean, you'd have some of those older teachers that might . . . but that's just something they have to deal with.
- I personally believe that people are born that way so that's what I talk to my kids about, so all of these types of things I would have no problem talking about it in the early childhood classroom, but I can see where other teachers do not have those same beliefs, and wouldn't be open about that.

A great deal of data regarding the participants' attitudes and beliefs about gender roles and stereotypes also presented itself. The most common thread is similar to the research of (Cahill & Adams, 1997) and reveals the attitude of "boys will be boys and girls will be girls." While most believe that traditional gender role expectations have decreased over the years, much of the language used shows that traditional gender norms continue to prevail. The language used here indicates a belief among the teachers as to what are "boys' things" and what are "girls' things."

- I mean usually, the boys will go in the typically boy areas and the girls will go in the typically girl areas, but once in a while, I'll get a comment like that.
- I think it's more so that they don't want to be in trouble . . . because we have no guns and we don't play with toy guns . . . and the girls are a little bit better at following the rules than the boys.
- I would say that you will get some cases where boys only choose boy things and girls only choose girl things. It doesn't seem to happen too much, but the girls will play with the girls and the boys will play with the boys.

If asked directly whether they perpetuate gender role stereotypes and bias in their classroom, the answer would likely be an unequivocal "no;" however, stories of some of the practices used by teachers on a daily basis may influence gendered behavior. The participants report that the students in their classrooms are very aware of whether they are a boy or a girl and this is reinforced by certain practices such as having the boys line up in one area and the girls in another. Materials presented to young children can also promote gender stereotypes. One teacher's comment regarding stickers is related to this.

- The girls go to the princess stickers and the boys will go to the superhero stickers.

Another area of the gender construct is the colors pink and blue. Children in many early childhood classrooms can be very insistent that blue is for boys and pink is for girls. From birth this color construct is present. Babies' first introduction to clothing is generally a pink or blue colored blanket they are wrapped in as newborns. Color selection in nursery colors, toys, clothing, and birthday cakes generally follow suit. In early childhood classrooms, there are consequences for not following the binary color system.

- Well it is like that, the colors pink and blue. Boys can't have pink, and like when we ask favorite colors it's always pink and the blue.
- Last week they were talking about the colors pink and that boys shouldn't wear pink. And then I told them that real men wear pink and they kind of looked at each other, like, so it's okay for me to wear pink? And I was like why not? Who says that's a girl color . . . and half of my girls love blue . . . and I'm like they can't not like that color because they're a girl, so . . . so we talk about it.
- We get that often. Girls don't do that, or boys don't do that, or you can't play in there that's for girls, or you know you're wearing a girl color or that's a boy color, and I'm like 'Oh my gosh! You've already got that in your brain!'
- I hear a lot of 'Pink is a girl color.' And so, if there is a pink scissors, they (boys) don't want the pink scissors, or the girls will say, 'I want the pink scissors because that's a girl color.'

This led to questions about methods teachers use to address gender bias and stereotyping in their classrooms. Each stated that they really liked the stimulus book and would use such a book in their classroom to facilitate discussion about gender roles. This title was by far the most popular of the four book selections for each of the participants.

- Yeah! I would use this, definitely! I like it! Can I have it?
- I would, I would use it. In fact, I was going to write it down.

Another method teachers said they used to address gender roles was discussion. Some seemed to have very thoughtful discussions with their students, mainly when situations arose in the classroom that involved teasing or what they perceived as over-enforcement of gender roles between peers. For most, these discussions tended to be held as a response to behaviors in the classrooms, rather than proactively presented.

- It's just they can do that, a girl can be a doctor, cuz it's been asked . . . a girl can be a doctor, a girl can be president, a girl can be anything she wants and so can you, you know. We've had discussions about it with the kids because it has been brought up about maybe different . . . like 'you can't be a doctor' but it's like anybody can be a doctor. You know, that has come up a couple times.
- It makes me kind of sad that we have to have a book that points out the fact that really if you have a dream, you can push to achieve it, whether you are a boy or a girl.
- If I think it's important enough, and we're doing something else, I will stop and we will address it. Have a little talk about it, and then they're satisfied with it, you know, because they will ask.

Gender roles in young children are most evident through the observation of their play. Differences have been observed in studies where young children would change the nature of their play, depending on who was present or if they were alone (Goble et al., 2012). Gender-typed toy preferences can be seen in children as young as 12 to 24 months. Teachers interviewed for this study were well aware of gender roles and gender-typed play activities in their classroom, but did not seem to view this as problematic, unless there was some sort of teasing involved. Furthermore, responses indicate that peer consequences are stronger for boys who step outside of gender-role norms than for girls. This is evident in other studies related to gender roles (Frable, 1997; Martin, 2013; Robinson & Davies, 2007). This also appears to be noticed more by early childhood teachers interviewed for this study.

- Are boys parented differently? To be tougher? Do they notice it more? Do boys just . . . I don't know what that is. But I do get it more from the boys.
- My grandson (chuckle) because, we don't know, you know, he's in between. He started out very young liking long hair. He liked dolls, he still kind of does play with dolls, my other grandson looked like 'What are you doing?' and anyway he kept playing and they started playing together, but he still prefers girl things, like long hair, and his doll.
- He wanted a princess Halloween outfit last year, but I don't think they went that way with him. They found something else to take the place of it.
- If girls play in there, nobody ever comments on it. The one that you consider the more masculine, the blocks and cars and trucks center, the girls go and play in there quite often and nobody says anything about it.

- The tougher times seem to come from the boys in the classroom. If there is a boy who is playing in the kitchen a lot, it is kind of like, ‘Well that’s where the girls play.’ Or ‘That’s a girl color.’ Or ‘That’s a girl toy.’ I don’t hear a lot of the girls saying those things.
- No not often, but I have seen it, and it’s just, you know, a comment here and a comment there, . . . it’s nothing, really . . .

The attitudes and beliefs of these early childhood teachers in North Dakota appear to be quite consistent with the empirical data of earlier work. Gender studies and research into teachers’ attitudes and beliefs were prominent in the 1980s and 1990s (Fagot, 1984; Frable, 1997; Honig, 1983; Witt, 1997), precipitated by the feminist movement in the 1960s (Friedman, 1963) and the *Presidential Commission on the Status of Women (1961)*. It is evident that attitudes and beliefs about gender roles have changed significantly over the past 50 years, which has changed social norms. What was not acceptable in the past is in some cases now, the new normal. One teacher commented that she remembered not being allowed to wear pants to school. In today’s classrooms styles of dress run a huge gamut. While there have always been sociological gender roles and norms, there have always been some who have challenged them. None of the participants spoke of anti-biased education or gender-neutral concepts, and seemed content with the status quo in their classrooms. They each spoke of teasing amongst the children, especially with boys, and how they responded. The discussions spoke to the teasing and in some case gender stereotypes were talked about in response to a behavioral situation. After some reflection, the majority commented that they hadn’t really given it much thought, but now feel they should, and would use a book such as *Of Course They Can* without hesitation in their

classrooms. After a small amount of self-reflection, most seemed to come to a realization that maybe this should be addressed as part of the curriculum and expressed interest in professional development.

Construct 2: Diversity in Families

The second book selection was entitled *Who's in My Family* (Harris, 2012), a New York Times best seller in preschool books. The book, according to the Amazon.com description:

Accessible, humorous, and full of charming illustrations depicting families of many configurations, this engaging story interweaves conversations between the siblings and a matter-of-fact text, making it clear to every child that whoever makes up your family, it is perfectly normal—and totally wonderful

(Amazon.com, n.d.-b).

The illustrations and text depict many different types of families: nuclear, single parent, grandparent, racially mixed and same sex parents, all enjoying a day at the zoo.

The following figure (Figure 3) exemplifies the coding procedure for this gender construct:

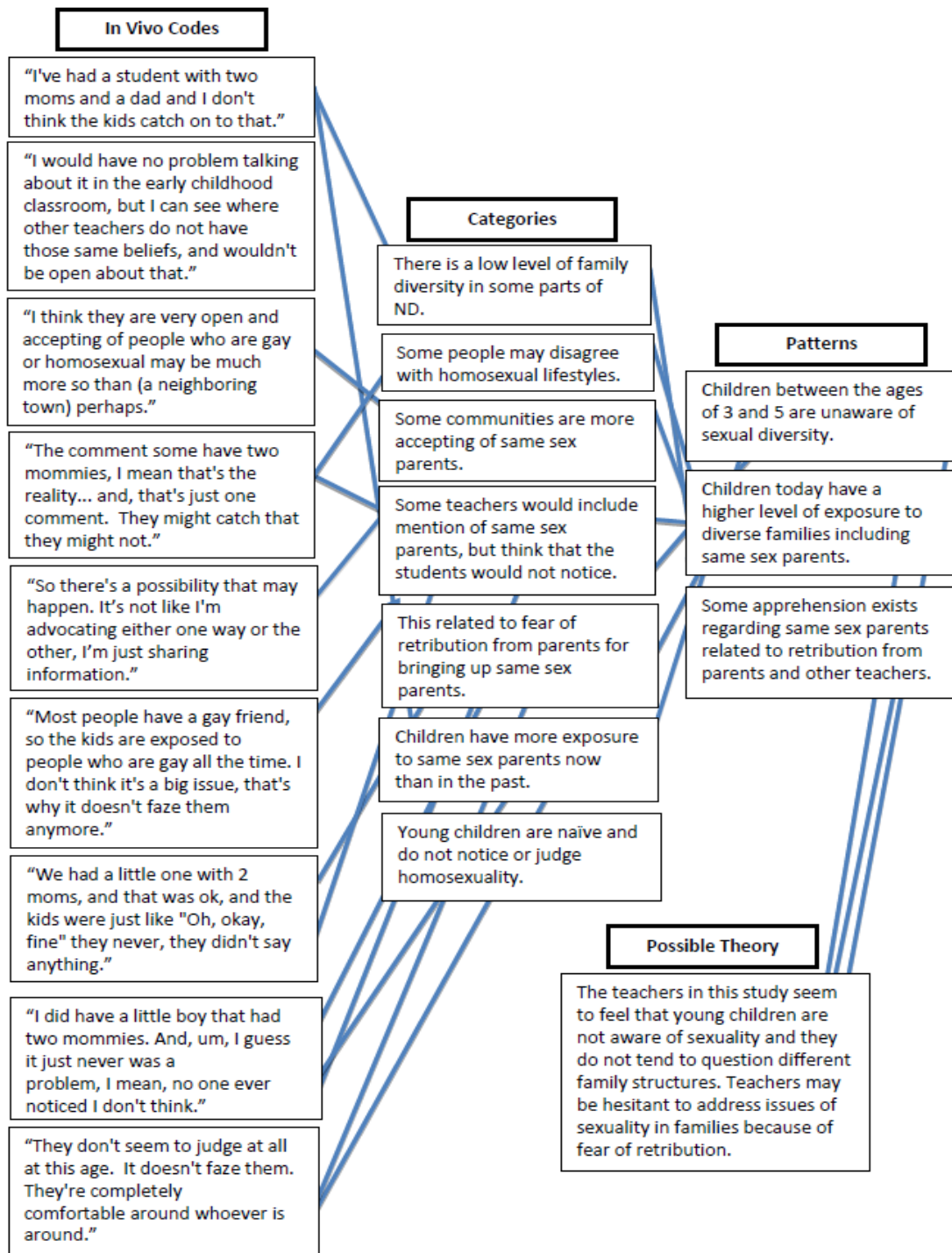


Figure 3. Coding Example Diagram Construct 2: Diverse Families

The scenarios and illustrations in this selection were also fairly well received by each participant. Most expressed that their students came from many different family configurations, including same sex parents. Several themes emerged based on this selection, including an acknowledgement that the children in these classrooms come from a wide variety of family situations, that young children do not express judgment about others' families, and that teachers are not likely to draw attention to family structures they may consider to be outside their own comfort zone and would avoid what they considered to be "sensitive topics." While most participants stated they would have this book available in their classrooms, perhaps on the library shelf, they would probably not make a point to share it with the class during story time.

The first theme is related to the fact that family structures in our state are changing. According to 2016 statistics, of 281,192 occupied homes, 136,522 are husband- and wife-led families (Suburban Stats, n.d.). These statistics indicate that over half of the state's population is not living in traditional nuclear families. Other configurations listed by the United States Census Bureau include female householder, male householder, nonfamily households, unmarried couple households and unmarried couple households with opposite or same sex partners (Bowen & Schutt, 2007).

Participants' voices echoed these statistics and expressed that children's material such as this could be helpful in helping children address family issues.

- I think it's just so normal now. For all of us, like it's so normal to see two ladies together with the kids, or two gentlemen with their kids, and most people have a gay friend, so the kids are exposed to people who are gay all the time. I don't think it's a big issue, that's why it doesn't faze them anymore.

- I've got a few kids in my class that are going through some problems with their parents. They're going through a change, divorce or whatever, getting back together, so I think would be a good way for them to see that even if mom and dad do split up they are still a family for me. I'm not going to be left out and not going to be left behind. So, I actually think I would use this book.
- I guess all I would say is; you know some families do . . . I mean, if they don't see it in North Dakota, which they probably wouldn't as much, they're going to see it on TV, you know, so, the rest of it is, it's the way it is, so I guess I would be comfortable, you know.
- I like how they talk about different types of families, cuz in the school district they are living with many different types of people . . . maybe their mom, maybe their dad, a lot of extended family, maybe their aunts and uncles, their grandparents, there's a lot of people usually, and they're very transient so they might move from house to house a lot.
- There's a lot of different families now so I don't think it would be an issue.
- Yes, a lot more diversity and acceptance of that diversity in schools.

The data suggest that most of these teachers believe that children at the preschool level are largely naive regarding other children's family structure and the stereotypes that adults may hold.

- Well, a couple years back I did have a little boy that had two mommies. And, um, I guess it just never was a problem, I mean, no one ever noticed I don't think.

- At this age, they're too young. I would think they would say something if there were like, say, middle school or something. Then I think the subject would come up. They don't notice, you know, they're naive I guess.
- I just think we have to be really careful not to impose our adult biases and thoughts onto them, because they are not there yet. So just leave that alone.
- I don't think that the students really noticed it so it wasn't an issue.
- I've had a student with two moms and a dad and I don't think the kids catch on to that.
- I don't know that they judge it at the preschool level.

While the perception is that young children may be naive about the diverse nature of families, even though they may be experiencing a family situation different from their peers, there is some hesitation by teachers to address these differences, seemingly for fear of being asked too many questions and uncertainty of how to respond. The nuances of the participants' statements may reflect fear of retribution from parents for discussing family diversity. Fear of parental retribution is heightened in the following two constructs; however, this is the first construct where some discomfort with the subject matter was expressed. Most teachers seem to feel that they must walk a fine line when addressing gender constructs in their classrooms. They may feel that family diversity should be talked about, but tend to avoid it because some parents may be upset with them if their children report or ask further questions about the issues.

- I don't think it is my place to tell them how to think, how to feel. I think it is my job to listen and to model acceptance for myself.
- I hope that I wouldn't get, anybody, any parents, calling.

- I just, I don't know, I guess my response to a parent I would say, you know that's the reality, that's the way life is nowadays. It's not like I'm advocating either one way or the other, I'm just sharing information.
- Parents would probably never know because the kids wouldn't understand and go home and tell them.

As family diversity increases in our state, children entering early childhood programs bring their families' constructions with them. For many, it may be the first time they are exposed to children from families very different from their own. Early childhood teachers are in a position of power in their classrooms and young children look to them for guidance when learning to negotiate new social situations and new concepts (Brinkman et al., 2014). Vygotsky's theory on Zones of Proximal Development is not limited to physical or academic skills, but social concepts as well (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). As teachers of young children, it seems to make sense that the point where we begin to feel discomfort with a social issue may be the point we need to begin to reflect on our own attitudes and beliefs as a starting point for increasing social and cultural literacy in our classrooms for the sake of facilitating social competence in children. Even though teachers may believe that children in this age group are naive and do not have adult-like biases, research indicates that even very young children will mirror the disposition of the adults around them when learning social concepts (Yang & Montgomery, 2013). Our teachers seem unsure of themselves in addressing the topic of family diversity and may tend to avoid the topic altogether; however, this may not be the best method if our goal is to create anti-bias early childhood programs (Derman-Sparks et al., 2015).

Construct 3: Gender-Nonconformity

The third gender construct examined was a child crossing the line of traditional gender roles and stereotypes in an early childhood classroom. The stimulus book was entitled *Jacob's New Dress* (Hoffman, 2014) and the book jacket description reads in part:

Jacob loves playing dress-up, when he can be anything he wants to be—a pirate, a bird, a fireman! But he also wants to be himself and wear his favorite thing . . . a dress! Now Jacob has a new dress that he made himself and what he wants most of all is to wear it to school. Will Mom and Dad let him? (Hoffman & Hoffman, 2014).

The book tells Jacob's story and depicts the angles of parental reactions, peer teasing, and how the classroom teacher addressed the issue with her class. In the end, Jacob wears the dress as kind of protective armor against the bullies. Sarah and Ian Hoffman wrote the book for their son Sam who they describe as gender nonconforming, "a pink boy—the male equivalent of a tomboy" as a means of providing support for him and other gender nonconforming children" (Hoffman, 2014, p. 30).

The following figure (Figure 4) exemplifies the coding procedure for this gender construct:

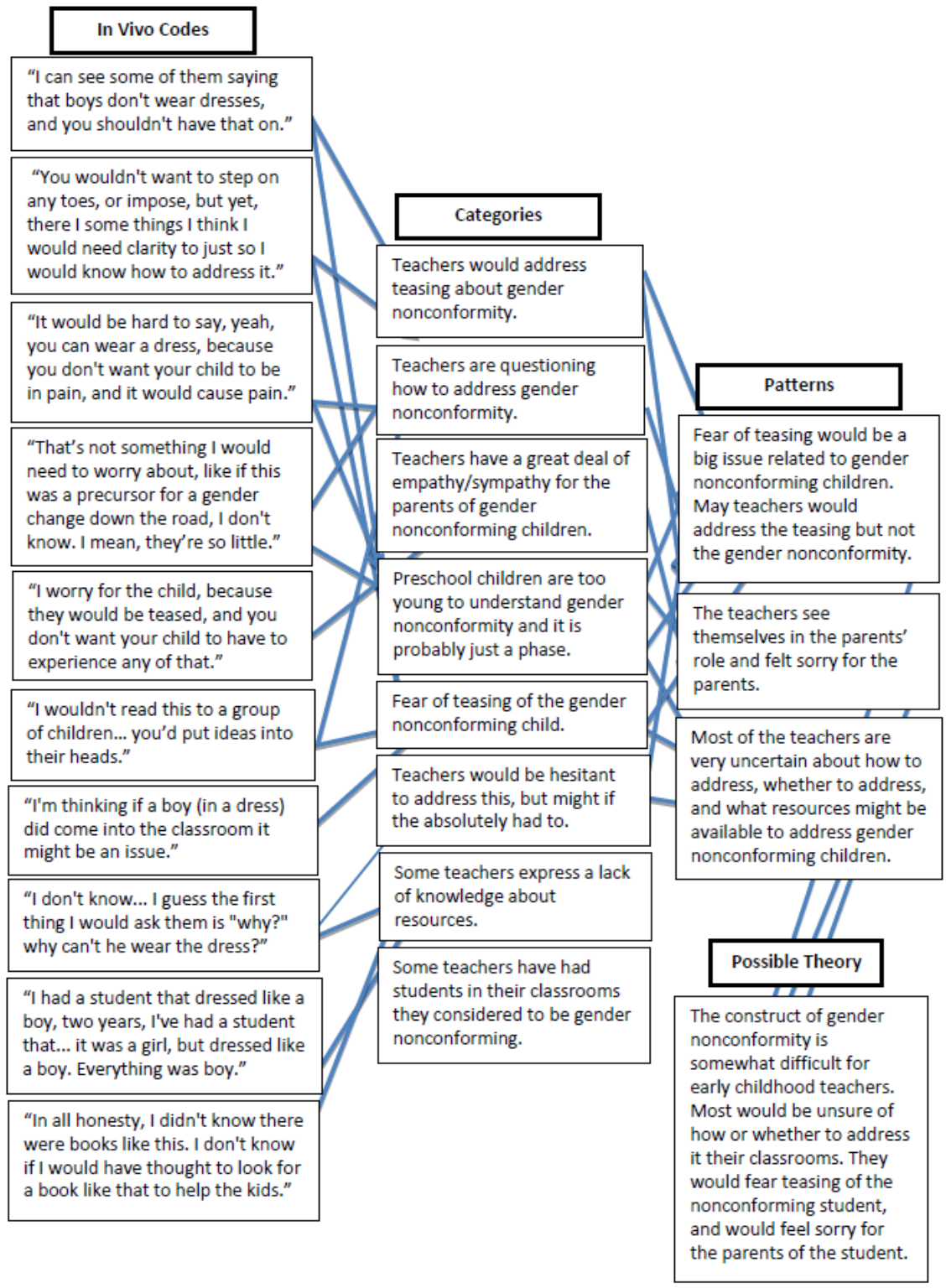


Figure 4. Coding Example Diagram Construct 3: Gender Nonconformity

For the participants in this study, this construct seemed to cause a bit more consternation than the previous two. Some of the participants mentioned the crossing of gender lines in children regarding gendered toys and activities, but it became more difficult when they considered a child disregarding the gender norms of dress with the blessing of his parents. Several themes emerged from this section of the interviews. The most prominent themes included fear of teasing, empathy for the parents, the fluidity of gender roles and identity at this age, self-doubt about what to say, mostly for fear of parental retribution, and not wanting to place too much emphasis on it for fear of “putting ideas” into children’s heads. Methods for addressing this construct varied as they did for the previous two. The general consensus was that it would probably be best to ignore it unless there was teasing, and then it would be discussed in generic terms.

For most of the teachers participating in this study, teasing is seen as inevitable in some situations. There seems to be a tendency to minimize the amount of teasing that goes on in their classrooms and the effect it may have on the children being teased.

- I can see some of them saying that boys don’t wear dresses, and you shouldn’t have that on. Then we would have to have a big long talk for a few days in a row, saying, ‘No, this is okay, if this is what he wants it’s okay.’
- They might dress up during the free time, and they kind of laugh and think that’s silly but they’ve never made fun of anybody else or what they have on.
- But when we do have our dress up clothes out, there’s a little one in our class that would say, ‘uh-uh, boys don’t wear that’ and even if we were to say ‘no, that’s fine, he can have his choice’ he would be stubborn enough to say ‘uh-uh, that’s not supposed to happen.’

- I can see some of them saying that boys don't wear dresses, and you shouldn't have that on!

Most of the teachers also expressed a form of fear and the need to protect children. A common thread was that children who are allowed to dress in gender nonconforming ways are opening themselves up to teasing from their peers.

- You get into this area again where it's . . . do I let you go to school dressed as a girl when I know it is going to open you up for hurt and all that stuff?
- I worry for the child, because they would be teased, and you don't want your child to have to experience any of that of course.
- It has a great likelihood of some negative consequences and would be really, really hard.
- I don't want to send them into the lions' den, so to speak, and not give them some protection.
- I can see some of them saying that boys don't wear dresses, and you shouldn't have that on!

Another interesting aspect regarding Jacob's story is the amount of empathy and sympathy the participants had for the parents. Almost all of them commented on how they might feel if it was their own child, and how the parents must feel. This attitude appears largely based on the fear that the child will be targeted or teased. These feelings of anxiety were heightened when they considered how it may feel if this were their own child rather than a student in their class.

- I feel very empathetic about that for those parents who have to struggle with that.

- I feel bad for that mom because I think, you know, moms are very sensitive. And when our kid hurts, we hurt a thousand times more. So, I actually feel worse for the mom than I do for Jacob.
- I would picture myself with my son, and . . . oh boy! What are you going to do with that? I mean it's fine if you want to dress up and do dress up, but it would be hard to say yeah you can wear a dress, because you don't want your child to be in pain, and it would cause pain. So, but then are you stomping on someone's, you know.
- Because there are people out there who are going to be mean to your child. I don't know how to handle that.
- It would be hard I think as a parent to have something like this, I think it would be really difficult.
- I think it is really hard to raise a child who is bullied
- It would be harder as a mother or a parent, than a teacher somewhat, because you have more of a personal stake in it obviously if it's your own child.

Most of the participants also shared that they would probably view Jacob as a child possibly “going through a phase” and that they would try not to read too much into it.

- I can't say really at this age that I would think that it's gender confusion, I would say it's more just like playing here and they feel like this is a safe place where they can try on stuff, and nobody will laugh at them, it's just silly here.
- They can experiment with different things, they can try different things, because that's how they learn.

- But then you kind of wonder if down the road that kid will be like . . . ‘Mom, why did you let me wear that to school?’
- Yeah, like you know if you like wearing a dress then I’m fine with that. I taught a little boy who wore a costume for the first couple weeks of school. He wore his costume every day. Which I’m fine with, because that’s what he felt safe in, that’s what he felt comfortable in.
- I guess I just like to keep things, you know, open-minded. Just like children with disabilities. We talk about, ‘he’s learning how to do that now, he’s learning how to sit, he’s learning. Everybody’s different.’
- I don’t think you should be making it a big deal. I really don’t. I don’t think it’s, ‘He wanted to wear a dress, he is going to be a girl when he grows up.’ I just think it should be, ‘If you want to wear a dress, go for it.’ Or, ‘I don’t think that’s a good idea right now honey but you can wear it when you come home.’

While it was common for the participants in this study to tend to view this student’s nonconformity as a phase, several related personal anecdotes about individuals they knew who displayed gender nonconforming tendencies and related this to possible alternative gender identity or homosexuality as adults.

- I had a student that dressed like a boy, two years, I’ve had a student that . . . it was a girl, but dressed like a boy. Everything was boy. We bought her, when we bought Christmas presents for the classroom we bought her what she picked out. Ya know, and mom dressed her the way she wanted to be dressed. She still does dress that way. I had gone to the powwow at UND that one year,

when I was a teacher, and she was grass dancing. You know, the boys were the grass dancers. I don't know whatever became of that little girl, boy I guess I would say now. I don't know.

- I haven't seen that in my classroom but we actually had a friend who has a little boy and he just loved to dress up in girls' clothes. He had a birthday party one summer and it was a hula birthday party and he dressed up like a hula girl. He did a lot of that stuff and his parents let him. They just thought, I don't know if they thought, if they went to the point thinking that he was gay or transsexual, I just think they thought he likes to do that, he's a little bit feminine, he's going to grow out of it eventually. Well, he's in high school now and he really enjoys theater. If he can dress up like a girl for any type of Halloween, or homecoming week, or anything on the stage she is a beautiful girl and he loves to do it, and they all, his classmates, they are very accepting of that. Like 'Oh that's just (John -alias)' that's just how he is.
- I had one son who absolutely adored wearing his sister's silky nightgown because it was so soft and silky. I remember one day he had wanted to paint his nails so I painted his nails. Didn't think anything of it. He went to school that day and, I don't know, for some reason we were running late so I was helping him take off his gloves and stuff like that. I took off his gloves and he grabbed them back. And I was like, 'What, what's wrong?' And he pointed to his nails. So, see, right away he knew and that was, I think, first or second grade. And I had to take him home and take the nail polish off before he wanted to be back to school.

Many of the participants expressed some amount of self-doubt about how they would address this construct if a boy started wearing a dress to school. One reason presented was they did not want to place too much emphasis on it for fear of “putting ideas” into children’s heads. Methods for addressing this construct varied as they did for the previous two. The general consensus was that it would probably be best to ignore it unless there was teasing, and then it would be discussed in generic terms.

- I would have been stuck on what to say.
- I just think we have to be really careful not to impose our adult biases and thoughts onto them, because they are not there yet. So just leave that alone. At this age, leave them alone. They will get there.
- We would have to have a big long talk for a few days in a row, saying, ‘No, this is okay, if this is what he wants it’s okay.’
- I do, and in all honesty, I didn’t know there were books like this. I don’t know if I would have thought to look for a book like that to help the kids.
- I don’t think the preschool would get that, and then you’d put ideas into their heads.

Memos and observational data collected during these interviews indicated that thinking about their own views and how they might feel if Jacob were to enter their classroom cause a heightened level of anxiety in many of the participants. There were longer hesitations before answering and a great deal more crinkling of brows and looking around the room before responses were given. This indicates that this may be a topic they have not reflected on previously, probably because it just has not happened. It took some reflection for many to relate this construct to situations they many have experienced in

their classroom or their lives outside of school. The approach of not making a big deal out of it and hoping it will pass was common. The greatest anxiety was expressed when the participants thought about this being their own child versus a child in their classroom. There was a clear hesitation to view a young boy wanting to wear a dress as a form of gender confusion, transgender or homosexuality, and it was viewed more as experimentation, which is seen as typical for this age group. Discussing Jacob was viewed as a precursor to the final book selection that addressed the construct of transgender.

Construct 4: Transgender

The book selection for the transgender construct was entitled *I Am Jazz* written by Jazz Jennings and Jessica Herthel (2014). The book jacket description reads:

From the time she was 2-years-old, Jazz knew that she had a girl's brain in a boy's body. She loved pink and dressing up as a mermaid and didn't feel like herself in boy's clothing. This confused her family, until they took her to a doctor who diagnosed Jazz as transgender and explained that she was born this way.

Jazz's story is based on her real-life experience and she tells it in a simple clear way that will be appreciated by picture book readers, their parents and teachers.

(Jennings & Herthel, 2014, book jacket)

Jazz Jennings is currently 16-years-old and is an LGBTQ rights activist, author and television personality.

The following figure (Figure 5) exemplifies the coding procedure for this gender construct:

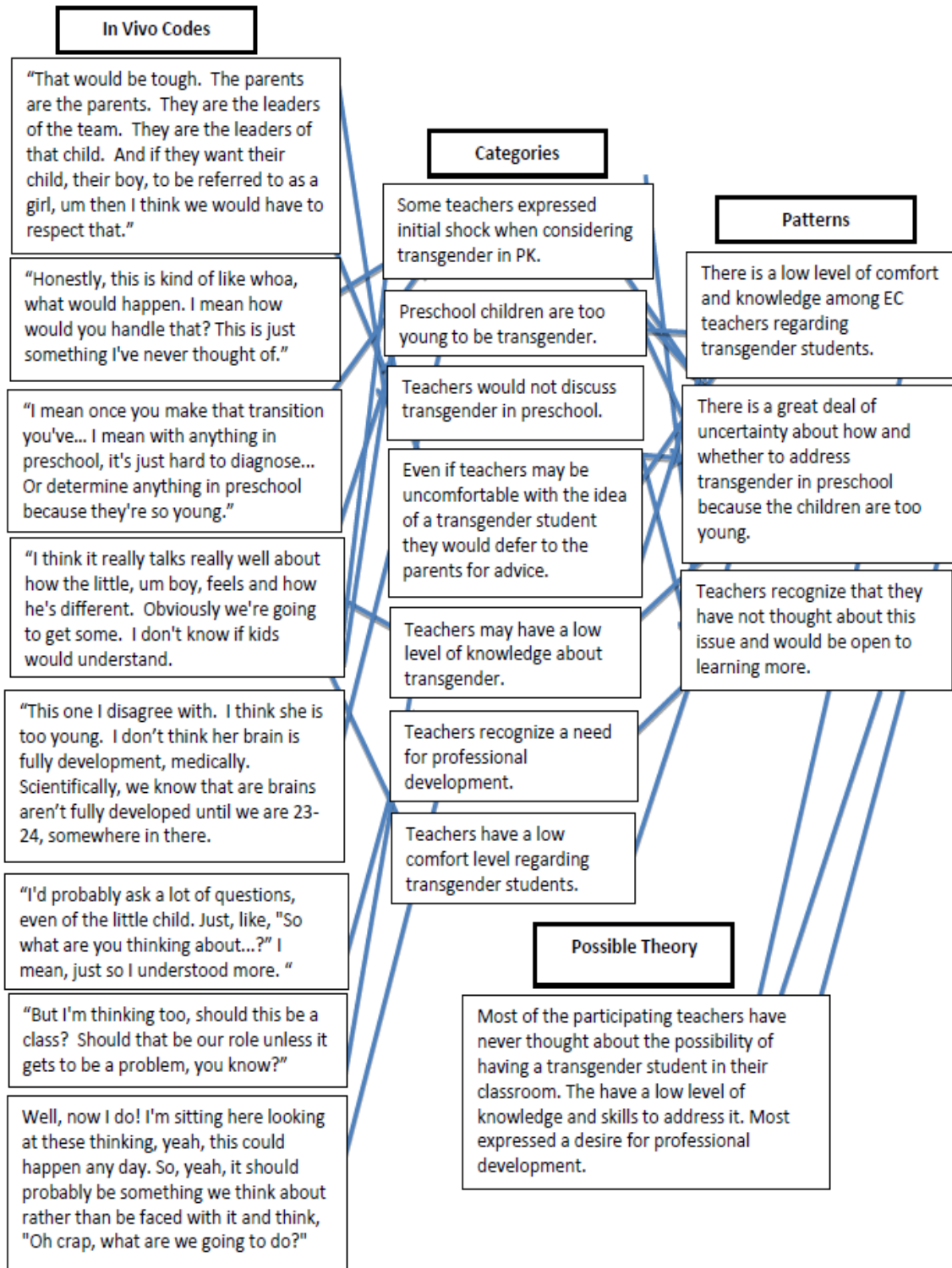


Figure 5. Coding Example Diagram Construct 5: Transgender

Viewing the book about Jazz and discussing the transgender construct was by far the most provocative construct for the participants. In recent years, the construct of transgender has been discussed more than ever before and many are challenging the concepts of a binary gender system and the idea that sex assigned at birth and gender are the same (Brill & Pepper, 2008). Because the construct of gender is so ingrained, it can be difficult for individuals who are not transgender to understand it. A multitude of factors come into play for each person in terms of understanding gender identity including exposure, personal beliefs, religion, peer pressure and politics, to name a few. Bearing in mind the assumption that early childhood teachers care for all of their students and want them to feel safe and valued, this construct can produce feelings of anxiety about their own attitudes and beliefs and about the possibility of having a transgender child in their classroom. Themes that were prominent included an initial sense of panic, feeling that preschool children are far too young to be exposed to the concept of transgender, a lack of understanding about what transgender is, difficulty with pronouns and terminology, fear of the reactions of the school community and parents of other students, and for some a desire to learn more about anti-biased educational practices. With two exceptions, this was an area teachers felt they would not address in their classrooms, although they recognized that there would likely be a time when transgender cannot be ignored because they may have a transgender student in their classroom.

After taking a few moments to flip through *I Am Jazz*, there was generally a large sigh. Most of the initial comments were related to the realization that a student like Jazz could enter their classroom at any time, and they would have to figure out what to do. A slight sense of panic, or being taken aback was also evident. It seemed to be an entirely

different matter than having a student that crossed gender lines with clothes or play and for most it took a few moments for them to collect their thoughts before speaking.

- Honestly, this is kind of like ‘whoa!’” what would happen?’ I mean how would you handle that?
- I’m sitting here looking at these thinking, yeah, this could happen any day, and I’m sure it does happen at the middle school and high school level. So, yeah, it should probably be something we think about rather than be faced with it and think, ‘Oh crap, what are we going to do?’
- It’s a tough topic to address.
- Really? Wow! Um, so your question is what?
- I can see this coming too.

The majority of the participants expressed that they felt preschool children are far too young to be exposed to the concept of transgender and that they were not likely to understand it, or in some cases, even notice it. A nuance of these statements was that perhaps they shouldn’t know about such things at this age.

- But I’m not sure our kids would notice it much unless we brought attention to it, especially the very young ones.
- I think this book here (*I Am Jazz*) maybe is too extreme for a preschooler, cuz I don’t think they’re even going to understand it.
- I think a lot of people might think, no, we don’t need to talk about that because then they’re going to know, and then they might make that choice and they might think it’s okay.

- I think it really talks really well about how the little, um boy, feels and how he's different, and I think it's very accepting, and you know . . . and perhaps . . . I don't know . . . later, or if I, it's hard for me because I'm not an elementary teacher so I don't see those kids in a group like that, but, um, obviously, we're going to get some. I don't know if kids would understand. I mean they understand but they wouldn't understand, so would you read this to a classroom of children? Um, I don't know.
- This just seems too old and too personal of a thing for a book to do.

For many there was a lack of understanding about what transgender is, and some of the participants began questioning whether it is possible for students of this age group to actually be transgender. For the teachers in this study there was a great hesitation to use the word transgender regarding young children.

- Like, gosh when do I use he and she?
- Sometimes they might just be trying to be silly, you never know how they're feeling, but for parents I think that would be difficult as a parent too, at a young age to throw . . . throw the towel in, that sounds horrible.
- Okay, yeah . . . you're transgender . . . I mean at what age do you decide that they're not just exploring versus . . . that's actually . . . really . . . I mean once you make that transition you've (inaudible comment) I mean with anything in preschool, it's just hard to diagnose, or determine anything in preschool because they're so young.
- I think she is too young. I don't think her brain is fully development, medically. Scientifically, we know that our brains aren't fully developed until

we are 23-24, somewhere in there. Someday you may very well want to make a transition into being somebody else but your brain isn't ready to make that choice yet and I am not ready to help you make that choice yet.

- Well, I would hope to learn from it, but I'd be a little puzzled at first, and in all honesty, I'd probably ask a lot of questions, even of the little child. Just, like, 'So what are you thinking about?' I mean, just so I understood more. I wouldn't want to pry too much, but I would have to just so I understood. Don't get me wrong, they would be accepted in here and we would love them to no end, but I think I would find myself asking questions, just to know their opinion of different things and try to understand where they're coming from. Because they can't help it!

A common expression of the participants was the fear of the reactions of the school community and parents of other students.

- I probably would never read it because I think there are a lot of parents, especially in North Dakota, a very conservative state, that would have a big problem with this book.
- Once I got into it, as a teacher I thought no, this isn't appropriate to read.
- Oh, I'm sure you would have one or two. There are so many different religious issues, personal issues, all those kinds of things play into it and I don't know the backgrounds of all of that with my families. I would hope that they would be able to understand, but that wouldn't be for me to make them. But, I think we would just have to say that this is something that our class is dealing with and this is how we are going to deal with it.

- But then about that time you're going to get that parent who gets ticked off and doesn't want you to talk about it.
- I don't think that it would be so bad, but all it really takes is one parent. And I think that in this day and age, parents don't really come to the teachers anymore, they just blast the teacher on Facebook, and then everybody just spreads it around, and they share it, and it's really not the right story anyway."
- I just think sometimes parents are pretty strong in their beliefs, and saying that this is wrong, you know, whether it's religious or whether they've brought it up or learned it they're still going to be those families that, you know, this is not ok, it's wrong, it's against God . . . whatever.

Many of the participants' comments reflect that they recognize that North Dakota is somewhat behind the rest of the country in terms of diversity, but they know that change is coming.

- I don't see a lot of different families in my class.
- I haven't seen that yet, but it is coming.

Most of the participants expressed that they would not address the construct of transgender in their classrooms. While they did identify a need, they did not feel that it would be up to them to address it or determine how to address the topic of transgender.

- I don't know that I would necessarily address it because I think the kids would naturally assume then that she was a girl and then maybe as she gets older she wouldn't have that issue of, all of a sudden, 'Hey I thought you were a boy!'

- I don't even know if I would read it to the class if there was an issue with a child doing that. Just because I think it's a little bit above for some, or a lot of my kids, developmentally.
- But I'm thinking too, should this be a class? Or should this be something that psychologists should teach? You know what I mean? Should it be something the social workers should teach? It's like I don't know if the teacher . . . should that be our role unless it gets to be a problem, you know?
- I wouldn't read this to a group of children.

There were several occasions during the interviews when religious beliefs entered into the conversation.

- I don't think that homosexuality, female, male or whatever is a choice. I do think that is something that you are born to be. I do also happen to think that it is probably a sin.
- I do know in discussions with other people of faith, the pastors or whatever, that they say it is our responsibility as Christians to point out to our brothers and sisters when they are making wrong choices. I don't feel called to do that. (Sighs) And there is just a lot of gray area but I think, you know, again I think you can disagree with somebody's lifestyle and life choices and not be hurtful.

Data Summary

In order to summarize the large amount of data collected and provide a visual representation of how a potential theory was generated, the following conceptual map (Figure 6) was developed. The phenomenon studied was the attitudes and beliefs held by early childhood teachers in North Dakota towards gender and gender issues. Through a

series of face-to-face interviews a hierarchy of gender constructs emerged, meaning that all of the participants were most comfortable with the lower end of the hierarchy, gender roles, and least comfortable with the most complex construct, specifically transgender.

The causal conditions section illustrates the factors that the teachers' attitudes and beliefs expressed during the interviews. These factors entail not only their internal attitudes and beliefs, but also include contextual factors such as their level of exposure based on their backgrounds and demographics. Practical factors include the knowledge and skills already possessed as well as the number of resources available to them. External factors include the constraints placed upon them by their school leaders and the availability of funds for professional development and resources.

The following diagram (Figure 6) represents the process of this grounded theory study and summarizes the phenomenon, constructs, causal conditions, methods, theory, and strategies needed to address the phenomenon.

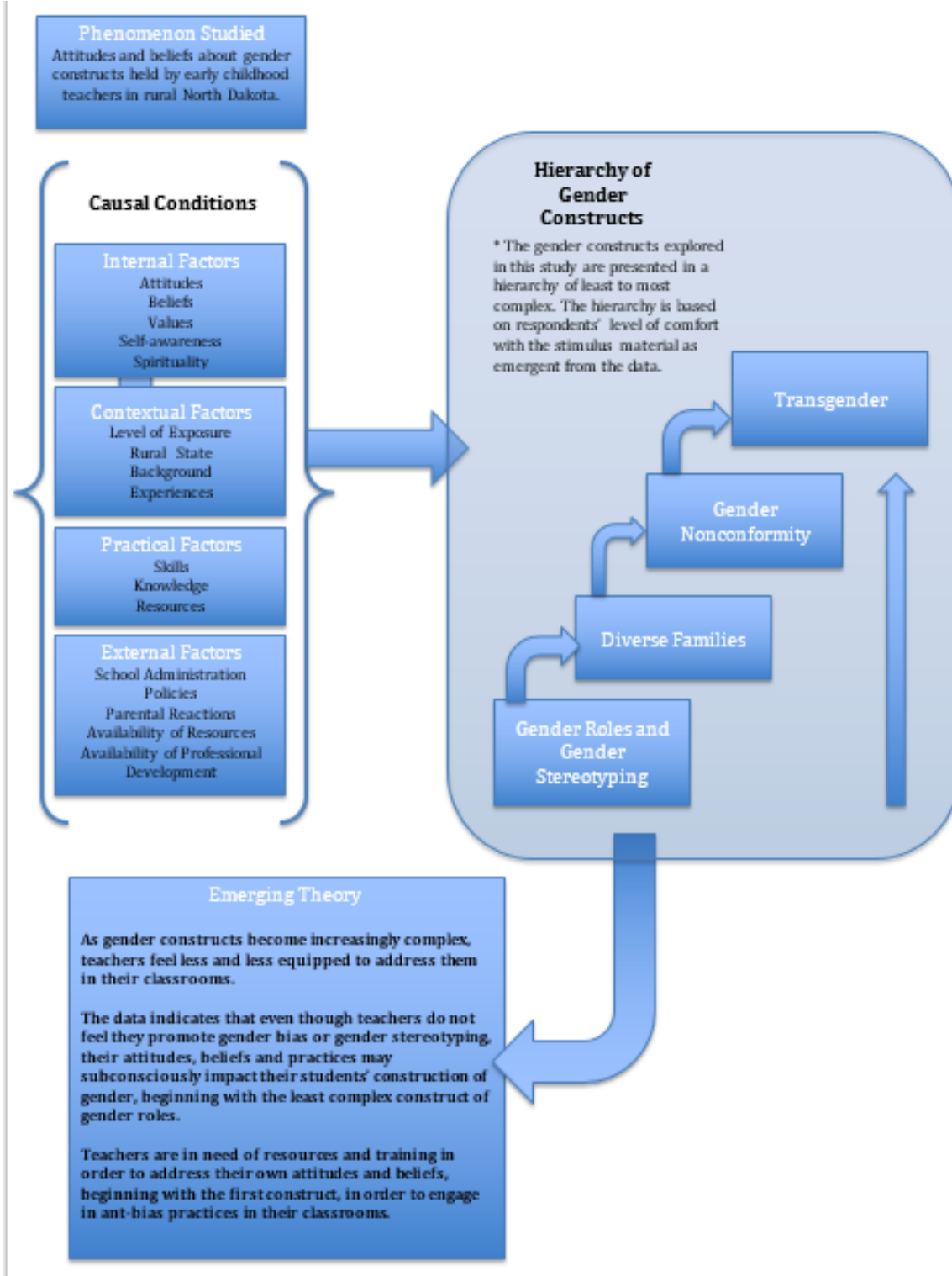


Figure 6. Conceptual Mapping of Grounded Theory

Summary

All of the participants in this study were women with at least a four-year postsecondary education, and all of them exuded a true passion and caring for the students they teach. Through their training and experience they have learned about child development and are aware of the impact of early interactions. Also, they are all human beings with their own set of attitudes and beliefs stemming back to their own developmental timeline.

Throughout history, teachers have been held to a higher standard of behavior. In the past, a woman's teaching contract included terms such as not being allowed get married or keep company with men, smoke, drink, wear bright colors or dye their hair (Bruk, 2015). While times have certainly changed, teachers are still sometimes held to a higher standard, especially by the parents of their students. Teachers are also governed by the rules and policies of the administration, school board, parents and the general public. It was evident throughout the interviews that these teachers take their role in their students' lives seriously and demonstrated clear interest in improving their practices in relation to these gender constructs, even though they may grapple with their own attitudes and beliefs about each one.

Introduction to Chapter V

Chapter IV explained the process used to collect and analyze the data and presented a detailed picture of the data collected. Chapter V will provide an introduction, restate the research questions, summarize the data results as aligned with the literature, discuss the limitations of the study, and provide recommendations for further education, research and recommendations for the practice of educational leadership.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Chapter I presented an introduction to the study, discussed a need for the study, the purpose of the study as well as the research framework, research questions, delimitations, definitions, and a summary of the researcher's background and experience. Chapter II reviewed the literature in relation to the four constructs addressed as well as the research framework and methodology. Chapter III provided a restatement of the purpose of the study and research framework as well as a description of the development and design of the study. Methods of participant selection, data collection, data analysis, validation and reporting design were described. Chapter IV presented the results of the study. Chapter V will further the discussion of the results as aligned with the literature, conclusions, limitations of the study, and recommendations for further research and leadership practices.

Introduction

The current study explored the attitudes and beliefs of early childhood teachers in North Dakota towards the gender constructs of gender roles, family diversity including same-sex parents, gender nonconformity and transgender. The research questions are:

1. What are the attitudes and beliefs about gender held by teachers in early childhood classrooms in North Dakota?

2. What are the implications for school leaders regarding the provision of resources and professional development for teachers regarding gender constructs?

The following discussion will answer the research questions in each of the four construct areas based on data collected through a series of face-to-face interviews with early childhood teachers in North Dakota.

Discussion

Gender Roles

The results of this study indicate that early childhood teachers in North Dakota feel they promote gender equality in their classrooms, and most indicate that it is not an area they feel is of particular concern. The data from the interviews show that the majority of teachers feel that a certain amount of gender stereotyping is typical at this age and that most of the stereotypes held by preschool children are learned at home. They point to the influences of family culture, parental roles, parental attitudes, and the type of lifestyle children are exposed to before they reach the age of three. This attitude is congruent with studies that look at gender role development dating back to the 1990s. In an overview of parental impact on gender role development Susan Witt states, “the strongest influence on gender role development seems to occur within the family, with parents passing on, both overtly and covertly, to their children their own beliefs about gender” (Witt, 1997, p. 2).

The majority of participants expressed a desire to be politically correct when talking about gender roles and, at times, some seemed worried about saying the right thing. This could indicate an inherent difficulty when interviewing people about sensitive

topics, in that they may be trying to please the researcher (Seidman, 2006). An alternative explanation may be that they had not given much thought to the language and practices they were using until they were asked. A common element related to this was their own perception of being open-minded, and the expression of teachers being open-minded in general depending on their level of exposure. This prevailed throughout all four construct areas.

Regarding gender roles, most teachers seemed to perceive the level of teasing and bullying in their classrooms to be minimal. As previously mentioned, they expressed that a certain amount of this is typical at this age. Many reported instances of children enforcing gender roles, especially among boys. A common situation encountered was boys with long hair being called girls. This phenomenon has been studied and the research indicates that there is generally a higher rate of enforcement among young boys (Robinson & Davies, 2007). Furthermore, the social consequences of boys behaving in ways for boys that appear feminine are higher than for girls perceived as tomboyish. Without exception, the participants in this study corroborated these findings. They expressed that much of the enforcement centered around the colors pink and blue and on classroom materials, such as stickers and scissors, that were perceived by the children as boy colors or girl colors. Previous studies have indicated that children show preferences for gender-typed toys during their toddler years and even younger in some cases (Weisgram et al., 2014). In addition, a great deal of market research goes into the marketing of toys to young children in gender-specific ways. While these participants did express the recognition of gender role enforcement and teasing, most indicated minimal

concern and few indicated that they felt the need to make changes in their toy selections or analyze the possibility of gender-heavy practices and materials in their classrooms.

Methods discussed by the participants for addressing gender roles and gender role enforcement in their classroom included talking with children during circle time and perhaps using books such as the stimulus book on which to center the discussion. In general, the enforcement of gender roles among children is not seen as highly problematic by these teachers and most stated that it does not happen very often. While they have heard and observed children making comments, and perhaps teasing, teachers do not necessarily address gender roles unless the teasing was perceived as overt. In those cases, most stated that they would talk with the children about how there are no boys' colors or girls' colors and that everyone can choose the colors or toys that they like to play with.

The possibility exists, based on the data, that early childhood teachers may underestimate their role in developing gender bias and stereotypes in young children based on their own attitudes and beliefs. A common stereotype related to academics is that boys are better at math and girls are better with language (del Río & Strasser, 2013). If teachers subscribe to this belief, their behavior in the classroom can perpetuate and strengthen this stereotype among their students (Bigler, Hayes, & Hamilton, 2014). In early childhood classrooms, both peers and teachers have a significant impact on gender socialization. Teachers' attitudes and beliefs shape their own behavior, and gender stereotypes can be promoted by practices such as gender-differentiated toys, giving different kinds of feedback based on gender beliefs, and gender-differentiated practices such as having boys and girls line up separately (Bigler et al., 2014). Use of gender

labeling by teachers has been shown to increase gender stereotyping in young children and decrease the amount of cross-gender play (Hilliard & Liben, 2010).

In relation to the theoretical framework of Vygotsky's Zones of Proximal Development this makes sense. As young children learn to negotiate social worlds outside of their own homes, they look to the guidance of More Knowledgeable Others to increase or strengthen current levels of development (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). For teachers in early childhood classrooms, implications are that it is important to understand their own attitudes and beliefs and receive training in recognizing how they affect their behavior in the classroom and may promote and reinforce gender role stereotyping in their students (Bigler et al., 2014). This could lead to enhanced practice in that teachers would be able to "adopt a commitment to gender egalitarianism and thus promote cross-gender interaction, expose pupils to counter-stereotypic models, and discuss and teach challenges to gender stereotyping and harassment (and) optimize their pupils' developmental outcomes" (Bigler et al., 2014, p. 3).

Diverse Families/Same Sex Parents

The construct of diverse families was introduced in order to gain insight into the attitudes and beliefs of early childhood teachers about the gender construct of same sex parents. Many of the participants reported that their students experience more diversity in family structure than in the past, including same sex parents, single parents, foster parents, grandparents and biracial families and other living arrangements. While some of the participants felt that family diversity was a sensitive subject, others expressed that children in today's world are exposed to a great deal of family diversity in their home, their extended families, friends and in the media. One participant said that she did not

even use the term family, but rather who the children are “staying with” at the time.

According to these teachers there is a great deal of family diversity in the lives of their students.

A common theme among the participants in this study was the belief that children in their classrooms are largely naïve to the nature of family diversity and that they don’t generally notice or make judgments about different family structures. They again related this to the children’s level of exposure before coming to preschool. Three of the participants had experienced children in their classrooms who had same sex parents. One of them stated that she thought it was these parents that were sensitive to their children being judged, even though she did not feel that was the case. This may be due to gay and lesbian parents feeling marginalized by a “don’t ask, don’t tell” mentality in early childhood centers and note a sense of discomfort and lack of understanding by teachers (Goldberg, 2014). Many of the responses indicate that the children in their classroom are very accepting and that they did not think that there would be many questions related to same sex parents if talked about in the context of there being many types of families, as in the context of the stimulus book.

Because of the propensity to believe that young children do not notice family differences, there seemed to be a common thread in the tendency to leave the topic alone and let the children figure it out on their own. There was a general hesitance to broach the topic of same sex parents for fear of retribution from traditional families. Also, most felt that discussing same sex parents specifically could raise questions from the students that they may not know how to respond to, and they did not want to say the wrong things. This relates back to the concept of political correctness in that they are not sure of the

“right” things to say so they may tend to avoid gender-related topics altogether and only address any teasing that may occur.

These findings are similar to findings in previous research on gender-related topics. In a similar qualitative study conducted by Robinson in 2002, a dominant discourse among early childhood educators was “the perception of gay and lesbian discrimination and equality issues was largely irrelevant to children” (p. 418). In the current study, sexuality was also viewed as an adult concept that preschool children are too young to understand, and same sex parents would only be addressed in the context of talking about many kinds of families. Even though early childhood teachers often perceive their students as being too young to understand, and view sexuality as a private matter to be addressed by the parents, in Robinson’s study (2002) they also reported that it is common for children of this age to role play mommies and daddies in the house corner and may also have pretend weddings or play kissing games. This was viewed as a part of normal development, and not linked to sexuality by the teachers in Robinson’s study (2002).

Studies indicated that many gay and lesbian parents feel marginalized within the school context (DePalma & Atkinson, 2006; Goldberg, 2014). They suggested a “code of silence” that “serves to support the construction and maintenance of heteronormativity as well as demonstrating the power of the heterosexual matrix in action” (DePalma & Atkinson, 2006). While several participants in the current study indicated that gay and lesbian parents were a normal part of family structures, most indicated that they would not want to address it directly in the form of discussion or children’s books. Two of the participants discussed their own attitudes and beliefs about homosexuality based on

religious backgrounds, and may have felt torn between supporting families with same sex parents and being a good member of their church. Other studies of early childhood teachers' attitudes and beliefs about same sex parents indicates that they felt that sexuality and gay and lesbian issues were not relevant to their practice, but were the issues that they felt most strongly about (Robinson, 2002). Including family diversity in early childhood curriculum is considered to be developmentally appropriate and anti-bias practice (Derman-Sparks et al., 2015); however, the extent to which same sex parents are included in curriculum and practice depends heavily on the attitudes and beliefs of the teachers (Robinson, 2002). Even teachers who appreciate and honor diversity in families may have difficulty addressing that diversity in their classrooms (Emfinger, 2007). For young children, it is "important for their own experience to be reflected in the discussion and curriculum" (Emfinger, 2007, p. 25). For teachers, "we must make an honest assessment of our own practices, beliefs and attitudes" in order to create more welcoming environments for diverse families in our early childhood classrooms (Emfinger, 2007, p. 25).

Gender Nonconformity

The third gender construct explored in this study was that of gender nonconformity. The stimulus book was about Jacob, a boy who wanted to wear a dress to school. The first concern most of the participants expressed was about teasing. They expressed fear of teasing, especially by other boys and a need to offer protection to the student in some ways. They also expressed empathy for the parents of gender nonconforming children and speculated on how they would respond if it were their own child and offered stories about children they have taught who they considered to be

gender nonconforming. Several participants expressed that gender nonconformity during the preschool years could probably just be a phase that the child is going through, or a possible indication of future homosexuality or transgenderism. Methods talked about for addressing it included talking about how everyone is different and people can wear whatever they feel comfortable in, or ignoring it if no teasing were involved. Most reported that they would probably avoid conversations about gender and would try not to make a big deal out of the child's wardrobe choices.

Teasing among preschool children was viewed as inevitable by most of these teachers. In reviewing the research on child development and social constructivism, this view is probably true. Between the ages of three and five, children are just learning self-regulation and the concepts of empathy (Morrison, 2012). For some children, this may be the first time they have experienced an environment other than their own home, and they experience many situations and activities for the first time. The role of early childhood teachers is “not only to help children develop early academic skills, but to help them learn to negotiate the social worlds as well” (Morrison, 2012, p. 281). How teachers respond to the social constructs, including teasing, influence construct development and social awareness and skills that can last a lifetime (Kaur, 2012). For teachers in early childhood classrooms, their training on guiding behavior and teaching social responsibility may not have specifically encompassed matters of gender constructs and social justice; however, the philosophies can still be applied.

Vygotsky's theory of the Zones of Proximal Development can also be applied to behavior such as teasing. For children experiencing social situations that may be new to them, and may not fit into their construction of the social worlds, they look to those

viewed as more competent than themselves in order to determine how to respond (Morrison, 2012). “Through the use of scaffolding teachers are able to facilitate deeper understanding and guide behavior within each child’s ZPD” (Morrison, 2012, p. 392). “Teasing of any sort is a behavior teachers are wise to address immediately since verbal comments can lead to more aggressive forms of bullying if not addressed” (Morrison, 2012, p. 49). In fact, gender nonconforming individuals report extremely high rates of bullying and violence throughout their lifetimes (Ehrensaft, 2011). Suicide attempts by gender nonconforming individuals is nearly fifty percent as opposed to 4.2% in the general population (Haas, Rodgers, & Herman, 2014). As young children look to the adults around them for cues to negotiate their social worlds, teachers can impact the construct development of both children who bully and those who are bullied through the examination of their own attitudes and beliefs and engagement in the development of developmentally appropriate and thoughtful practice (Derman-Sparks et al., 2015).

A second theme pertinent to the discussion of gender nonconformity was sympathy for the parents. Many of the participants wondered what they would do if their own son wanted to wear a dress to school. Several talked about experiences with their own children when they wanted to get a Mohawk haircut, or wear an outfit that might be perceived as inappropriate by their teachers or peers. Again, a big fear was of teasing and the need to protect their children. In personal accounts the parents of gender nonconforming children go through agonizing stages of emotion that may or may not lead to acceptance of their child’s behavior (Ehrensaft, 2011). Assuming that every parent wants their child to be happy, healthy, and socially well adjusted, the thought of a child stepping outside of social norms can be heartbreaking. One participant talked about her

young son who loved to wear his sister's silky nightgowns. She would only allow it at home when others were not present. To her, it seemed that this was a form of protecting him from the ridicule of others. Such situations were seen as quite a dilemma for the parents of these children. It is often cited by gender nonconforming individuals that trying to please their parents caused them to suppress their authentic selves, which can lead to problems in their later sexual life (Brinkman et al., 2014). In an overview of parental impact on gender role development, Witt (1997) stated that "the strongest influence on gender role development seems to occur within the family, with parents passing on, both overtly and covertly, to their children their own beliefs about gender" (p. 2). It may be "helpful for parents and teachers to consider that conformity and nonconformity may be viewed as socially constructed and contextually based" (Witt, 1997, p. 838). Reflecting on one's own concepts of gender in the context of an early childhood classroom may bring perspective to the feelings of fear sometimes experienced by parents and teachers of children who may be viewed as nonconforming.

The third theme resulting from the data collected on gender nonconformity was the inclination to view it as a phase that may resolve itself on its own. Between the ages of three and five, young children are exploring many things and are naturally curious about gender (Morrison, 2012). The participants talked about different phases that students in their classrooms went through as well as their own children. Not all children who exhibit gender nonconforming behaviors identify as transgender or homosexual in their adult lives; however, a majority of transgender and homosexual adults report gender nonconforming behaviors, feelings and interests as children (Rieger, Linsenmeier, Gygax, & Bailey, 2008). As construct of gender begins to change because of the

willingness of people to challenge them and an increase in exposure to what may be considered gender nonconformity, the attitudes and beliefs of teachers in early childhood classrooms may also begin to shift, and children can be accepted as they are, without fear or sympathy.

Transgender

The fourth gender construct explored was transgender. This was, without exception, the most difficult construct for the participants to discuss. The major themes emerging from the data regarding this construct include shock, regarding preschool children as too young to understand, lack of information and knowledge, fear of retribution, and a fear that they may have to address it in their classrooms. For most, this seemed to be the ultimate transgression to gender conformity. There were a number of “oh boys” and sighs as the first response after reading the story of Jazz Jennings, a transgender male. The emergent themes mirror those arising from the previous constructs, but were heightened in response to the consideration of having a transgendered student in their classroom. This reaction is not unique to early childhood teachers. These attitudes and beliefs can be traced back to the earlier gender constructs examined in this study, beginning with attitudes and beliefs about gender roles.

The construct of transgender encompasses all of the previous gender constructs and the attitudes and beliefs towards them. Attitudes and beliefs about gender roles, family diversity including same sex parents, and gender nonconformity seem to culminate with this construct. This became evident during the interviews for this study as the participants began to explore their thoughts. For some of them, this book essentially ended the interview as two participants seemed unwilling to discuss the topic and became

guarded in their body language. Only one teacher stated that she would feel comfortable talking about transgender with her students. Her approach was to try to “get inside their head” to understand what their thoughts and questions were. Most expressed the belief that children were far too young to be considered transgender by age five, even though they said that they feel people are “born that way.” Researchers who study transgender, however, have evidence that many transgender children know by the age of two that they are not the same gender everyone seems to think they are (Brill & Pepper, 2008; Ehrensaft, 2011).

Another common theme was a low level of knowledge about transgender. Most of the participants asked several questions about what biological parts Jazz had and tried to clarify whether she was a boy or a girl. In today’s society, it does seem that many people cannot move past the biological markers of sex based on conversations and social media memes and comments. In her Tedx talk about gender, educator Batya Greenwald discussed many myths about gender and shared her experiences based on years of working with and observing young children. She challenges the binary sex myth and discusses gender identity, and the need to challenge rigid, outdated gender marker assumptions (Greenwald, 2015). Resources such as this can help teachers of young children gain a better understanding about gender and gender identity which may, in turn, change some of the attitudes and beliefs they hold that may be based on myths.

The construct of transgender crosses a line in the minds of some early childhood educators who participated in this study. While it may be one thing for a boy to wear a dress to school and still be a boy, it becomes an entirely different matter when a boy wants to be treated like a girl, use the girls’ restroom, and prefers to be addressed by a

different name and with the female pronouns. This way of thinking is not unique to early childhood teachers in North Dakota but for educators across the country, as evidenced by the attempts to create federal guidance regarding the treatment of transgender students in our nation's public schools. On May 13, 2016, the United States Department of Justice and the United States Department of Education provided guidance to our country's schools regarding transgender students in the form of a Dear Colleague letter. A document from the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education entitled *Example Policies and Emerging Practices for Supporting Transgender Students* accompanied the letter (Lhamon & Gupta, 2016). These documents provided guidance to schools by providing terminology and guidance for requiring schools to treat students in a manner consistent with their gender identity including documentation in school records, restrooms and student activities. This guidance represented a significant step in protecting the rights of transgender students in America's schools. It was not well-received by many school districts across the country and, on February 22, 2017, newly elected president Donald Trump called for withdrawal of the guidance and Dear Colleague letter, citing that current laws using the term "sex" are relative to biological sex, not gender identity (Battle & Wheeler, 2017). The new letter essentially took away the right of students to be treated equally based on their gender identity rather than their biological sex. Many supporters of transgender rights have criticized the appointment of Betsy DeVos as the head of the Department of Education, as well as Attorney General Jeff Sessions and chief strategist Steve Bannon because of anti-gay and anti-transgender views. While letters from the government and the current nationwide debate on transgender rights may seem far removed from the early childhood classroom, it is apparent that a type of transphobia

exists widely across the country and may be strengthened by the views of our nation's leaders.

Sympathy, or perhaps empathy, for the parents was echoed in this construct as well. One participant talked about how awful to must be to “throw in the towel” when talking about a parent letting their child transition. There are numerous personal accounts by parents of gender nonconforming children that indicate it can be very difficult for parents to accept that their child is transgender. In her work, *Transitions of the Heart, Stories of Love, Struggle and Acceptance by Mothers of Transgender and Gender Variant Children* (2012), Pepper shared poignant stories about the journeys of these mothers whose children have transitioned and the full gamut of feelings and reactions that occur with families. Looking back on their journeys, most realized that their child was not quite like the other children from a very young age and most believe early on that it is just a phase. Many equate the road to acceptance to that of accepting a death and the stages of grieving one goes through including denial, anger, bargaining, sadness and finally acceptance. Many do talk about a period of mourning for the boy or girl they thought they had (Pepper, 2012). The road to acceptance and support can be a long and difficult one for parents, but most attest that it is only when the struggles lessened that their children were able to feel happy and loved as they are (Pepper, 2012, p. 6). In the introduction to Pepper's book, Diane Ehrensaft, a renowned psychologist who works with transgender children and their families, stated: “For every transgender or gender nonconforming son or daughter there is a parent who has struggled, searched, listened and loved” (Pepper, 2012, p. 3).

Conclusions

This study on gender constructs in early childhood education comes full circle. We began with gender roles and the implications for children and teachers when traditional roles are not followed. In discussing the construct of diverse families, attitudes and beliefs about homosexuality and same sex parents were talked about. Several conclusions may be drawn from listening to these teachers and considering the implications for early childhood education.

First, these teachers care deeply about their students. Many of them talked about the love they had for teaching young children and their desire to have every child in their classrooms feel safe and loved. The thought of children being teased, bullied, or ostracized by their peers is almost painful for them to think about. They work hard to create a safety net and provide support to students as they navigate the developmental waters of early childhood. For them these children are their life's work and they are truly invested in doing the best they can for them.

Secondly, the participants felt they were very open-minded, especially regarding the constructs of gender roles and diverse families. Most of them related stories about students, friends and family members that may have stepped outside of gender norms, or were homosexual and made comments such as "I'm fine with it" or "it doesn't bother me." This may imply that there is something to be bothered about, as several talked about other teachers who may not be as open as they are. The construct of transgender was somewhat more challenging for them to consider. It did "bother" some of them and some were very hesitant to expound on their attitudes and beliefs surrounding this topic. None of the participants had received any type of professional development related to gender

constructs. Several indicated that they thought it would be a good idea to have some kind of training regarding these gender constructs, while others felt that there was no need because their students are too young.

Most of them reported not having given much thought to their own attitudes and beliefs about gender constructs and how they may affect their daily interactions with their students. After reviewing the stimulus books, many remarked that they had no idea such books existed, but stated that they would use them with children if they felt there was a need. None of them supported including material related to gender identity in their curriculum. All of them supported the idea of safety and addressing teasing and bullying in their classrooms. The discussions sometimes halted when considering whether safety is enough. In a recent article in the *American Educator*, Sadowski (2017) discussed at length the idea that while anti-bullying program and “safe zones” for LGBTQ students are a step in the right direction, they do little to provide affirmation to students, and that schools’ responsibility goes beyond safety.

For these teachers, and all teachers in public schools, cultural competence is a necessary requirement for being an effective educator. In a plenary paper regarding democratic cultural competencies and global citizenship, Barrett (2016) discussed competencies students need to acquire in order to become democratic citizens. He calls for the need for assessment of democratic, intercultural and global competencies for both teachers and students. Barrett’s model for cultural competence depicts the integral role of values, attitudes, skills and knowledge in developing cultural competence.

For teachers to develop these competencies in themselves and in their students, professional development may be required, beginning with self-reflection regarding their

current levels of understanding and competence. Further development of skills and knowledge may help teachers engage in more inclusive and gender-neutral practices in their classrooms. One method that has been shown to be effective when dealing with sensitive subjects with young children is the use of topical picture books such as those used in this study (Bowen & Schutt, 2007). The power of children's literature can provide a springboard for further discussion as in the case of this study. While some of the titles were well received, and were enthusiastically endorsed by the participants, others were deemed as too controversial and grown up for young children to understand. A possible theory behind this view is that the teachers' own attitudes and beliefs may prevent them from discussing topics of gender constructs, and may call for professional development beginning with this type of self-reflection.

Limitations

This qualitative study is confined to participants who are early childhood educators in North Dakota. This is a limited group of educators selected because of the age group they serve. Results of this study may not be transferred to other groups of educators of other age groups or in other states.

The data collected is in the form of one-on-one open-ended interviews with the researchers. Because of the sensitive nature of the topics and the propensity to be politically correct, it is possible that the respondents may not be completely open in their responses during the interviews.

The researcher recognizes that personal feelings and bias may influence the conduct and interpretation of the interviews and that these factors may fluctuate during the different phases of the process. Attempting to discern the underlying meaning from

interview statements is not an exact science and may be interpreted differently by others based on their own personal constructs. Peer reviews were used as a means to mitigate this.

Constructivist grounded theory has been criticized by many as being an untrue form of grounded theory because it does not assume an objective researcher (Breckenridge et al., 2012; Glaser, 2002). Constructivists argue that it is impossible for a researcher to be completely objective towards any topic and that the constructs of the researcher are just as important to analyze as those of the participants (Charmaz, 2011). The researcher in this study has a strong view of social justice and how this was to be mitigated is discussed in the validations techniques.

Another potential limitation with the study was the difficulty in obtaining willing participants. Early childhood teachers are extremely busy during the school day and may not be interested in giving up precious personal time in order to participate in interviews. This could be overcome by the iteration that research projects such as this one are intended to improve practice for educating young children and provide new perspectives for policy as well. It was the assumption of the researcher that early childhood teachers would be willing to participate because they have the best interest of early childhood education at heart.

Emergent Theory

To summarize the possible theories constructed through the data analysis, we are able to see that the teachers in this study see examples of gender stereotyping and bias in their classrooms resulting in gender role enforcement and teasing among children; however, they may minimize the significance and underestimate their role. The construct

of gender nonconformity is somewhat more difficult for early childhood teachers. Most would be unsure of how or whether to address it their classrooms. They would fear teasing of the nonconforming student, and would feel sorry for the parents of the student. The teachers in this study seem to feel that young children are not aware of sexuality and they do not tend to question different family structures. Teachers may be hesitant to address issues of sexuality in families because of fear of retribution. Most of these teachers have never thought about the possibility of having a transgender student in their classroom. They have a low level of knowledge and skills to address it. Most expressed a desire for professional development. All of the participants expressed the belief that they were open-minded and did not impose gender role stereotyping or engage in gender bias practices; however, as the constructs become increasingly more complex, a greater level of discomfort is revealed and more of their personal attitudes and beliefs are evident in their response, body language and hesitation to respond. Given the level of exposure most have experienced this is not surprising; however, it is within the first construct that we can see the origins of bias develop.

An analogy to tie this theory together may be that understanding our attitudes and beliefs about gender constructs can be likened to our understanding of a complex mathematical concept such as calculus. It would be extremely challenging to one who had no experience with calculus to understand the operations. It can be learned, but first one would need to assess their knowledge and skill about basic math operations and start building from there. Gaps in knowledge, or lack of self-understanding, would need to be addressed where they exist. Similarly, one must first examine and acquire new knowledge and experience about gender constructs in their most basic sense, our attitudes

and beliefs about gender roles and gender bias, in order to expand our belief system regarding more complex gender constructs such as gender nonconformity and transgender. In the words of an engineering student: “In order to understand multivariate calculus one must first learn the standard calculus of a single dimension before he/she can grasp the concepts of multivariate calculus which take place over infinitely many higher dimensions.”

Our youngest students will grow to live in a global society, likely within infinitely higher dimensions than their teachers. Our charge is to help create within them a level of respect for all human beings regardless of gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, or gender performance.

The following section will discuss implications for leadership and practice in North Dakota.

Recommendations for Practice and Leadership

In order for teachers to explore their attitudes and beliefs about gender constructs, they must first recognize the need for improvement. The majority of teachers interviewed for this study indicated that they felt they did not promote gender stereotyping or have gender bias; however, as the constructs increase in complexity, their comfort level decreased. It is also evident that some of the everyday practices in fact suggest gender bias, for example, grouping children based on sex. Recommendations for practice are based on recommendations for leadership for anti-bias early childhood programs discussed by Derman-Sparks, Debbie LeeKeenan, and John Nimmo (2015). The following recommendations are also relevant to teachers in North Dakota based on the results of this study.

1. Comprehensive training for teachers starting with self-reflection about gender roles and progressing through more complex gender constructs.
2. Coursework for pre-service teachers at the higher education level regarding gender issues and entailing self-reflection on their own attitudes and beliefs and their potential impact in practice.
3. Curriculum recommendations and training for teachers including the use of children's literature and training on leading discussions with young children about gender constructs. If children can expand their thinking about gender and sexuality, they will be able to scaffold their knowledge to more easily understand and accept more complex gender constructs based on their own Zone of Proximal Development.
4. The development of criteria to assess and select developmentally appropriate curriculum and materials that do not promote gender bias and gender stereotypes followed by commitment from school leaders to use them.
5. The development of statewide policy and guidance for schools to analyze their existing policies and create new ones that not only address bullying, but also create an inclusive and accepting environment for all students regardless of gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, or gender performance.

Implications for Further Research

The method of this study involved in-depth interviews with early childhood teachers in central North Dakota. The nature of interviews required the participants to speak about their attitude and beliefs and their classroom practices. To further examine how their attitudes and beliefs affect their daily practice; an observational component

could be effective. For instance, an interesting follow-up to this study could be to observe these teachers' daily interaction to determine how their attitudes and beliefs about gender constructs affect their interactions with the children in their classrooms. Furthermore, expanding the sample to other areas of the state and country could provide a more comprehensive picture of teachers' views.

Concluding Thoughts

Within moments of our births we are assigned a sex, which is generally assumed to be our gender as well. As we grow and develop we look to the more knowledgeable others around us in order to figure out how to perform it correctly. Our first influences come from our families. At that point in our lives our families, or our primary caregivers, are the main influences in our social construction of the world around us. They teach us through their behavior and how they respond to ours what their expectations are regarding our gender roles and performance. How they interpret and enforce the rules of gender performance stems from the attitudes and beliefs they have constructed for themselves over their lifetimes.

For many children, the early childhood care and education setting may be their first social experience with people other than their primary caregivers. Their new peers and adults in authority also have a strong influence on their continuing social construction of the world. Young children have their own brand of social enforcement of the gender roles based on what they have already constructed. Teachers in early childhood classrooms directly influence this social construction as well based on their own attitudes, beliefs, and level of knowledge about gender and gender roles.

As educators and leaders, we are charged with the sacred task of helping facilitate the development and learning of children. The young children of today will grow to become adults living in a global society. Are we doing enough to prepare them, not only academically, but socially and mentally as well? Having taught in an early childhood classroom for nearly 20 years, I understand the demands of preparing lessons and materials, planning curriculum with increasing academic expectations for young children, and helping children learn to negotiate possibly their first social environment outside of their families. I have learned that they are astute observers of adults' behaviors, and the majority of young children hold their teachers in the highest esteem.

In order to thoughtfully engage in the process of helping children process and navigate the waters of gender and sexuality, it is important for teachers to understand gender construction, gender roles, gender nonconformity and transgender as well as the nature of sexual development and understanding in young children. They can be surprisingly more aware of sexuality and gender than many teachers may realize. The tendency is to think that children in early childhood classroom are too young and naïve to necessitate addressing any issues regarding gender or sexuality, the research has demonstrated that this is not the case. Early childhood is a time when children are developing at a faster rate than at any other time in their lives.

For teachers to enhance and promote healthy sexual and gender identity development they must first examine and reflect upon their own attitudes and beliefs as well as acquire knowledge about gender and sexuality issues in young children. Secondly they must engage in thoughtful practice including anti-bias programming, curriculum and materials. Teachers must also be able to recognize when young children are over

enforcing gender roles upon each other and intervene in healthful ways. School leaders as well as pre-service teacher training programs must also be aware of and address these issues and provide resources for training, materials, and evaluation of programs and teachers in order to implement anti-bias early education programs.

APPENDICES

Appendix A Institutional Review Board Consent



DIVISION OF RESEARCH & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

UND.edu

Institutional Review Board
Twamley Hall, Room 106
264 Centennial Dr Stop 7134
Grand Forks, ND 58202-7134
Phone: 701.777.4279
Fax: 701.777.6708

July 18, 2016

Principal Investigator:	Janelle Ferderer
Project Title:	Attitudes and Beliefs of Early Childhood Educators in North Dakota Toward Gender Issues
IRB Project Number:	IRB-201607-014
Project Review Level:	Expedited 7
Date of IRB Approval:	07/15/2016
Expiration Date of This Approval:	07/14/2017
Consent Form Approval Date:	07/15/2016

The application form and all included documentation for the above-referenced project have been reviewed and approved via the procedures of the University of North Dakota Institutional Review Board.

Attached is your original consent form that has been stamped with the UND IRB approval and expiration dates. Please maintain this original on file. **You must use this original, stamped consent form to make copies for participant enrollment. No other consent form should be used.** It must be signed by each participant prior to initiation of any research procedures. In addition, each participant must be given a copy of the consent form.

Prior to implementation, submit any changes to or departures from the protocol or consent form to the IRB for approval. No changes to approved research may take place without prior IRB approval.

You have approval for this project through the above-listed expiration date. When this research is completed, please submit a termination form to the IRB. If the research will last longer than one year, an annual review and progress report must be submitted to the IRB prior to the submission deadline to ensure adequate time for IRB review.

The forms to assist you in filing your project termination, annual review and progress report, adverse event/unanticipated problem, protocol change, etc. may be accessed on the IRB website:
<http://und.edu/research/resources/human-subjects/>

Sincerely,

Michelle L. Bowles, M.P.A., CIP
IRB Coordinator

MLB/sb
Enclosures

Cc: Pauline Stonehouse, Ph.D.

The University of North Dakota is an equal opportunity / affirmative action institution.

Appendix B Informed Consent

THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

TITLE: *Attitudes and Beliefs of Early Childhood Educators in North Dakota Toward Children from Diverse Groups*

PROJECT DIRECTOR: *Janelle Ferderer, PhD Candidate*
PHONE # *701-851-0201*
DEPARTMENT: *Educational Leadership*

STATEMENT OF RESEARCH

A person who is to participate in the research must give his or her informed consent to such participation. This consent must be based on an understanding of the nature and risks of the research. This document provides information that is important for this understanding. Research projects include only subjects who choose to take part. Please take your time in making your decision as to whether to participate. If you have questions at any time, please ask.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

You are invited to participate in a research study exploring gender issues among children in ND early childhood programs because you are an early childhood teacher in a DPI approved early childhood program.

The goal of this qualitative study is to examine the attitudes and beliefs about children's gender issues held by certified practicing early childhood teachers in North Dakota Department of Public Instruction approved preschool programs. Sample pages from selected children's books will be used to stimulate discussion about gender issues in early childhood programs.

HOW MANY PEOPLE WILL PARTICIPATE?

Approximately 8-10 people will take part in this study at a variety of locations.

HOW LONG WILL I BE IN THIS STUDY?

You will be asked to participate in a one-on-one, face-to-face interview with the researcher. You may be contacted to participate in a brief follow-up interview or to clarify responses. Each interview is expected to take about 60 minutes.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN DURING THIS STUDY?

Approval Date: <u>JUL 15 2016</u>
Expiration Date: <u>JUL 14 2017</u>
University of North Dakota IRB

Date: _____
Subject Initials: _____

You will be asked view select pages from children's books related to gender issues in early childhood settings. You will be asked a series of open-ended questions related to the samples.

The study will be conducted in a suitable location of your choosing such as your early childhood classroom, your home, or other suitable location.

You are free to pass over any questions that you would prefer not to answer.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF THE STUDY?

There may be some risk from being in this study: Risks are minimal for involvement in this study. However, you may feel emotionally uneasy about the topics portrayed.

Some questions may be of a sensitive nature, and you may therefore become upset as a result. However, such risks are not viewed as being in excess of "minimal risk"

If, however, you become upset by questions, you may stop at any time or choose not to answer a question. If you would like to talk to someone about your feelings about this study, you are encouraged to contact the University of North Dakota Student Counseling Center.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THIS STUDY?

You will not benefit personally from being in this study. However, we hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study because knowledge will be gained about the attitudes and beliefs of early childhood educators in North Dakota what may lead to professional development opportunities for teachers working with diverse populations in early childhood settings.

WILL IT COST ME ANYTHING TO BE IN THIS STUDY?

It will not cost you anything to participate in this study.

WILL I BE PAID FOR PARTICIPATING?

You will not be paid for being in this research study.

WHO IS FUNDING THE STUDY?

The University of North Dakota and the research team are receiving no payments from other agencies, organizations, or companies to conduct this research study.

Approval Date: JUL 15 2016

Expiration Date: JUL 14 2017

University of North Dakota IRB

Date: _____
Subject Initials: _____

CONFIDENTIALITY

The records of this study will be kept private to the extent permitted by law. In any report about this study that might be published, you will not be identified. Government agencies, the UND Research Development and Compliance office, and the University of North Dakota Institutional Review Board may review your study record.

Any information that is obtained in this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. You should know, however, that there are some circumstances in which we may have to show your information to other people. For example the law may require us to show your information to a court or to tell authorities if we believe you have abused a child, or you pose a danger to yourself or someone else. All data obtained from participants will be kept confidential and will only be reported in an aggregate format, meaning it will only be reported as combined results and not individual responses. All questionnaires will be concealed, and no one other than the primary investigator will have access to them. The data collected will be stored in the HIPPA-compliant, Qualtrics-secure databased until the primary investigator has deleted it.

If we write a report or article about this study, we will describe the study results in a summarized manner so that you cannot be identified.

IS THIS STUDY VOLUNTARY?

Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of North Dakota.

You will be informed by the research investigator of this study of any significant new findings that develop during the study which may influence your willingness to continue to participate in the study.

CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS?

The researcher conducting this study is Janelle Ferderer. If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the research please contact Janelle Ferderer, PhD candidate at Janelle.Ferderer@und.edu or 701-851-0201. Or the Mentoring Professor, Dr. Pauline Stonehouse, at Pauline.Stonehouse@email.und.edu or 701-777-4163.

Approval Date: <u> JUL 15 2016 </u>
Expiration Date: <u> JUL 14 2017 </u>
University of North Dakota IRB

Date: _____
Subject Initials: _____

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, you may contact The University of North Dakota Institutional Review Board at (701) 777-4279 or UND.irb@research.UND.edu.

- You may also call this number about any problems, complaints, or concerns you have about this research study.
- You may also call this number if you cannot reach research staff, or you wish to talk with someone who is independent of the research team.
- General information about being a research subject can be found by clicking "Information for Research Participants" on the web site: <http://und.edu/research/resources/human-subjects/research-participants.cfm>

I give consent for my quotes to be used in the research; however I will not be identified.

Please initial: ___ Yes ___ No

I give consent to be audio-recorded during this study.

Please initial: ___ Yes ___ No

Your signature indicates that this research study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study. You will receive a copy of this form.

Subjects Name: _____

Signature of Subject

Date

I have discussed the above points with the subject or, where appropriate, with the subject's legally authorized representative.

Janelle Ferderer, PhD candidate

Date

Approval Date: <u> JUL 15 2016 </u>
Expiration Date: <u> JUL 14 2017 </u>
University of North Dakota IRB

Date: _____
Subject Initials: _____

Appendix C Interview Protocol

Attitudes and Beliefs of Early Childhood Educators in North Dakota Towards Gender Issues

Participants will be asked to view sample pages from the children's books listed. Due to copyright laws, I am unable to copy the images directly. Brief descriptions of the pages are provided. Interview questions will follow a basic format; however, there may be changes based on the direction the participant takes. The researcher will follow up and inquire further about various themes that may arise with questions like:

*Can you tell me more about that?
Why do you think that is?*

Stimulus 1: *Of Course They Do! Boys and Girls Can Do Anything* – Pages 17-24.

Citation: Roger, M.-S., & Soll, A. (2014). *Of Course They Do! Boys and Girls Can Do Anything*. Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge.

Page 17 is a photograph of a young girl crying. Page 18 reads "Boys don't cry." Pages 19 and 20 are a photograph from an international tennis match. A male player is hugging another young man. He is crying. The caption reads, "Don't they?" Page 21 is a photograph of a young boy kicking a soccer ball in a grassy area with trees. Page 22 reads, "Girls don't play sports." Pages 23 and 24 are a photograph of women competing in an intense soccer match, and the caption reads, "What? Of course, they do!"

Interview questions:

1. What comes to mind as you view these pages?
2. How do you feel about the content of these pages?
3. How would you feel about incorporating this book into your early childhood curriculum?

Stimulus 2: *Who's In My Family? All About Our Families* – Pages 13-14.

Citation: Harris, R. H. (2012). *Who's In My Family? All About Our Families*. Somerville: Candlewick Press.

These facing pages depict a drawn illustration of a zoo scene with various people and families viewing the hippos playing and a tiger family playing in the background enclosure. One child is in a wheelchair, several children have animal shaped balloons, and each group has a different combination of family roles. The words on page 13 are, "Many families have grown-ups and children in them. Some families have only grown-ups. Some families have a mommy and a daddy. Some have a mommy. Some have a daddy. Some have two mommies. Some have two daddies." On page 14 there are caption bubbles for two children who are watching the hippos with a mother and father. Child one is saying, "Guess what, Gus? My family is your family!" Child two says, "Nellie, I know who's in my family! Hippos are not in my family!"

1. What comes to mind as you view these pages?
2. How do you feel about the content of these pages?
3. How would you feel about incorporating this book into your early childhood curriculum?

Stimulus 3: *Jacob's New Dress* – Pages 20-21

These facing pages depict a drawn illustration of a group of young children sitting on a rug in a circle with a female teacher. One child wearing a purple and white dress is standing and talking. The text reads: "My mom and I made this dress!" Jacob said proudly at circle time. "We used her sewing machine!" "That's

wonderful!” said Ms. Wilson. “Was the sewing machine hard to use?” “Why does Jacob wear dresses?” interrupted Christopher. Ms. Wilson paused. “I think Jacob wears what he’s comfortable in. Just like you do. Not very long ago little girls couldn’t wear pants. Can you imagine that?” Christopher shook his head. “I asked my dad, and he says boys don’t wear dresses.” Jacob rubbed the hem of his dress, looking at the little stitches he’d sewn himself. He could hear Ms. Wilson and the other kids talking, but their words sounded far away.

1. What comes to mind as you view these pages?
2. How do you feel about the content of these pages?
3. How do you feel about Ms. Wilson’s response to Christopher?
4. How would you feel about incorporating this book into your early childhood curriculum?

Stimulus 4: *I Am Jazz* – Pages 15 and 17

Citation: Herthel, J., & Jennings, J. (2014). *I Am Jazz*. New York: Penguin Group.

Page 15 is a drawn illustration of a mother and father and a female doctor wearing a stethoscope. The father is holding a young boy on his lap. The text reads: “Then one amazing day, everything changed. Mom and Dad took me to meet a new doctor who asked me lots and lots of questions. Afterward, the doctor spoke to my parents and I heard the word ‘transgender’ for the very first time.”

Page 17 is a drawn illustration of three young girls in cheerleading outfits with pompoms. The text reads: “Mom and Dad told me I could start wearing girl clothes to school, and growing my hair long. They even let me change my name to Jazz. Being JAZZ felt much more like being ME!”

1. What comes to mind as you view these pages?
2. How do you feel about the content of these pages?
3. How would you feel about incorporating this book into your early childhood curriculum?

Appendix D North Dakota Open Records Request

Kirsten Baesler
State Superintendent

Robert J. Christman
Deputy Superintendent



600 E Boulevard Ave., Dept. 201
Bismarck, ND 58505-0440
Phone (701) 328-2260
Fax (701) 328-2461
www.nd.gov/dpi

March 28, 2016

Janelle Ferderer
Emmons County Special Education Unit
101 NE 3rd Street
Linton, ND 58552

Dear Ms. Ferderer:

The North Dakota Department of Public Instruction (NDDPI) has fulfilled your open records request to obtain the list of North Dakota approved pre-kindergarten programs and pre-kindergarten teachers employed within those programs. The NDDPI is aware you are utilizing this data for research purposes as proposed in your doctoral degree plan. Unfortunately, the NDDPI does not have all the indicators of data you requested; however, the data we were able to supply is open to the public and may be used for your educational purposes.

If we can be of further assistance, please contact the department at your convenience.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tara Bitz".

Tara Bitz, Assistant Director
Office of Academic Support

Appendix E Sample of Coding

Interview Excerpt In Vivo Codes	Initial Code/Concept	Second Coding B1	Memos/Notes
maybe things they've been told before so things are going to stick in their head 10	What they've been told	1. Origins of Bias	Vygotsky believed that "private speech" is a product of an individual's social environment" (McLeod, 2007, p. 4). Young children are absorbing the language and processing the behavior of those around them at all times.
Maybe at home kids have those issues, 19	Home Influence	1. Origins of Bias	Talking about gender roles and what boys can do. Is the inference that parents perpetuate those stereotypes at home? Where does bias begin and what do adults knowingly or unknowingly affect children's perceptions about gender roles.
kids will do whatever they think they can do, whatever you let them do, whatever you expose them to 21	exposure	2. Influence of Exposure	In some households, there may be strict social codes about what is acceptable behavior for men and boys and women and girls.
I've seen some boys tease boys... other boys if they're playing with girls' stuff 29	teasing	3. Boys will be Boys	A common perception in this interview was that there is strong inference that boys tease each other to a greater degree than any other gender combination. Why?
Not very often though 30	minimizing	3. Boys will be Boys	Boy to boy teasing happens but the amount is minimized. Defending? Boys will be boys?
I shouldn't say the boy's stuff, now look I just did it 34	Political Correctness - want to be politically correct	4. Political Correctness	The interviewee exuded wanting to be non-offensive, or correct, but seemed worried that her response might be construed as biased or mean.
boys doing more girl things 37	Boys doing girl things more common	5. Gender Roles in Play (boys with girls)	Boys gender stereotypes are stronger than girls. It seems more OK for girls to engage in activities perceived as masculine than for boys to engage in activities perceived as feminine.
I don't see a lot of different families in my class	homogeny	6. ND homogeneity	white middle class community with mostly intact nuclear family structures
I don't know that they judge it at the preschool level	judgement at pk	7a. Construct Development (right and wrong)	How do children at this age perceive? Are the more accepting? When does "judgement" develop? Children at this age understand right from wrong based on constructs influenced by surroundings, experience and observation.

they'll question it... like if somebody doesn't have a mom,	kids questioning why something is different	7b. Construct Development (questioning)	Using zones of proximal development to expand thinking structures in a social context.
I've had a student with two moms and a dad and I don't think the kids catch on to that.	experience	8. Naivety	How much thought do young children put into other kids' family structures?
I have a student without a mom, and that's questioned.	experience	7b. Construct Development (questioning)	It strikes me that her perception is that the students question no mom and a dad, more than two moms and a dad. There is questioning across the board, but are opinions already formed or are they looking for answers and to make sense of circumstances different from their own?
The kids would say something about their two moms.	kids are open	7c. Construct Development (recognition of difference)	It is possible that these two boys didn't realize that having two moms is a very different circumstance than anyone else in the class. How does their world view change as they gain this realization?
The family pointed it out more like it was going to be an issue and how to deal with it when it wasn't something he needed to deal with yet.	parents influence can make things a big deal	9. Parent's Perspective (Defensive)	This could point to defensiveness that same sex parents may feel upon exposing their children to a public-school setting. Based on their experience they may fear that the child will be singled out and made fun of by peers. Are they jumping the gun? Should this difference be pointed out to kids and discussed or should they develop their constructs on their own?

Appendix F
Postcard/Email Sample

Dear Early Childhood Educator,

Please consider participating in a research study about the attitudes and beliefs towards children from diverse groups in North Dakota early childhood settings. This study is being undertaken as a dissertation project, and your participation is imperative to its success. As our population increases in diversity, it is important for us as early childhood educators to reflect on our own beliefs in order to promote anti-biased instruction in our programs. Participation will require your informed consent to participate and will entail anonymously reflecting on a series of hypothetical scenarios in an online environment. If you are willing to share your thoughts, please visit (qualtrics website) by (date) to participate in the study. If you would like more information before participating, please contact me at janelle.ferderer@my.und.edu or by phone at 701-851-0201. Thank you very much for your participation.

Janelle Ferderer, PhD Student

University of North Dakota

FOLLOW-UP EMAIL/POSTCARD SAMPLE:

Dear Early Childhood Educator,

I recently contacted you to request your participation in a research study about the attitudes and beliefs towards children from diverse groups in North Dakota early childhood settings. This study is being undertaken as a dissertation project, and your participation is imperative to its success. As our population increases in diversity, it is important for us as early childhood educators to reflect on our own beliefs in order to promote anti-biased instruction in our programs. Participation will require your informed consent to participate and will entail anonymously reflecting on a series of hypothetical scenarios in an online environment. If you have not already done so, and are willing to share your thoughts, please visit (Qualtrics website) by (date) to participate in the study. If you would like more information before participating, please contact me at janelle.ferderer@my.und.edu or by phone at 701-851-0201. Thank you very much for your participation.

Janelle Ferderer, PhD Student

University of North Dakota

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