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Relationships Between Primary Teacher Beliefs and Practice in the Primary Classrooms of a  
Small Urban School in East Tennessee

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A thesis

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Human Development and Learning

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in Early Childhood Education

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by

Lindsay Collins Moore

May 2008

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Dr. Jane Broderick

Dr. Amy Malkus

Dr. Laurelle Phillips

Keywords: Constructivism, Developmentally Appropriate Practices, Traditional Teaching,

Public Schools, Primary Grades, Teacher Beliefs

## ABSTRACT

Relationships Between Primary Teacher Beliefs and Practice in the Primary Classrooms of a  
Small Urban School in East Tennessee

by

Lindsay Collins Moore

The purpose of the study was to determine if a relationship existed between primary teacher beliefs, traditional or developmentally appropriate; and primary teacher practice, traditional or constructivist. A multi-case study design was employed for this qualitative research study. Eight teachers completed the *Primary Teacher Questionnaire (PTQ)* to determine the study group. Based on their responses to the teacher beliefs questionnaire, 3 teachers were chosen to further participate in the study. Three main research questions were analyzed with individual and cross-case analysis. Triangulation of data included observations, *Assessment of Practices in Early Elementary Classrooms (APEEC)* scores determined from observation data, and individual teacher interviews. The 3 teachers' initial data from the questionnaire were also used. The teacher with traditional beliefs demonstrated traditional practices. The teacher with developmentally appropriate beliefs demonstrated constructivist practices. The teacher whose beliefs fell in the middle demonstrated practices that were more constructivist than traditional.

## DEDICATION

First and foremost, I give all thanks to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, for whom I would have never have made it through this long and hard process without his love, grace, and constant guidance. I also thank my parents who have supported me emotionally and financially my whole life. Their favorite statement this past year to me has been, “You better be working on your thesis!” Thank you Mom and Daddy for letting me take this crazy and long way around graduate school! Also, thanks to my extended family who really just want to know when I graduate so that we can have a party again!

Next, I have to definitely thank all of my many close friends. I have the absolute best friends a person could have in the whole wide world! I am totally blessed beyond what I deserve. They have heard me continually complain, laugh, scream, and shout for joy because of this paper. The ones who have been there with me since the beginning and are still with me now are John, Chip, Sam, Steve, Mike, Ethan, Vijay, Julie, Trish, Jenna, Jennifer, Lala, Georgia, Jessie, Nicki, and Janelle. Mandy came in at just the right time to feel the burden and excitement with me as she does her own thesis! Keep watching *The Devil Wears Prada* and you can do it Mandy! Holly and Whitney supported me while I took a hiatus to China for three months and lived with them during the middle of the paper! My other best friend Chip came back into my life at the beginning of this paper and has encouraged me more than anyone else has throughout this process, constantly telling me that I am doing well and refocusing me to keep going even though I wanted to give up. I thank you so much Chip!

The past year has had its ups and downs with many days seeming as though they will never end and other days going by so fast. I was told it would be a journey of self-discovery and that my internal motivation and talent at writing would get me through, but I discovered honestly

that more days than not I found myself inadequate to achieve the standard I set for myself. However, in the end I did discover that I have grown internally and do possess the determination to succeed at a scholarly challenge. But by taking this paper slow, I appreciate life more. My social life was never put on hold and had it been I would have had a nervous break-down. I am known to not rush anything, and by that I fully embrace the gift of the present moment, knowing that whatever I am doing should be cherished completely because that time will never be given back to me. So if life leads me off the main road a lot, then I'll take the road less traveled and throw a party.

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I would like to say thank you to Dr. Tracey Crowe, the external auditor for the study. I greatly appreciate you taking your time to review my data and lending your professional advice. I also thank Dr. Lissy Gloeckler for the consultation regarding the qualitative research, which was highly informative and much needed. Quality research has many layers!

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Constructivism has become a popular and widely accepted term in the field of education in recent years even though it is not a novel idea. Although, most teachers who are implementing it in their classrooms are still not completely sure as to what exactly is involved on a daily basis (Alesandrini & Larson, 2002). There are the obvious facts that children construct their own knowledge and should be active learners in the process of acquiring knowledge, but there are many more concepts to know in order for constructivism to work successfully in the classroom (Cunningham, 2006). There has been much research done on constructivism and how it should work properly as well as cautions that teachers should be aware of in the beginning (Cunningham). The research has proven that there are more benefits for children who are taught constructively than for children who are taught in the traditional way (Cunningham). No longer should children be forced to sit in rows of desks and remain quiet while the teacher recites information and expects students to memorize facts for tests. Case studies also point out that the ways in which teacher candidates are taught in college greatly impact the degree to which they use constructivism with their own classes (Cook, Smagorinsky, Fry, Konopak, & Moore, 2002).

The concept of constructivism was brought into the spotlight in America by John Dewey in the early 1900s (Weiler, 2004). Then, as early childhood theorist Jean Piaget studied children for his research, he added more information to the concept, which has given educators a wealth of knowledge about how children develop and learn (DeVries & Edmiaston, 1998). Some teachers embrace the idea of constructivism with open arms and others do not. Research does prove that students learn more information and are able to think for themselves when taught

constructively (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). However, some teachers choose to teach with traditional methods of direct instruction and a “one size fits all” approach to learning.

The constructivist theory differs greatly to the theory of traditional teaching and learning. Learning is constructed in a constructivist classroom, whereas learning is taught and facts are memorized in a traditional classroom environment. A holistic approach to learning is used in a constructivist classroom as opposed to a traditional classroom that is based on the learning of parts to whole. Teachers in a constructivist classroom are aware that learning is not only constructed but also active, reflective, collaborative, inquiry-based, and evolving, constantly encouraging students to ask questions (DeVries et al., 2002). Teachers in a traditional classroom approach learning as a mastery of content and rote learning. They are the dispensers of information and use a whole-class approach, not taking into account whether students fully understand the content or more importantly if the content is developmentally appropriate. Information is filtered through layers to students in traditional classrooms, where the systems tend to be closed instead of open (DeVries et al.). Students taught with traditional methods are inclined to feel silenced, as if they have no voice to express themselves, even though children are naturally curious by nature and need the freedom to be investigators. Traditional and constructivist teaching practices as they both relate to teachers’ traditional and developmentally appropriate beliefs will be discussed further in the study.

#### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this qualitative study was to determine if a relationship existed between public school primary grade teacher beliefs, traditional or developmentally appropriate; and practice, traditional or constructivist, in primary classrooms. The teachers may have an early childhood degree or not. How often do teachers take the time to evaluate themselves to see if

they are adhering to their own personal standards of what constitutes a quality education instead of only focusing on the standards that are set before them by the school and the state government? Surprisingly, teachers do not have to abandon their idealism of what works best when teaching young children even though they are bound by rules and regulations. The investigator is curious as to whether teachers have strayed away from their basic principles and beliefs about how young children learn best.

### *Research Questions*

Three questions guided this research:

1. Are teachers' traditional or developmentally appropriate beliefs congruent with the way they actually practice traditionally or constructively in the classroom with their students?
2. How are teachers teaching constructively?
3. How is the classroom environment used in teaching and learning?

When teachers assess the ways in which they teach their students on a daily basis, it may give them a desire to do better and create a need for them to reflect upon their overall mission for educating young children. The vision that they have to help students become successful may be fostered again after reviewing their current teaching strategies.

### *Rationale for Study*

#### *Need for a Qualitative Study*

To better understand whether teachers are practicing what they believe, it is necessary to individually study teachers in the field and get a comprehensive analysis of their unique situations and experiences. Teachers will have varying influences that contribute to their beliefs and carry into their teaching methods. The investigator felt that a more thorough examination of

a select few teachers would lead to a more in-depth and complete report of the findings. Knowing exactly what teachers do in their classrooms and why provides an accurate account of whether or not those practices match their beliefs.

### *Scope of the Study*

The researcher conducted a qualitative, multi-case study comparing three teachers' beliefs with their practices as it occurs within one elementary school located in Northeast Tennessee. Data about the three teachers' beliefs, traditional or developmentally appropriate, were gathered through a questionnaire, and data about the teachers' classroom practices, traditional or constructivist, were gathered through a formal assessment, interviews, and observations.

### *Limitations of the Study*

This multi-case study is limited to one elementary school located in Northeast Tennessee. When conducting a case study, a small sample is selected precisely because the researcher wishes to understand the particular in depth, not to find out what is generally true of the many (Merriam, 2002). The study is also limited to the three teachers who participated; therefore, generalizations to other populations can not be made as results will only pertain to those who participated in the study.

### *Definitions of Terms*

1. *DAP (Developmentally Appropriate Practices)* - The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the nation's largest early childhood professional organization defines DAP:

Developmentally appropriate practices result from the process of professionals making decisions about the well-being and education of children based on at least

three important kinds of information and knowledge, including what is known about child development and learning, what is known about the strengths, interests, and needs of each individual child in the group, and knowledge of the social and cultural contexts in which children live. (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997, pp.8-9)

2. *Primary Grades* – For the purpose of this paper, the primary grades are defined as kindergarten through second grade.
3. *Beliefs* – An accumulated and contested stronghold of personal claims reflected in actions (Rivalland, 2007).
4. *Practice* – All observable aspects of professional practice, such as rules, routines, activities and artifacts as well as the negotiation among partners, the decision-making and the thought process in which teachers engage within their educational community (Rivalland).
5. *Constructivist Teaching Practices* – For the purpose of this paper, constructivist teaching practices are defined as when teachers guide children in learning by using an interactive curriculum that builds upon their previous knowledge, gives students choices, and bases value on the process as well as the product in primary grades.
6. *Traditional Teaching Practices* – For the purpose of this paper, traditional teaching practices are defined as when teachers use a fixed curriculum that is based primarily on textbooks and workbooks, where teachers have complete authority, and instruction consists mostly of whole group and is teacher directed.

7. *Observations* – Data taken in the form of field notes, which are descriptive accounts of the who, what, where, why, and how of the phenomena under investigation (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1996).
8. *Trustworthiness* – For the purpose of this paper, trustworthiness is defined as the credibility and validity of the research.
9. *Structured Interview* – Each respondent is asked the same set of pre-established questions, in the same order, by an interviewer who follows a schedule (Goodwin & Goodwin).
10. *Member-Checking* – Participants are asked to comment on the interpretation of the data to ensure credibility and accuracy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### *Overview of the Study*

Chapter 1 includes an introduction to the study, purpose of the study, research questions, rationale for study, scope of the study, limitations of the study, definitions of terms, and an overview of the study. Chapter 2 contains a review of available literature pertaining to constructivist and traditional practices as it involves teachers' developmentally appropriate and traditional beliefs in primary grades. Chapter 3 describes the methods and procedures used in this qualitative, multi-case study including the measures used in gathering the data and how the data were analyzed. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the research and the data analysis. Chapter 5 consists of a summary of the study with a summary of major findings, recommendations for further study, and a conclusion.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### *Acquisition of Knowledge*

Kumar (2006) declared that a person's knowledge base is an inner state that is unique and personal, which is formed through experiences of how he or she has made meaning of the world. Situations in real life give way to how knowledge is acquired and learned. According to Kumar, the learning context can be divided into two main categories of declarative knowledge and procedural knowledge. Declarative knowledge can be defined as knowledge relating to the what, where, and when of the physical world; dealing with communication in words, sounds, and emotions (Kumar). Procedural knowledge on the other hand focuses on how to carry a procedure out and obtain a desired result (Kumar). In an educational program, many teachers often battle with the issue of whether they are giving out too much information or not enough to the students. They question themselves about instructional sequencing. Through the knowledge taxonomy of Kumar's framework, declarative knowledge is learned first and lays the foundation for procedural knowledge, which comes next. They both then work together to form a relationship that the learner can use to obtain knowledge. Just as Kumar studied different categories of knowledge, Piaget developed frameworks of knowledge through his extensive studies on children.

Piaget was an epistemologist who studied the nature and origins of knowledge expressed in ways of asking questions about what people know to be true (DeVries & Kamii, 1980). He studied the development of knowledge in children and developed the logico-mathematical, physical, and social knowledge frameworks that make up the theory of constructivism (DeVries & Kamii). The knowledge a person gets depends on what he or she already knows. DeVries and

Kamii stated that through his study and work with children, Piaget found that children construct the basic frameworks of knowledge through their interactions with the environment, so knowledge acquisition is not innate but rather the result of a formation. Structuring the frameworks accurately and precisely results in people getting better information from reality (DeVries & Kamii). The authors also note that children are not empty vessels to be filled; they already come to teachers full of knowledge that can be built upon in any given moment with the right guidance. Knowing how children form their knowledge helps teachers in their goal to develop a learner-centered education program that focuses on the students and their needs rather than totally on the teacher's desires.

### *Learner-Centered Education*

Teachers take on a huge responsibility when their goal is to have a learner-centered education program in their classrooms. Henson (2002) defines learner-centered as an educational system involving individual learners with a focus on learning, how it occurs, teaching practices, and achievements for all learners. As dean of the School of Education at The Citadel, Henson discusses the conceptual framework that is used for a learner-centered education that is currently in place at the university. The program, policies, and teaching must all be in line with the purpose of reaching the optimal potential for learning. Henson states that in order for learners to become actively involved in the learning process, students' frame of references and perspectives must be taken into consideration and respected. In addition, learners have different learning styles, learning speeds, feelings, and stages of development that should be addressed by the teacher. Learning should take place in a positive environment that encourages interpersonal relationships with students and adults as well as in an environment where individuals are appreciated, acknowledged, and validated (Henson). It is imperative to note that learners are

seen for being naturally curious and already interested in learning more about their world (Henson). In a learner-centered classroom, thinking is guided and not taught. This breakthrough was realized during the progressive movement in America.

### *Progressivism*

The Progressive Education Association was formed in 1919, though the progressive movement flourished from the turn of the century until The United States entered World War II in 1941 (Henson, 2002). It was at that time that learner-centered education moved forward in becoming the accepted teaching method in schools across America. An “Eight Year Study” was conducted from 1932 until 1940, and results found that the learner-centered approach was equal to or better than traditional education in every way (Henson). Eight advantages that made the approach superior to the traditional method include attaining higher grades, attaining more academic honors, developing superior intellectual curiosity, developing superior creativity, developing superior drive, developing superior leadership skills, becoming more aware of world events, and developing more objectivity (Henson). A shift in educational thinking occurred during the progressive movement.

The political world was changing, and as American society adjusted to the ups and downs of life throughout the first half of the 20th century, the educational system experienced the effects of a transforming nation. Liberation of the individual child became an evident theme in schools when educators realized that children should be active not passive, the curriculum should adapt to a changing society, and teachers should guide not master (Weiler, 2004). John Dewey, American psychologist, philosopher, and educational reformer, was influential during this time with concern to how democracy could be furthered by education (Weiler). Dewey visited and investigated many public and private schools of the day, noticing major differences between the

progressive and traditional establishments. Weiler proclaims that the progressive schools promoted activity, growth, discovery, play, and the centrality of the child's interests as opposed to the traditional schools that dulled the children's minds, narrowed the curriculum, and forced them to be silent. Schools were built during the progressive movement that resembled small communities (Weiler). They were equipped with cafeterias, playgrounds, gymnasiums, and swimming pools. Dewey said that it was essential for children to learn to become productive members of the democratic society. He proclaimed that schools should prepare children for the future and be a vital part of every neighborhood, as cited in Weiler. During the progressive movement, teaching constructively became the standard by which teachers taught students in American schools.

#### *Constructivist Teaching Methods*

Teachers trained in early childhood education rely on Piaget's research with children, which can be summarized as children automatically form their unique ideas and construct their own knowledge. DeVries, Zan, Hildebrandt, Edmiaston, and Sales (2002) state that constructivist education involves children's interests, experimentation, and cooperation. Teachers must see children and not themselves as central to their education, which may take awhile to realize. Teachers are not just observers of children's play but are active in what the children are learning (DeVries et al.). However, teachers must also make a shift in thinking if they are used to teaching by telling and directing (DeVries et al.). In a constructivist environment, a cooperative social atmosphere is present where children's moral, social, intellectual, and emotional developments are enhanced (DeVries et al.). The goal in the classroom is for children's morality to be autonomous. Children must learn to think and reason

for themselves and regulate their own behavior. The sociomoral atmosphere is very important in a classroom if learning is to take place.

DeVries and Edmiaston (1998) proclaim that even though Piaget's research was conducted with individual children, he realized that social factors are very important in a child's development. Coercive or authoritarian relationships between adults and children only teach the child to be regulated by others through power and control. Teachers who have an early childhood degree realize that in a cooperative relationship of mutual respect, children and teachers can work together to form rules, reasoning, and conflict resolutions (DeVries & Edmiaston). Children in constructivist classes learn their academic subjects in a way that takes into consideration what is known about child development and learning. The teacher is responsible for facilitating the construction of numerous networks of knowledge, including physical, logico-mathematical, and arbitrary conventional.

Children learn about physical knowledge by finding out properties of objects and how objects react to them. For example, students observe water flowing in an arc from a hole in the side of a plastic glass (DeVries & Edmiaston, 1998). Logico-mathematical knowledge is promoted when students reason about physical, logical, and social phenomena and construct relationships (DeVries & Edmiaston). An example of this is when children realize that objects, like toy cars, move faster down a higher than a lower inclined plane (DeVries & Edmiaston). Arbitrary conventional knowledge involves teachers willingly telling students about arbitrary, random facts and information. Students with a wide range of knowledge are more prepared to think outside of the box than those students who are told what to think.

Chrenka (2001) points out in her article about constructivism that there is no one way to formulate an answer to a question. Why do teachers who teach traditionally assume that there is

always one right answer and the rest are wrong? Students exposed to this method learn to memorize and absorb information instead of learning how to process information, turn it into knowledge, and then answer questions. Teachers who do not use constructivism produce students who think conventionally, have the same perspectives, and are void of inquiry (Chrenka). Children who are encouraged to use their imagination discover that there are many ways to form conclusions and that not every problem has to be solved the same way each time. Gaining wisdom is a process children will need to be aware of so as not to give up on themselves as they seek their findings (Chrenka). Uncertainty is an obstacle that can be overcome with practice. Constructivism allows a student the freedom to think unconventionally and steer clear of acting like everyone else. Although, when constructivism is applied in the field, it may be hard to implement appropriately, as the following authors proclaim.

#### *Application of Constructivism in the Field*

Cook et al. (2002) did a case study on a woman named Tracy, who was transitioning from her role as a student at a university into her first full-time teaching job. They found teachers just beginning to teach in the field of education will unfortunately often abandon the practices they were taught to teach in college and instead adopt the philosophy and values of the school (Cook et al.). The professors Tracy had thought they were teaching her to use constructivism with her students. The authors questioned whether Tracy had a clear concept of constructivism or were given too many contradictory ideas that led her to be confused (Cook et al.). They documented her growth through the university program, field experiences, student teaching, and her first job. Tracy was given mixed messages about constructivism while attending the university, like teachers verbalizing one concept and demonstrating another (Cook et al.). Because she was hired in an inner-city school that valued traditionalism, Tracy was

increasingly driven to teach phonics, use basal readers, and teach to the test. She said that she moved further and further away from the university's philosophy of letting the students construct their own knowledge (Cook et al.). When new settings change, then the mind changes to adhere to the surroundings. Teacher educators continue to struggle with the concepts learned at the university and the conflicting demands placed on them in the schools (Cook et al.).

Similarly, while studying teachers in the field of education, Alesandrini and Larson (2002) noticed that although teachers thought they were constructivist, their teaching methods did not always fit the constructivist theory. Therefore, the authors wanted teachers to experience firsthand how constructivism should work properly. They led a workshop where teachers worked together in small groups and built paper bridges strong enough to hold a 16-ounce bottle of water (Alesandrini & Larson). The activity was structured to involve five important components, which were investigation, invention, implementation, evaluation, and celebration (Alesandrini & Larson). Along with the components, nine steps were also present throughout the bridge-building activity. The nine steps were contextualizing, clarifying, inquiring, planning, realizing, testing, modifying, interpreting, and reflecting (Alesandrini & Larson). Each group made up their own rubric at the start of the project and assessed their final product in the end. Each team then assessed the other teams' bridges as well. One lesson teachers learned was that even though they have students doing hands-on activities in their classrooms, the experiences may not be constructivist (Alesandrini & Larson). After the activity, teachers had their own students choose a topic and then complete an authentic constructivist activity created by the teacher that incorporated relevant subject matter into it (Alesandrini & Larson). Eighty-two percent of the teachers who participated in the bridge activity found it to be very useful in helping them "bridge" the gap in their minds about constructivism (Alesandrini & Larson).

Other teachers in the field of education are not as lucky to have the concept of constructivism demonstrated and thoroughly explained to them, which is why many give up on practicing it in classrooms.

Implementing constructivism into the classroom has proven to be challenging for most teachers (Airasian & Walsh, 1997). The authors claim that the concept is descriptive and not prescriptive (Airasian & Walsh). Therefore, they say that it is not an instructional approach but rather a theory about how learners come to know (Airasian & Walsh). The authors point out that constructivism views all knowledge as tentative, subjective, and personal, based on each person's beliefs and experiences. This is in direct opposition to the traditional way that teachers have viewed knowledge and taught students, which were directly conveying the knowledge to them without letting them question (Airasian & Walsh). Constructivism began in the social sciences and humanities and has now shifted into education. The authors argue that even though one may be opposed to constructivism, it does not directly mean that he or she does not want autonomy, construction, and interest for his or her students (Airasian & Walsh). They warn teachers to be cautious of applying constructivism in their classrooms. The authors say there is a difference between an epistemology of learning and a well-thought-out and manageable approach for implementing it with students (Airasian & Walsh). Constructivist techniques do not provide the sole means by which students construct knowledge (Airasian & Walsh). Time is needed for students and teachers to learn what their roles are in the process. Teachers should be cautioned to not switch from reductionism to anything goes constructivism (Airasian & Walsh). Practically applying constructivism in a classroom will definitely prove to be a daunting yet rewarding task.

### *Traditional Teaching Practices*

Teachers who are trained in elementary education programs rely on behaviorist ways of getting students to learn and teach to the textbook more than early childhood trained teachers (Jonassen, 1991). Students taught in behaviorist ways expect to be rewarded for doing well and become passive rather than active in processing knowledge (Gardner, 1991). Behavioral theorists rely on the classroom environment to shape and control children's behaviors. The environment does have the power to affect children both positively and negatively. However, negative behaviors are learned by the environment when teachers stress the importance of reward and punishment. Children in that type of atmosphere are not taught to control their impulses and regulate their own emotions (Bronson, 2000). Self-regulation, such as impulse control, self-control, and self-discipline, are not learned when children live in fear of whether they will be punished or rewarded (Bronson). Teachers who teach with a traditional approach develop the philosophy that they are to instruct students by having them memorize facts and reach predetermined outcomes. It is as if a limit is already placed on students' learning before they even begin to start the curriculum. Elementary education programs teach knowledge to teacher candidates in sequential steps with parts to whole instead of whole to parts (Jonassen). Students who learn facts in isolated parts actually take longer to grasp the main standards than students who start with the whole and move outward (Jonassen). In addition, learners form habits of reproducing what is taught to them rather than becoming responsible to think for themselves (Gardner). Group work does not happen very often either, and talking is considered to be disruptive. Traditional teachers motivate children externally and think they as teachers must always be in control of what children are learning.

From the review of the literature, teachers who are trained in elementary education programs are more than likely going to use traditional methods of instructing students in primary grades (Jonassen, 1991). Teachers who are taught constructively in college and have earned an early childhood degree are more prone to teach constructively when out in the field (Cook et al., 2002). Teachers with an early childhood degree value process more than product and know that as students work on projects over extended periods of time, they are learning many skills and developing positive quality characteristics. Children are also given adequate times for reflection after steps in the process are accomplished. Project work in groups is not valued as much in traditional classrooms.

Behaviorism is at the root of why teachers with an elementary degree teach with direct instruction and need only one correct answer for a question (Jonassen, 1991). On the other hand, students taught constructively learn that it is okay to question and ponder the whys in life. Teachers with an early childhood degree have a strong knowledge base of how children develop and learn through their study of theorists in the field. These theorists have drawn conclusions on how children's brains work as well as how and when they learn best (DeVries et al., 2002). A behaviorist approach to education says that the teacher is the transmitter of knowledge, which is in direct opposition to a constructivist approach (Gardner, 1991). Teachers who seek behaviorism rely heavily on textbooks for their knowledge base, which limits the viewpoints that children will be exposed to while learning (Jonassen). Many differences have been addressed between traditional and constructivist teaching.

### *Personal Beliefs and Practices*

Rokeach (1968) implies through his extensive research on personal beliefs that even though beliefs vary in depth and importance to humans, a collective belief system is organized with the following underlying features:

Primitive beliefs which are developed during childhood within the family and social context, and provide the individual with a sense of self and group identity; authority beliefs which are mainly attributed to religion and other reference groups; and derived beliefs, which comprise beliefs learned from others. (p. 30)

The ways in which people have been influenced determines how each person fits into society. Furthermore, the community's teachers are a part of each day contributes to their beliefs, because each community is comprised of specific norms, values, rules, and understandings (Wenger, 2000). Due to these factors, personal beliefs have a relation to teaching and learning in the educational setting of a community.

Rivalland (2007) conducted a qualitative research study on how three different childcare professionals made meaning of their reality and expressed their personal beliefs in relation to their practices. Field observations, document analysis, and in-depth interviews and prompts were used to collect data. One of the findings was that there was a "striking pattern that, on one level, childcare professionals' beliefs were aligned with the center's documentation; but on another level, the specifics of their interpretations were varied, personal, and multidimensional" (Rivalland, p. 35). Because there are varying degree levels within the belief system, the researcher found that the more important the belief, the more it would affect the practices (Rivalland).

There were also two situations that caused community discourse, which were the discipline policy and use of natural materials. One of the participants indicated to the author that she felt tension existed among her core beliefs, her practices, and the complexity of the context when it came to dealing with the discipline policy of redirecting behavioral problems (Rivalland, 2007). All three teachers had taken on the practice of redirecting inappropriate behaviors before something went wrong in order to keep the group consistently unified and were exhausted by it, rather than giving children freedom of choice, having flexibility in the classroom, and trying other positive discipline techniques. Regarding the use of natural materials as teaching tools, the three teachers had assorted views on how important it was in their classroom. One of the teachers had always loved the outdoors, passed on her love of it to her own children at home, and considered it a way of life; therefore, she considered using nature as a teaching technique to be deeply rooted in her core values (Rivalland). Moreover, another teacher who also enthusiastically used nature as a teaching technique did so after being influenced by the previously mentioned teacher who had always possessed the passion for nature. The third teacher did use natural materials but was at the same time adamant about having a diverse selection of materials for children to choose from, including plastic toys. The three teachers implemented natural materials, but each believed in varying degrees of their importance, which correlated to the way they practiced in the classroom.

Findings from the study suggest that “Beliefs, when shared and agreed to, are articulated consistently and are enacted in practice, whereas others not so readily agreed upon are articulated inconsistently or enacted differently across different circumstances” (Rivalland, 2007, p. 37). In other words, personal beliefs along with the community of professionals working together contribute to the system of beliefs that individuals have and carry out into their practices. The

author discovered that beliefs and practices are part of a complex and multidimensional system (Rivalland) that can be traced back to Rokeach's (1968) belief system.

### *Project Construct*

*The Seven Principles of Constructivist Teaching: A Case Study* by Cunningham (2006) focuses on a teacher and a school that has had success in the classroom and has a proven track record with student achievement. The school is located in a Midwestern urban school district that has a "special curriculum" based on developmentally appropriate practices and sound theoretical principles of child development. The Missouri school was established to meet the needs of a culturally diverse student population from preschool through second grade and was designed to implement the state-initiated curriculum of *Project Construct*, a constructivist curriculum (Cunningham, 2006). In 1986, a Midwestern Commissioner of Education established a 15 member Early Childhood Curriculum Task Force. The task force included teachers, administrators, early childhood education professors, and staff of the State Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. They had to create a curriculum and assessment framework for children ages 3 through 7 years that would be appropriate to the distinctive development and learning characteristics of young children (DeVries et al., 2002). During the 1988-1989 school year, 10 pilot sites, representing public schools and programs, tested the implementation of the constructivist framework. By the 1990-1991 school year, 33 school districts across the state were involved with the implementation of the Project Construct Curriculum and Assessment Framework (Murphy & Goffin, 1992). DeVries et al. developed seven basic principles of constructivist education:

- 1) Establish a cooperative, sociomoral atmosphere.
- 2) Appeal to children's interests.

- 3) Teach in terms of the kind of knowledge involved.
- 4) Choose content that challenges children.
- 5) Promote children's reasoning.
- 6) Provide adequate time for children's investigations and in-depth engagement.
- 7) Link on-going documentation and assessment with curriculum activities.

Cunningham's case study focused on a second grade teacher. The study examined what a constructivist curriculum looks like in a primary classroom where student achievement, measured by standardized test scores, is consistently high. Questions regarding how constructivism was implemented in the second grade classroom were the basis for the study, focusing on how the "Seven Basic Principles of Constructivist Teaching" (DeVries et al., 2002) could be applied to assist in the identification of a constructivist teacher.

Triangulation of data included observations of the teacher in her classroom, a personal interview, and review of archival data. DeVries et al. (2002) believe that "Constructivist education can be summarized in these three words: interest, experimentation, and cooperation" (p. 35). These characteristics were apparent in her classroom and were mentioned several times during the interview. Cunningham (2006) concludes that a teacher who implements the seven basic principles of constructivist education is a constructivist teacher. She also asserts that a developmentally appropriate constructivist curriculum with its support of a rich language environment and numerous opportunities for choice, decision-making, and problem-solving must be a strong contributing factor to students' academic achievement. She witnessed this with the teacher's students.

### *Physical Classroom Environment*

The physical classroom environment in primary grades should be designed to enhance the learning that is taking place in the room every day. Teachers have the ability to design the layout and structure the furniture in ways that are optimal for student success. First, the environment must be healthy and safe, with medicines locked in cabinets and out of children's reach and chemicals out of harm's way (Hemmeter, Maxwell, Ault, & Schuster, 2001). The sink should be accessible to all children with frequent hand-washing taking place. A first aid kit should be up-to-date and one member of the classroom staff needs to be certified in CPR and first aid (Hemmeter et al.). It is obvious that the physical environment has a great effect on the overall climate of the room (Wien, Coates, Keating, & Bigelow, 2005). Are the children drained of energy, wild and crazy, or calm and productive in the classroom? Teachers should ask themselves if they have given as much attention to the environment as they have given to planning the curriculum. Students should feel connected to classroom space as well as feel a sense of clarity and purpose in each area of the room. Organization of materials is the key to serenity and tranquility in designated spaces within the room (Wien et al.). Attention should be given to details, like jars for markers and crayons, pillows on the floor, and pictures in frames that sit around the room. There is assurance in knowing that children are comfortable and at ease in their environment. Children will be inspired to learn when learning centers are set up creatively to peek their interest and encourage their participation.

The environment is a momentous educator within the classroom and has the means of becoming a prevailing driving force in children's educational pursuits. Curtis and Carter (2005) proclaim that the environment should respect and represent the culture of the community. Every school consists of various geographic locations and people and should not house universal

classrooms that look as if they belong in an advertising catalog (Curtis & Carter). Interesting materials, ample time, and frequent opportunities to investigate, transform, and invent without interruption should be a consistent part of a student's customary routine (Curtis & Carter). Open-ended materials that can be combined in many types of play appeal to children's many interests. These materials help children move toward pursuing more complex and challenging adventures within the classroom. In addition, spaces should be flexible, offer moveable furnishings and equipment, create play places at different levels and angles, have dedicated indoor space and equipment for active play, include quiet spaces where children can work in small groups, and contain places where children can be alone (Curtis & Carter). It is also not necessary to fill the walls with commercially produced borders, posters, and informational materials, but instead, let the students' work be on display for all to see, and embrace the opportunity for white space, which lets the eye focus on what is important (Tarr, 2004). Walls and spaces that are too busy are a distraction and hinder children from being able to concentrate on what needs to be learned. Teachers must not forget that there needs to always be a purpose behind displays and classroom aesthetics. "Classroom environments are public statements about the educational values of the institution and the teacher" (Tarr, p. 89). With that said, it is imperative to know that the environment can be read by each person that walks into the classroom. Messages are given and judgments are formed about relationships between teaching and learning and most importantly relationships between student and teacher (Tarr).

Displays in classrooms should not be for decoration only but rather serve as documentation of what happens in the educational environment. Children in primary grades can write their own text about their work, which gives an insight into the process that took place instead of placing all the value on the end product (Tarr, 2004). Some questions that teachers

can ask themselves are as follows. What image of a learner is conveyed by the materials displayed (Tarr)? Do the posters invite participation and active involvement or passive reception of information (Shapiro & Kirby, 1998)? Is the display for children, families, or other visitors (Tarr)? When time is taken and thought is given to why the classroom looks the way it does, ambiguity can soon turn to clarity. One of the most important questions that teachers should consider is whether the educational environment is contributing to children's learning or eventually silencing children (Tarr).

### *Instructional Environment*

The instructional environment of a primary grade classroom should be developmentally appropriate. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the nation's largest professional organization of early childhood educators, has published a position statement on developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) in early childhood programs for children birth through age 8 (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). The revised position statement was adopted in July of 1996 and promotes high-quality, developmentally appropriate programs for all children and their families (Bredekamp & Copple). The primary position statement of DAP was that programs designed for young children needed to be based on (a) what is known about child development and learning, (b) what is known about the strengths, interests, and needs of each individual child in the group, and (c) knowledge of the social and cultural contexts in which children live (Bredekamp & Copple). The original position statement in 1987 came at a time when educators in the field of early childhood were placing emphasis on narrowly defined academic skills and parts to whole instead of whole to parts (Bredekamp & Copple). Active learning approaches were not being implemented; and children's needs, competencies, and

interests were not being taken into consideration. The DAP approach to learning has once again regarded children as valuable resources instead of conventional commodities.

A developmentally appropriate classroom includes task-oriented timetables for groups and individuals, whole-group routines and activities, learning areas related to children's interests and needs, and a program that matches their developmental characteristics. Tasks should have prominence over time instead of the opposite. Most teachers stick to a strict schedule of events within a day and do not allocate children enough time to fully engage in an activity. Students should be given large uninterrupted blocks of time in which they can complete tasks (Gareau & Kennedy, 1991). In fact, children are very capable of concentrating on tasks without being distracted if they are engaged and challenged by them. Growth in attention spans will occur when children begin to make decisions for themselves and control their actions (Gareau & Kennedy). Children should be given time to ponder, reflect, and gather their thoughts before and after lessons take place.

Gareau and Kennedy (1991) state that whole group activities in need of everyone's participation at the same time are better suited after lunch, when children have just been together as a large group. The morning hours are more advantageous for children to work independently with reading and writing. Teachers can then work with students one-on-one and assess students' achievement individually. Planning boards are very useful in classrooms to help children become aware of what happens when and gives them the opportunity to manage their time (Gareau & Kennedy). Children are also capable of choosing centers that interest them. Established routines that are appropriate give a flow to the day. A well balanced mix of whole group instruction, shared learning, self-instruction, teacher facilitation, and one-on-one instruction represents a developmentally appropriate curriculum.

Basic learning areas, such as reading and math, as well as areas with units of study that integrate several curriculum subjects, are appropriate learning centers in primary classes. Children should be encouraged to foster connections among the centers, which in turn help children learn that knowledge from a variety of sources contributes to a complete understanding of information. Children grow toward logical thinking when those types of connections are made (Gareau & Kennedy, 1991). In addition, children construct their own knowledge differently than adults (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). Developing learning areas where children plan and select their activities helps an integrated curriculum evolve over time (Bredekamp & Copple). If children show an interest in oceans, activities revolving around oceanography can be set up in math, writing, art, science, and music centers (Bredekamp & Copple). Teachers who provide intellectually stimulating curriculums for their students and also provide them with supportive, positive human relationships, find that students are eager, willing, and enthusiastic to learn (Bredekamp & Copple).

### *Social Environment*

The social environment for children has been researched extensively by Piaget and early childhood theorist Lev Vygotsky. Piaget found that as higher levels of the social and physical worlds are reached, children can more effectively regulate behaviors and thoughts in these areas (Bronson, 2000). The ultimate goal for educators should be that children learn to work well with others, control their own emotions, and become productive members of society. Getting along well with others is taught at a very young age and reinforced within the classroom. Vygotsky (1962) claims in his sociocultural theory that the social environment is an important determining factor in the way children construct their own knowledge. Is there mutual respect taking place in the classroom? Are positive expectations for responsible behavior known? Children in primary

grades begin to place importance on their friends' opinions and give much prominence to how others view them and want to make sure that everything is fair (Bronson). As children grow and mature, they become increasingly capable of consciously weighing effects of the decisions they make. Children can plan, use strategies, monitor progress, correct errors, and show patience and endurance (Bronson). Moral reasoning develops as children begin to understand multiple perspectives on issues (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). Furthermore, children are sympathetic to those in need and like to lend a helping hand. Their communication skills develop as they strengthen their abilities to express themselves, understand, reason, and solve problems (Bredekamp & Copple). Teachers are crucial in promoting and prolonging children's conversations in order to increase their vocabularies and social skills.

#### *Brain Compatible Learning Environment*

Teachers' attitudes and perceptions about their students greatly affect their performance and behaviors. Teachers also unconsciously offer suggestions about learning through their attitudes (Jensen, 2000). Children are attuned to much more than adults realize. The tone of conversation, appearance, and smile or lack thereof all suggest what teachers value as important. "Learners in positive, joyful environments are likely to experience enhanced learning, memory, and feelings of self-esteem" (Jensen, p. 109). Teachers who have high expectations for their students and demonstrate their optimistic beliefs in them are more likely to have students with better attitudes themselves. A relaxed nervous system is best for learning, and the more students are free from stress, the better they perform (Jensen). A relaxed state for optimal learning can include laughter and humor, slow stretching, music, games and activities, and unstructured discussions and sharing (Jenson). Teachers who start the day off in a good mood and relaxed state of mind as well as an organized agenda will be prepared to lead the class all the way

through until the afternoon. Teachers have the ability of putting their students at ease and contribute greatly to their functioning every day. Children may need to set short-term goals for themselves each morning. Goals should be created by the learner, be concrete and specific, have a specific due date, be able to be measured through self-assessment, and be reviewed and adjusted periodically by the learner (Jenson). When small steps are taken each day by the teacher and students, then long-term goals become more attainable.

#### *Assessment of Practices in Early Elementary Classrooms*

Hemmeter et al. (2001) designed a tool called *Assessment of Practices in Early Elementary Classrooms (APEEC)* for practitioners and researchers who wanted to gain a better understanding of elementary school practices in kindergarten through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade general education classrooms serving children with and without disabilities. Based on the NAEYC position statement for DAP, the scale is used to assess the physical environment, instructional context, and social context of the evaluated classes. Each broad domain contains items under them (total of 40) that are measured using a seven-point continuum with descriptors at the one, three, five, and seven anchors (Hemmeter et al.). Higher scores mean higher quality of classrooms and better outcomes for children. Interrater agreement and validity has been gathered for the APEEC, and several field-tests have been done to assure that a high level of interrater agreement can be established (Hemmeter et al.). The APEEC is designed to measure practices during a full day in a classroom, and interview questions are provided to ask the teacher afterwards.

#### *Primary Teacher Questionnaire*

The *Primary Teacher Questionnaire (PTQ)* was designed by Kenneth Smith (1992) to assess teachers about their teacher beliefs based on the NAEYC position statement on DAP in the primary grades. The three phases that the study was conducted in were item development,

initial testing and scale refinement, and field testing. The PTQ consists of 42 questions, including 18 items from a developmentally-based subscale (DAP) and 24 items from a traditionally-based subscale (TRAD). This was administered to 144 elementary and early childhood pre-service and in-service teachers. Smith stated that there was a need to differentiate those early childhood teachers who support developmentally appropriate practice from those who do not, so he developed an effective means to do so. Do primary teacher beliefs and values match the principles of NAEYC? As teachers remain in the field, they begin to construct their own conceptions of development, curriculum, and instruction, which may not align with what is known to be appropriate for young children (Smith). Teachers choose one answer for each question from a scale that contains four options (a) if you strongly disagree with the statement, (b) if you somewhat disagree with the statement, (c) if you somewhat agree with the statement, and (d) if you strongly agree with the statement.

### *Summary*

Based on the extensive review of the literature that was comprehensively analyzed and then summarized in Chapter 2, readers should ease their way through the remaining chapters with an enhanced understanding of the pertinent information needed in order to completely understand the main purpose and meaning of the thesis. Summaries of articles regarding constructivism, developmentally appropriate practices, traditional practices, the environment, theorists, and other subjects concerning teacher beliefs and practices in primary grades provide the necessary facts that form the foundation of the research study. Chapter 3 describes the methods and procedures used in this qualitative study.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### *Description of Research*

##### *Data Collection*

The *Primary Teacher Questionnaire (PTQ)* was used to determine the participants of the study. Data about the teaching practices of the teachers were collected in three ways. First, the researcher recorded observations in the form of field notes of teaching and learning by teachers and students while in the classroom. Second, the researcher interviewed the teachers, asking each one the same set of questions about his or her instructional strategies. Third, the researcher spent a single, entire school day and half of another school day in each of the three classrooms documenting, note-taking, and completing the *Assessment of Practices in Early Elementary Classrooms (APEEC)* scale that was to be used in conjunction with the interview responses and field notes.

##### *Participants*

*Sampling Criterion.* A purposeful sampling strategy was used within this qualitative study. Cider Grove Elementary School (pseudonym) was selected because the principal was very willing to allow me access into the school to conduct my study and seemed highly interested in learning about my findings. The teachers at the school are local, have college degrees, and are currently teaching in a kindergarten, first, or second grade classroom, which met the requirements needed for the *APEEC*.

*Participants.* Eight people were invited to and did participate in the study. The kindergarten, first, and second grade teachers at Cider Grove volunteered to participate in the

study and were aware of how the information would be used. There are three classes in kindergarten and second grade and two classes in first grade, so eight classroom teachers completed the *PTQ*. First, all eight teachers filled out the questionnaire about their perceptions of how they think they teach upon my initial visit to the school. Second, based upon how they answered on the *PTQ*, I chose three of the teachers for my qualitative study. I chose to use one teacher whose results classified her as “most traditional” in terms of teaching methods, one teacher whose results classified her as “most developmentally appropriate (constructivist),” and a third teacher who fell in the middle between traditional and developmentally appropriate. One was a second grade teacher named Karen (pseudonym), one was a kindergarten teacher named Linda (pseudonym), and one was a kindergarten teacher named Betty (pseudonym). Karen is considered the most traditional teacher, because out of the 24 traditional statements that were on the *PTQ*, she agreed with 19 of them and only disagreed with five. Linda scored in the middle. Betty is considered the most developmentally appropriate teacher, because out of the 18 developmentally appropriate statements, she agreed with all of them. It is in those three classrooms where I gathered my data. I used the *APEEC* to determine the correlation between the beliefs and practices as well as observed the teachers and conducted interviews.

### *Research Setting*

I spent a full day as a participant observer in the classroom of each teacher. The three teachers taught at Cider Grove Elementary, an urban public school in East Tennessee. The school population is small and consists of students who are from predominantly middle to lower income homes. Sixty-seven percent of the students are economically disadvantaged. Regarding ethnic distribution at the school, 96% of the students who attend are white, 2% are African-American, and 2% are Hispanic.

### *Background of Researcher*

I have a Bachelor of Science Degree from East Tennessee State University (ETSU) with a concentration in Early Childhood Education and a minor in Journalism. I am licensed to teach PreK-4<sup>th</sup> grade in the state of Tennessee. I have no previous relationships with anybody from Cider Grove and had never been to the school before I started my project.

### *Research Perspective*

#### *Guiding Theory*

The theoretical framework shaping this study was that of developmentally appropriate practices (DAP), which derives from The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the nation's largest professional organization of early childhood educators (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). The following statement by Bredekamp and Copple explains the true concept of DAP:

Developmentally appropriate practices result from the process of professionals making decisions about the well-being and education of children based on at least three important kinds of information and knowledge, including what is known about child development and learning, what is known about the strengths, interests, and needs of each individual child in the group, and knowledge of the social and cultural contexts in which children live. (pp. 8-9)

Throughout the process of the whole study and especially when observing, assessing, and interviewing, I was consciously aware of whether certain guiding principles of DAP were present and taking place in the classroom. These principles guided me in knowing whether or not the three teachers taught in a constructivist or traditional manner. This definition of the following points represents constructivist views that are developmentally appropriate:

1. The critical role of the teacher is to support children's development and learning.
2. The concept of classrooms or groups of children should be as communities of learners in which relationships among adults and groups of children support development and learning.
3. The role of culture in the processes of development and learning occurs in and is influenced by sociocultural contexts.
4. There is a significant role of families in early childhood education.
5. These principles are applicable to children with disabilities and other special learning and developmental needs.
6. There is importance in meaningful and contextually relevant curriculum.
7. There is a necessity of assessment practices that are authentic and meaningful for children and families.
8. There is importance in an infrastructure of policy and adequate resources are available to support delivery of high quality, developmentally appropriate programs for all children. (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997, vi)

### *Research Questions*

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of whether or not teachers are practicing what they believe to be true. Based on the review of the literature it is hypothesized that teachers who believe they teach in a developmentally appropriate way are in fact teaching constructively with their students. It is also hypothesized that teachers who believe that they teach in a traditional manner do indeed use traditional methods of teaching with their students. Therefore, I hypothesize that teachers' beliefs will have a correlation with how they

actually teach every day. My hypothesis examines the relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices in primary grades. The three questions that guided my research are as follows:

1. Are teachers' beliefs, traditional or developmentally appropriate, congruent with the way they actually practice, traditionally or constructively, in the classroom with their students?
2. How are teachers teaching constructively?
3. How is the classroom environment used in teaching and learning?

### *Research Method*

#### *Rationale for a Qualitative Design*

A qualitative research design was needed in order to fully understand the teachers' true beliefs and practices. According to Thomas (2003), "Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them" (p. 10). A multi-case study was the design for this research study. "A case study permits the researcher to reveal the way a multiplicity of factors have interacted to produce the unique character of the entity that is the subject of the research" (Thomas, p.10). Case studies allow researchers to feel as though they are intimately connecting to their subjects in an exclusive way. There will be commonalities as well as differences that will emerge by focusing on three teachers.

The focus of this study was within three classrooms. Multi-case case studies are descriptive and in-depth, seeking to understand a particular case under examination (Babbie, 2007). Qualitative research differs from quantitative in the fact that there may be no single answer that comes out of doing the study. Multiple realities usually exist based on flexible and evolving strategies; and, therefore, a definitive answer is not the main purpose of the study

(Goodwin & Goodwin, 1996). Meaning is constructed by the way the researcher chooses to participate and gather the data. Some generalizations about common characteristics of traditional teachers and constructivist teachers, as two separate groups, may be assumed based on findings from the study. However, conclusions that can be drawn must be done so with caution, understanding that not all teachers classified as traditional or constructivist behave in the same exact manner, maintaining the fact that every person is unique.

### *Research Design*

In the beginning of the study when I initially met the eight teachers, data about their beliefs was collected after they filled out the *PTQ*. “Questionnaires enable people to report information about themselves-about their life, condition, beliefs, or attitudes” (Thomas & Brubaker, 2008, p. 169). The questionnaire was a straightforward method of finding out background information of why they do what they do and what they believe. According to Thomas and Brubaker, “Beliefs refers to respondents’ knowledge and convictions about a topic” (p. 170). Many teachers fail to acknowledge their core beliefs and values about how students learn on a daily basis and instead just go through the motions of being a teacher.

Data about teachers’ practices was collected in three ways. First, I spent a full day and a half with each of the three teachers, observing them, and collecting data in the form of field notes. Second, I interviewed the three teachers during their planning time. Third, I completed the *APEEC* during the full day I was with them.

### *Field Work*

*Observations.* Observation was a technique that I used to gather the data necessary for my study. “For as long as people have been interested in studying the social and natural world around them, observation has served as the bedrock source of human knowledge” (Adler &

Adler, 1994, p. 377). Being naturally curious by character, observation is an intrinsic action that automatically occurs for me numerous times throughout a day. Therefore, the observations that I saw in the classrooms were recorded and reflected upon in the form of field notes. Field notes are records of observations or interpretations made during field work. They were extensions of what I would normally observe in my mind but not on paper when visiting a new place. I gained a firsthand experience of what it would be like to actually be a student in the classrooms I observed, which is an essential advantage of qualitative research. I was an observer as participant, which means that “the researcher has some interaction with participants but is primarily an observer from the outside” (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1996, p. 132). I sat in a corner off to the side in the classroom, the students obviously knew I was present, but I did not interact with them other than to say a few words if they asked me simple questions. Trustworthiness was confirmed by use of an external auditor, who confirmed that the observational data that were taken in the form of field notes matched what was transcribed in the study (Appendix A).

The first observation and interview experience was spent with Karen in her second grade classroom in September 2007. I also spent about 3 hours the following day in her classroom again filling in missing pieces from the assessment and taking more notes. The second observation and interview was with Betty, where I spent a day in late September 2007 in her kindergarten classroom and about 2 hours more with her the following day. The third and final observation/interview was conducted at the beginning of October 2007 in Linda’s kindergarten classroom, where I spent almost the full day and the next afternoon.

*Interviews.* “Interviewing allows the researcher to gain insights into others’ perspectives about the phenomena under study; it is particularly useful for ascertaining respondents’ thoughts, perceptions, feelings, and retrospective accounts of events” (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1996, p.

134). When investigators take the time to conduct interviews face-to-face with respondents, the researcher shows them that he or she values their opinions and is truly interested in their thoughts, ideas, and opinions. “Interviews can provide an in-depth understanding of a respondent’s motives, pattern of reasoning, and emotional reactions that is not possible with questionnaires” (Goodwin & Goodwin, p. 174). The interviews consisted of face-to-face, one-on-one contact with participants. Three interviews were conducted in the natural setting of each teacher’s classroom during her planning time at Cider Grove Elementary. The open-ended questions that I asked during the interview were:

1. How long have you been teaching, and what degree do you have?
2. Why did you become a teacher?
3. Can you explain to me the theorists and theories that guide your teaching?
4. Can you explain to me why you set up the environment like this, and how does it encourage learning?
5. How often do you display children’s work, and when do you feel it is necessary to do so?
6. How are families involved in your classroom?
7. Can you explain the instructional strategies that you use daily?

During the interview process, I noticed body language a lot from the teachers, including facial features, sighing, and moving legs and in addition picked up on the overall attitude of the respondents. Thomas and Brubaker (2008) say that attitudes have effects on how participants act. Therefore, if the teachers were not comfortable answering when I asked the questions and gave them time, I would phrase them in other ways to elicit responses. “A researcher asks for opinions on the assumption that information about people’s preferences can help explain and predict their behavior in decision-making situations” (Thomas & Brubaker, p. 170).

Throughout each individual interview, I recorded each teacher's answers on a separate piece of paper and then later copied the transcripts for them to review. To ensure trustworthiness, which is credibility and reliability, I used member-checking. Member-checking is when participants are asked to comment on the interpretation of the data to ensure credibility and accuracy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). After the interviews took place and I had the information needed, I returned to the school and gave each teacher a copy of her transcript for her to review, and then each of the three teachers signed a letter I had written, stating that she agreed what she read was true (Appendix B).

### *Procedures*

I informed the eight teachers who agreed to participate in the study of what would be involved during a meeting at Cider Grove. They each signed an informed consent document (Appendix C). I explained my purpose for the study and asked all those giving their consent to complete the *PTQ* at that time and give it back to me. This was convenient for both the teachers and me and enabled me to begin forming results to determine participants. There are 42 statements on the questionnaire and multiple choice a, b, c, or d answers. Teachers wrote their names on the questionnaire and the grade they teach, because if chosen, I would have to compare their answers to the data collected from the *APEEC*. Once the questionnaires were collected, days were set up for me to visit their classrooms and complete the *APEEC* as well as observe and interview them. Names have been changed and confidentiality kept in high regard. The procedures of this study follow the protocol of the Institutional Review Board at East Tennessee State University.

## *Measures*

### *Primary Teacher Questionnaire*

The *PTQ* by Smith (1992) is a self-report teacher beliefs scale based on the NAEYC position statement on developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) in the primary grades (Bredekamp, 1987) (Appendix D). This version consists of two subscales that relate to developmentally and traditionally-based practices. The DAP scale contains 18 items, and the TRAD scale has 24 items. The questionnaire takes approximately 20 minutes to complete. Phase I of the development of the *PTQ* involved scale development and was focused on the formation of an item pool. Phase II involved testing and refinement of an early version of the instrument. Phase III was the actual field testing of the revised *PTQ*.

All data analysis was performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS-X) (Smith, 1992). Items chosen for the *PTQ* were chosen from paired statements of appropriate and inappropriate practices for the primary grades. Then, the items were reviewed for content, consistency, and clarity. Respondents of the questionnaire use a 4-point Likert-type scale, comprising of the categories “strongly disagree,” “somewhat disagree,” “somewhat agree,” and “strongly agree.” Use of a 4-point scale results in a forced-choice response in either the developmentally based or traditionally based direction, leaving no room for a neutral response (Smith). Background information on the *PTQ* is that it was administered to 144 individuals, including 61.1% in-service teachers and 38.9% pre-service teachers. Furthermore, 61.2% had received elementary education training only, while 38.2% had received elementary plus early childhood education training. One hundred eight individuals completed data on both scales. The variables with both the *PTQ* and *APEEC* are gender, male or female; age, how old he or she is; years of experience teaching, how long the person has been a teacher; degree earned in college,

highest degree and which degree; and grade currently teaching, kindergarten through second grade.

#### *Assessment of Practices in Early Elementary Classrooms (APEEC)*

The *APEEC* by Hemmeter et al. (2001) is based on the NAEYC position statement on DAP and is used as a tool for both practitioners and researchers to use in understanding elementary school practices in K-3 general education classrooms serving children with and without disabilities. The *APEEC* instrument was used to assess the extent to which developmentally appropriate practices were used in the two kindergartens and one second grade classroom. Along with the interviews and observations, I completed the *APEEC* while in each teacher's classroom and correlated the answers with my three main research questions guiding this study. There are three broad domains used in developing the 16-item scale, which are the physical environment, instructional context, and social context. The items under each category are formatted along a 7-point continuum with descriptors at the "1," "3," "5," and "7" anchors. Each descriptor was scored as true, not true, or N/A. Each teacher received a total *APEEC* score by calculating the sum of the items that made up the measures, divided by the number of items. Consequently, higher scores were intended to reflect higher quality and more developmentally appropriate classrooms. A low score indicated inadequate teaching practices and-or a deficient classroom environment. The *APEEC* is designed to take place during a one-day observation of a classroom, with a follow-up 20-30 minute interview with the general education teacher. There is a score sheet provided that explains how to score each item and the exact definition of the item.

#### *Analysis*

Data analysis in qualitative research is an inductive process, which means that theories are developed rather than tested (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1996). In addition, multiple methods of

collecting data are used for my study, including observations, interviews, and formal assessments, so triangulation of data is performed to enhance the dependability of the information. Data were coded, reexamined, and compared for similarities and differences. The use of an outside auditor to confirm trustworthiness was employed as well as member-checking. Data were compared for similarities and differences through means of individual and cross-case analysis, which will support or fail to support the hypothesis by showing if teachers' beliefs, as determined by the PTQ responses, are represented within their practices, as determined by the interviews, observations, and *APEEC* scores, in the classrooms of a small urban school in northeast Tennessee. The analysis of the data is discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

### *Summary*

Chapter 3 contains an overview of the methodology and procedures for this study. This investigation included observations and communication with two kindergarten and one second grade teacher through an interview as well as data gathered through the *PTQ* and *APEEC*. Chapter 4 categorizes participants' responses, individually and cross-case, in an effort to answer the research questions.

## CHAPTER 4

### DATA AND ANALYSIS

#### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate primary grade teachers who are teaching in the public school system and determine whether they are teaching the way they believe they are teaching. It was my intention that this study provide a better understanding of how beliefs have an effect on practices in classrooms by teachers; in hopes they will be aware of the fact that their philosophies of education regarding how children learn and grow impact their students each day. This chapter includes the findings from the study, including the questionnaire, observation, interview, and assessment analysis. The research questions that guided this study are as follows and will attempt to be answered:

1. Are teachers' beliefs, traditional or developmentally appropriate, congruent with the way they actually practice, traditionally or constructively, in the classroom with their students?
2. How are teachers teaching constructively?
3. How is the classroom environment used in teaching and learning?

#### *Data*

Within a study, triangulation is often used to substantiate the information collected and make it more reliable and valid. Triangulation means that multiple methods are used when collecting data for the study (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1996). In this research project, teacher observations, interviews, and the *APEEC* formed the triangulation of data. Coding, a process that results in the data being organized into various categories was used. Open coding, breaking

down the data, examining carefully, comparing, and categorizing in order to identify similarities and differences, is an integral part of qualitative data analysis (Goodwin & Goodwin). The three research questions were analyzed individually and through cross-case analysis. In addition, initial data that were gathered on the *PTQ* to determine participants was used to assist in analysis of data.

#### *Primary Teacher Questionnaire Analysis*

As formerly stated in Chapter 3, the *PTQ* was taken by eight teachers at Cider Grove Elementary School; three second grade, two first grade, and three kindergarten teachers. Based upon the answers from the teachers themselves, the *PTQ* determined the degree to which the teachers believe they teach traditionally or developmentally appropriate. In other words, the answers revealed the teachers' beliefs about how children learn best. The 42-statement questionnaire took each person about 20 minutes to complete. The *PTQ* was multiple-choice and each teacher had her own score sheet. Teachers responded by choosing whether they strongly disagree, somewhat disagree, somewhat agree, or strongly agree with the statements. They placed their names and grade they teach at the top of the score sheet, so that I could determine which three teachers would be chosen. As mentioned earlier, names have been changed.

After the questionnaires and score sheets were completed, the results were analyzed and the three teachers to participate were determined. The teacher who scored most traditionally, most DAP, and the one that scored in the middle were chosen as a result of the responses on the questionnaire. Three teachers were chosen to represent the range of teaching styles from traditional to developmentally appropriate (constructivist). It was also necessary to include the teacher who fell in the middle of the traditional and DAP (constructivist) range to see if her beliefs matched her practices as well.

A score sheet was provided with the article Smith (1992), author of the *PTQ*, wrote telling specifically which statements are facts of traditional beliefs and which are facts of developmentally appropriate beliefs. This score sheet was used to tally responses to questions to determine to which degree each teacher agreed with the statements. A table was created to organize the results of each teacher's responses to determine whose beliefs were most traditional, most DAP (constructivist), and in the middle. Table 1 shows the number of questions answered traditionally or DAP (constructivist) on the *PTQ*.

**Table 1**

*Results from the Primary Teacher Questionnaire*

Teacher	Total # of Trad. Quest.	# of Trad. Quest. Agreed With	# of Trad. Quest. Disagreed With	Total # of DAP Quest.	# of DAP Quest. Agreed With	# of DAP Quest. Disagreed With
#1	24	7	17	18	14	4
#2	24	4	20	18	15	3
#3	24	8	16	18	18	0
#4	24	10	14	18	10	8
#5	24	19	5	18	14	4
#6	24	14	10	18	16	2
#7	24	4	20	18	16	2
#8	24	10	14	18	11	7

As depicted in Table 1: Teacher #5, to be referred to as Karen for the rest of this study, is considered the most traditional teacher. Out of the 24 traditional statements that were on the *PTQ*, she agreed with 19 of them and only disagreed with 5. Teacher #8, to be referred to as

Linda for the rest of this study, scored in the middle. Out of the 24 traditional questions, she agreed with 10 of them and disagreed with 14, and out of the 18 DAP statements, she agreed with 11 and disagreed with 7. Teacher #3, to be referred to as Betty for the rest of this study, is considered the most developmentally appropriate teacher, because out of the 18 DAP statements, she agreed with all of them. The most traditional, Karen; most DAP, Betty; and teacher in the middle, Linda, were chosen as participants in this qualitative research study to represent the far ends of the range and the median. Karen was contacted by e-mail to arrange for the day to begin the study in her classroom. While at the school, Linda and Betty were contacted to arrange dates for the study to continue in their classrooms.

#### *Assessment of Practices in Early Elementary Classrooms*

The *APEEC* score sheet includes the 16 statements and scoring procedures, room to write observation notes, space provided for the classroom schedule, and interview questions to ask the teachers that expound upon the main statements being asked. Three copies of the *APEEC* score sheet were used to complete the *APEEC* in each of the three teachers' classrooms. Furthermore, the *APEEC* summary score sheet is used to summarize the item-level scores and calculate the total *APEEC* score. As already mentioned in Chapter 3, there are three broad domains used in developing the 16-item scale, which are the physical environment, instructional context, and social context. The items under each category are formatted along a 7-point continuum with descriptors at the "1," "3," "5," and "7" anchors. Since the tool is based on finding out how developmentally appropriate the whole learning environment is in a primary grade classroom, a "1" means inadequate, "3" means minimal, "5" means good, and "7" means excellent and is the highest number that can be attained. Each descriptor was scored as true, not true, or N/A. The instructions on how to use the summary score sheet are:

1. Transfer each item-level score from the score sheet to the corresponding lines below.
2. Add all item-level scores and enter the sum on the corresponding line.
3. Enter the total number of items scored on the corresponding line.
4. Calculate the total *APEEC* score by dividing the sum of the item-level scores (line 2) by the total number of items scored (line 3) and enter the quotient on the corresponding line.

Karen, the “traditional teacher,” had a total *APEEC* score of 3.25, which translates to mean that she is slightly above minimal. Betty, the “developmentally appropriate” teacher, had a total *APEEC* score of 4.86, which means that she is slightly below good. Linda, the teacher that scored “in between traditional and developmentally appropriate” scored the highest with a 5, which means good. The results can be seen below in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Total APEEC Scores*

Teachers	Physical Environment		Instructional Context		Social Context.		Sum	# of Items	Total Score
Karen	16	+	18	+	18	=	52 /	16 =	3.25
Betty	13	+	39	+	21	=	73 /	15 =	4.86
Linda	19	+	37	+	19	=	75 /	15 =	5.00

## *Individual Analysis*

### *Question 1*

*Question 1:* Are teachers' beliefs, traditional or developmentally appropriate, congruent with the way they actually practice, traditionally or constructively, in the classroom with their students?

Instructional context is the focus when answering research question #1. Answers on the *PTQ*, results on the *APEEC*, observation data and interview answers are used to analyze each individual teacher in response to Question 1.

### *Karen*

#### *Primary Teacher Questionnaire*

*Instructional Context.* Results from the *PTQ* show that Karen is an extremely traditional second grade teacher. Her answers from the *PTQ* give an accurate overall account of how she believes children learn best as well as illustrates on a much smaller level which particular traditional facts are part of her educational philosophy. For example, Karen strongly agreed with the traditional statement of "Children with special needs should receive special instruction outside the regular classroom whenever possible." There are two children in her classroom who have behavior problems and require an IEP and one child who has an IEP for a learning disability. During the observation, one child with behavior problems was gone long periods of time to another room where a specialist helped him with his assignments. Karen made comments such as, "I can not do anything with him, because he requires too much attention for me to be able to help him the way he needs while still teaching the other students as well." She shared that his specialist addresses the IEP objectives in class, and she herself knows what they are but does not handle them.

Karen somewhat agreed with the traditional statement of “Instruction should consist mainly of reading groups, whole-group activities, and seat work.” This was evident in the fact that while observing in the classroom, these three instructional methods were implemented. The instruction that took place during classroom time was that of children completing worksheets in their individual seats, which was 90% of the time. What little time was left over was then divided among reading groups, free time on the computer, or listening to a story read aloud by the literacy teacher as a whole group. Karen was not engaged in direct teaching of new knowledge per se during the time of observation. The assignments the students were completing were written on the board before the children arrived in the morning, and they followed the list according to the appropriate time frame. The students did not work on any projects or manage their own play. The only learning centers available were a computer and a listening center which housed a scarce amount of equipment, such as cassette tapes and cassette recorders with headphones. Book bins were lined in a row across a table and on a shelf but were not part of a learning center. Karen met with a reading group during literacy time and the assistant met with another reading group while the rest of the students did worksheets at their desks. Work-focused peer social interaction only took place when students read books to partners.

Karen somewhat agreed with the traditional statement of “Curriculum should primarily facilitate the child’s meeting of group expectations as defined by grade level.” Karen is well aware of the state standards and what second graders should learn as evidenced by the fact that she follows a strict curriculum from a textbook in each subject. The students as a whole complete the same worksheets that are assigned to them as a whole group. The child is meeting learning expectations in a standardized format that is based upon what a typically developing second grader should know. Modifications on assignments were not made for those who have

different learning styles or are below or above grade level expectations, because everyone was completing the same pages from their workbooks.

Karen strongly disagreed with the developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) statement of “The school should be organized so that the individual teacher integrates instruction across the areas of the curriculum.” There was no evidence of integration and breadth of subjects in her classroom during the observation. Instruction was clearly divided into separate subject areas. As recently mentioned, a schedule was on the board that outlined each subject area and the time in which it would be covered for that day. There is a precise order and routine that is followed throughout each day. For example, the students completed worksheets in handwriting, then reading, math, English, and finally social studies. There was no common content among subject areas. Each subject was treated as separate with specific skills to master that do not relate to skills taught in a different subject area.

Karen somewhat agreed with the traditional statement of “For most of the time children should be expected to work quietly on their own and in teacher-led small groups.” For the majority of the day, children were expected to work quietly on their own and complete worksheets. Because no activities, demonstrations, or group projects took place during the day, children were not prompted to converse about ideas among themselves. In other words, no learning centers or stations were set up for children to acquire knowledge by problem-solving or researching information together. The tasks at hand for them were worksheets to be completed individually. The teacher-led small groups were ability-based reading groups, and Karen worked with a different group each day.

*Assessment of Practices in Early Elementary Classrooms*

*Instructional Context.* Results from the *APEEC* clearly show that Karen teaches in a traditional manner. There were six categories in the *APEEC* that measured the instructional context of the classroom. The outcome below shows how Karen scored in each category. As previously mentioned, the items under each category are formatted along a 7-point continuum with descriptors at the “1,” “3,” “5,” and “7” anchors. Because the tool is based on finding out how developmentally appropriate the whole learning environment is in a primary grade classroom, a “1” means inadequate, “3” means minimal, “5” means good, and “7” means excellent and is the highest number that can be attained. Table 3 depicts Karen’s scores on the *APEEC*.

**Table 3**

*APEEC Instructional Scores of Karen*

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Categories	Score
Use of Materials	1
Use of Computers	7
Monitoring Child Progress	4
Teacher-Child Language	1
Instructional Methods	4
Integration and Breadth of Subjects	1

---

Karen scored 18 out of 42 in overall instructional context. She scored a perfect seven in the category of computers. She scored almost in the middle for monitoring child progress and

instructional methods and received the lowest possible rating for use of materials, teacher-child language, and integration and breadth of subjects.

### *Interview Questions*

During Karen's morning planning time, I asked her seven questions in an interview. Three of the questions fall under the category of instructional context and will be discussed now, and the rest of the questions will be answered later.

1. How long have you been teaching and what degree do you have?

Karen responded, "I have been teaching 28 years and have a Bachelor of Science degree in PreK-8<sup>th</sup> grade and a Master of Education."

2. Why did you become a teacher?

Karen responded, "I became a teacher because I knew that I always wanted to teach children."

7. Can you explain the instructional strategies that you use daily?

Karen responded, "I use small groups, spiraling, reteaching, hands-on, and I incorporate computers and address many different developmental levels with books. In math, we use math workbooks, investigation, games, and computers. In language arts we use draft books, basal readers, and small reading groups. In social studies we cover the TN state standards."

### *Observations*

During the math time classroom observation, the children retrieved their large math workbook from their cubbies, took it back to their individual desks, and completed the assigned pages that were listed on the board. There was no direct-teaching of the information or review of the lesson observed. The hour devoted to math involved students completing worksheets by themselves. One boy was observed having trouble subtracting, so he used his hands to count.

Math manipulatives that were readily accessible were not available for the students to use, and I did not hear Karen mention or encourage using manipulatives.

The teacher-child language was nonexistent between Karen and her students. She did not ask questions or encourage students to inquire about problems. The only questions that students could ask would be those concerning the problems in their workbooks. No higher-order thinking questions were asked or answered, because the instructional contexts revolved around preset questions in workbooks. Karen made a comment during discussion at planning time, when the children were out of the room, which was “the problem with this class is that the students can’t think for themselves.” That was the pivotal moment that made me realize that the way in which teachers teach and guide children have a monumental effect on how they are going to learn or even if they are going to learn anything.

### *Betty*

#### *Primary Teacher Questionnaire*

*Instructional Context.* Results from the *PTQ* show that kindergarten teacher Betty was the most developmentally appropriate constructivist teacher. Her answers from the *PTQ* signify that she believes children learn best in an atmosphere that is attuned to supporting their strengths, interests, and needs based on their correct developmental levels. It is evident that her educational philosophy revolves around the belief that teachers should teach to the whole child. The method in which she conveys knowledge to the students reflects that of a constructivist educator. For example, Betty strongly agreed with the DAP statement of “Curriculum and instruction should primarily develop the child’s individual self-esteem, sense of competence, and positive feelings toward learning.” During the observation, the caring yet thorough teaching approach that Betty used toward her students resulted in them eagerly and enthusiastically

wanting to answer questions and participate in whole group lessons. The children made the effort to simply try, in many situations, without fear that their voices would be silenced or if wrong, that they would be made fun of or rejected. When the children were asked during circle time to tell her words they know that begin with the letter G, many students raised their hands and responded with answers that Betty verified as correct while simultaneously expressing her sense of pride to them. Moreover, the student of the week brings in a poster on Monday of himself or herself that describes his or her family, interests, and other fascinating facts, evidence supporting interest in the whole child, physical, emotional, social, and intellectual needs. During whole group time on the carpet, one girl shared her poster to the class. It said “All About Me!” and had many photographs on it and written descriptions under the photos. The children asked her questions and recited facts that they had learned about the girl to Betty. The girl was a little hesitant about speaking in front of everyone but was more at ease after Betty warmly communicated to her that she would do a great job and gave everyone some important tips about speaking in front of a group. This appeared to put the child at ease.

Betty somewhat agreed with the DAP statement “Instruction should consist mainly of projects, learning centers, and play managed primarily by children.” Groups of children rotated through learning centers during the literacy block of time. Three different stations with certain materials and open-ended objectives and instructions were set up in various areas of the classroom. One station was books; the other puzzles; and another spelling, which included pipe cleaners, individual dry erase boards, sand, small chalk boards, and a Smart Board on the wall. During the observation week, the children were learning about community helpers and got to take a field trip to Pizza Hut and make their own pizzas. Other activities took place in class pertaining to apples, because the children were learning about Johnny Appleseed that week as

well. Children were free to move around the room and did so frequently throughout the day. Instruction took place in many creative forms, involving play, learning centers, and field trips.

Betty strongly agreed with the DAP statement “The school should be organized so that the individual teacher integrates instruction across the areas of the curriculum.” A few activities observed integrated more than one subject into the lesson. When the children were learning about Johnny Appleseed, Betty had green, yellow, and red apples for the class to observe and then eat. She asked them numerous questions about an apple, cut it up and talked about the parts of it, counted the seeds with the students, and measured the length of the apple with a string. She let the students take turns weighing the apple on a scale to determine how many small bear manipulatives would equal its mass. All of the children tasted a piece of each apple, and then she modeled writing on chart paper a sentence for each child to finish based on his or her experience with the apples. The class determined which apple was the favorite among everyone. The class also engaged in a cooking experiment of making applesauce in a crock-pot. Therefore, math, science, social studies, and literacy were integrated into the study of Johnny Appleseed.

Betty strongly agreed with the DAP statement “Curriculum should respond primarily to individual differences in ability and interest.” Betty responded to children’s individual differences in ability and interest by keeping the curriculum active and engaging. Examples observed were songs being played multiple times during the day for those children that were musically inclined and for those that needed body movement, enhancing both cognitive and gross-motor skills. The children danced to a song about the days of the week and a song about numbers. Furthermore, the students took part in a math activity that taught them how to use grid paper. Betty explained the concept comprehensively and showed them an example of a picture that she had made on the grid paper using six orange squares. She asked them what they thought

it represented and listened to answers given by students which included a robot, cross, square, person, stop sign, and rectangle. She accepted all responses, genuinely giving positive feedback to each child, and challenged the students to make a picture using a certain number of squares, making sure that each touched at some point. The arrangements varied in creativity and difficulty, but all were compiled in the end to form a class math book. This example supported acceptance of individual differences in ability and interest.

*Assessment of Practices in Early Elementary Classrooms*

*Instructional Context.* Results from the *APEEC* clearly show that Betty teaches in a developmentally appropriate constructivist manner. Once again, a “1” means inadequate, “3” means minimal, “5” means good, and “7” means excellent and is the highest number that can be attained. Table 4 depicts Betty’s scores on the *APEEC*.

**Table 4**

*APEEC Instructional Scores of Betty*

Categories	Score
Use of Materials	7
Use of Computers	6
Monitoring Child Progress	6
Teacher-Child Language	7
Instructional Methods	7
Integration and Breadth of Subjects	6

Betty scored 39 out of 42 in the instructional context category. She received three perfect sevens and three sixes.

### *Interview Questions*

During Betty's afternoon planning time, she was asked seven questions in an interview. Three of the questions fall under the category of instructional context and will be discussed now, and the rest of the questions will be answered later.

1. How long have you been teaching and what degree do you have?

Betty responded, "It is my third year of teaching. I have a Master of Education degree." Her undergraduate degree is not in education.

2. Why did you become a teacher?

Betty responded, "I had the opportunity to volunteer in my own children's classes and teach Sunday School, so it made me want to switch careers and do it."

7. Can you explain the instructional strategies that you use daily?

Betty responded, "In math, we use hands-on manipulatives and then recording of answers and investigations. I use investigations with them that have a set curriculum. In language arts, we rotate groups, use ABC magnets, computers, listening center, Smart Board, and dry erase boards. In science, we have themes and discuss the five senses, life cycles of flowers, and take listening walks. We meet as a grade level and decide different themes. I use whole group teaching as well as give them work to do individually."

### *Observations*

A direct and obvious observation noticed while observing the class during the morning was that the children do not sit for long periods of time in one place. Instead, they are afforded the opportunity to change locations and move around when doing activities. First, Betty had group time with the children on the carpet in the morning and discussed, as a class, the weather, days of the week, and calendar, which integrated many different subjects into that time period.

Next, she read a poem to them from a large book titled, *Mice Squeak, We Speak*. She reviewed with them the job of the author and illustrator and asked them questions before beginning to read, possibly to peak their curiosity and encourage them to think about what would take place in the story. Third, the class learned about the letter G, words beginning with G, and the sound the letter G represents. They practiced writing G with their hand in the air and their finger in the carpet. The literacy block of time consisted of learning stations, which was discussed earlier. Children got to move around the room and experience reading and writing in several creative forms, including play and learning stations. Math time began with a song, and the students followed the directions in the song with their own number card. A verbal explanation of the math activity was given while students were still on the carpet and then they completed an individual activity at their table.

Later in the day, students discussed a true story that had happened while on the carpet and then worked on their draft books at their tables. The draft books are one way that Betty monitors individual child progress in writing. She explained that improvements in students' writing abilities emerge as time progresses within the school year and children are exposed to more writing opportunities as well as develop better fine-motor skills. Betty told me that she assesses her students by taking anecdotal records, using informal checklists, sending home report cards every nine weeks, and giving families midterm progress reports every four-and-a half weeks. She showed me the assessment tools as well the monitoring notebook, organized to include each child's information, consisting of alphabet recognition sheets, narrative elements, and emergent reading assessments, along with results from a beginning of the year statewide test that assesses the high frequency words, numbers, colors, names, and addresses children know. All of the previously mentioned examples were seen during her planning period. Moreover, at

the end of each day, every child goes home with a communications folder that always has a behavior chart, an example of a traditional practice, in it and frequently contains important information for parents regarding upcoming events or letters needing to be signed as well as work to keep at home. She shared that this is a consistent, informal way to keep the lines of communication open between home and school.

*Linda*

*Primary Teacher Questionnaire*

*Instructional Context.* Results from the *PTQ* show that kindergarten teacher Linda scored in the middle between developmentally appropriate and traditional. She varied greatly on the *PTQ* in her beliefs about traditional and DAP practices. Linda somewhat disagreed with the DAP statement “Children should move at their own pace in acquiring important skills in areas such as reading and math.” In areas such as reading, math, and spelling, all of the students participated in identical activities during the observation period. The ways in which they accomplished the final results were individualized based on how they chose to do it, so the process may have been unique but the product the same. It was evident that all of the children were learning identical information and were expected to understand the same facts and basically complete work that was alike. One table of children during literacy time was practicing their spelling words. The six children were practicing the spelling words by and be. They each had a file folder with the top piece cut into four horizontal strips with the inside part still connected. They placed their own piece of paper into the file and wrote under each of the four flaps. When they lifted the first flap, they were allowed to copy the word be and write it there. The next three times had to be from memory. Groups rotated and all children practiced the same spelling words

at that table. The example was evidence of children not moving at their own pace but accomplishing the same task at the same time.

Linda strongly disagreed with the traditional statement “Learning materials should be symbolic and representational.” However, even though she disagreed, there were a lot of learning materials present in the classroom for children to use that were symbolic and representational, such as commercially bought toys and food supplies in the housekeeping center. During math time, the children used manipulatives to help them count, but they were traditional materials that would normally be found in a math center, such as small bears, stickers, stamps, cubes, and colorful foam shapes. Standard art materials, consisting of crayons, markers, scissors, and glue sticks were provided for children as well. In the home living and block centers, there were ordinary toys, blocks, cars, and kitchen supplies to play with, but the resources were store-bought and familiar, typical of what is commonly present in learning centers. During the observation the children were divided into three groups during the morning to rotate stations. In one of the stations, the children were instructed to make a smoke detector. The materials provided for each child were two small white paper plates stapled together at the top and a circle sticker to place inside the plates at the bottom, representing the battery. Children could get their own crayons and make a pre-made design that was shown in the example on the table. The activity was simple and straightforward, a task to be completed leaving no room for the children to be creative or add their own unique ideas.

Linda somewhat agreed with the traditional statement “Curriculum should be primarily designed to develop the intellectual domain, stressing the acquisition of carefully defined discreet skills.” During the observation Linda was observed teaching students to spell. This was an example of teaching discreet skills. It is definitely not a holistic approach but rather a method

that emphasizes learning individual letters first and then when accomplished successfully, children learn to spell whole words. During the observation, it was shared that kindergarten teachers use a program called Wilson that introduces 2 new letters a week to the children. During the observation students were learning the letter E. Linda wrote the letter E on the board and explained how to write it correctly and then explained whether or not the lines touched, in her words, the sky, plane, grass, or dirt. The sky represented the top line on the paper, the plane represented the middle line, the grass represented the bottom, and the dirt represented the very bottom. Uppercase and lowercase were demonstrated on the board by her, and the children practiced with their fingers in the air as they stood and stretched. Children also practiced saying the sound the letter E represents.

#### *Assessment of Practices in Early Elementary Classrooms*

*Instructional Context.* Results from the *APEEC* clearly show that Linda teaches in a constructivist manner. Once again, a “1” means inadequate, “3” means minimal, “5” means good, and “7” means excellent and is the highest number that can be attained. Table 5 depicts Linda’s scores on the *APEEC*.

**Table 5**

*APEEC Instructional Scores of Linda*

Categories	Score
Use of Materials	7
Use of Computers	4
Monitoring Child Progress	6
Teacher-Child Language	7
Instructional Methods	7
Integration and Breadth of Subjects	6

Linda scored 37 out of 42 in the instructional context category. She received three perfect sevens, two sixes, and one four. The reason she received a 4 in the subcategory of computers is because children only use the computers to play educational games or reinforce a skill, but not for three or more distinct purposes.

*Interview Questions*

During Linda’s afternoon planning time, I asked her seven questions in an interview. Three of the questions fall under the category of instructional context and will be discussed now, and the rest of the questions will be answered later.

1. How long have you been teaching and what degree do you have?

Linda responded, “I have been teaching for 16 years. I have a Bachelor of Science degree in Education, PreK-8<sup>th</sup> grade.”

2. Why did you become a teacher?

Linda responded, “I became a teacher because I thought it would be fun, and I wanted to make a difference in the lives of children.”

7. Can you explain the instructional strategies that you use daily?

Linda responded, “In math, we use investigations that start with a focused whole group lesson and then in small groups the children have choices. They use manipulatives and learn counting and patterns. They do science or social studies every day, and it is incorporated into the literacy centers. On Fridays we have a review of the activities.”

*Observations*

Linda received a score of seven in the category of teacher-child language. Out of all the items on the *APEEC*, Linda scored the highest in this category. During story time Linda read a book titled, *Dinner at the Panda Palace*. She began asking questions before she even opened the book. “What time of day is it in this story? What does the author do? What does the illustrator do?” The children reviewed facts about books. As she read more pages in the story, the children realized that it was a number book. Linda said, “How many hyenas are there?” and the students exclaimed, “Seven!” Next, she said, “Well, if there are seven, what number do you think will come next?” The children shouted, “Eight!” Also, a lot of the words in the book rhymed, so she reviewed what rhyming meant as well. She read the pages from the story and discussed other concepts that arose. This is an example of mini-lessons within the main lessons which were observed all through the day in her classroom. She demonstrated a keen awareness of how to take full advantage of the complete attention she receives from the children. Linda is also conscious of how to peek their curiosity when she does have their attention, which lengthens the teachable moments into much more than moments and more like spans of time that allow a connection to occur between their current knowledge and their potential knowledge, as shown in the math examples in the next paragraph. Fortunately in this classroom environment it seems as though there is no set limit on the expectations that should be met, which serves as gain for

students. It was observed that Linda accepts many different answers when appropriate and prompts children to elaborate on their first responses.

In Linda's classroom, the math block of time was divided into two parts, the whole group lesson first and independent work at two tables afterwards. Half of the students went to one math table to work with Linda, and the rest of the class worked at another table with the student teacher. At the table where Linda was guiding the learning, small plastic containers with materials in them sat in the middle. The containers consisted of counting bears, cubes, foam shapes, brightly colored stickers, crayons, and stamps with ink pads. Each child had a blank piece of white paper and pencil and was asked the question, "What way can you represent 17?" The question was phrased in an open-ended manner that left room for the children to be creative in their answers. It was required that students show on their paper how they would represent 17 by writing one through 17 in addition to how they would tangibly represent it.

For example, one girl glued 17 different foam shapes onto her paper and wrote in pencil under each shape a number in chronological order. A boy used 17 stickers and then wrote under each sticker a number. Linda noticed that one child was trying to draw 17 little people on his paper and struggling to keep up with the number, so she kindly said to him, "Maybe you should do something besides drawing people?" He agreed and kept the kids he had drawn but finished the activity by using stickers. One boy drew 17 cubes on his piece of paper and numbered them; Linda praised him but also prompted him to do more by saying, "Now that you have drawn 17 cubes, see if you can stack 17 cubes on your paper and build a tower." After his tower was built, she came back to him and asked, "Where could you go to compare your tower to one in our classroom?" The boy said the other tower at the board, so he took his tower and stood it up beside it, came back to the table and told her, "They are the exact same thing!" With only nine

students at the table, Linda was able to observe the students and focus in on their specific needs and abilities. She saw that one boy had completed the task perfectly, so she sat down beside him and asked, “How many noses do we have in the room? How many heads? How many mouths?” He kept answering correctly 17, and then told her, “We have 17 belly buttons in the room!” “That’s right Adam,” she replied. This was an example of open lines of communication where children received immediate, positive feedback that enabled them to know whether they were mastering the skills.

### *Question 2*

#### *Question 2: How are teachers teaching constructively?*

Social context is the focus when answering research question #2. Answers on the *PTQ*, results on the *APEEC*, observation data and interview answers are used to analyze each individual teacher in response to Question 2.

### *Karen*

#### *Primary Teacher Questionnaire*

*Social Context.* Karen somewhat agreed with the traditional statement of “Grades are a better motivator of children than is the acquisition of competence.” Never was it conveyed to the children that learning is a lifelong process or the acquisition of knowledge is a goal that should be strived for every day or even that learning is fun. Children knew what was expected of them and knew that they had to complete assignments or consequences would take place. Karen and the assistant frequently checked off on the clipboard who had finished his or her work and wrote grades in the grade book. The students are aware of what they have to complete each day, and it was observed that the work will be graded, so they better do a good job. The assistant

continually walked around the classroom the whole morning in search of children who had finished their worksheets.

Karen somewhat agreed with the traditional statement of “Primarily, teachers should motivate children’s behavior through the careful use of rewards and punishments in the classroom.” A behaviorist approach was used in managing classroom behavior rather than a positive discipline or constructivist approach. This was very apparent throughout the day when Karen continually verbally warned children of the consequences that would happen when they misbehaved. The system she used for disciplining children consisted of tickets. The students are able to accumulate up to three tickets a day for good behavior and working well in class or they would lose tickets if they misbehaved or did not do their work or stay on task. There is a chart on a wall in the room that explains the prizes children can earn with a certain amount of tickets. Some examples of prizes that children can win are small stuffed animals, prizes from the treasure chest, and a peanut butter picnic. It was reported by Karen that children can save their tickets until they want to buy something they like. Karen shared that one girl saved 25 tickets and chose to have a peanut butter party the day before the observation took place. Karen shared that she brought in a tablecloth, peanut butter candy, jar of peanut butter, cookies, and other items related to peanut butter. The child ate and enjoyed her reward in the presence of the rest of the class. Alternatively, as the ticket chart was observed, one boy who was in trouble most of the day looked at the chart and said during the observation, “I’ll never have enough tickets saved to get anything good.” He appeared frustrated with himself because of the idea that he couldn’t get something. These are examples of the use of rewards and punishments.

Karen somewhat disagreed with the DAP statement “Teachers should deal with parents mainly informally, encouraging them to participate in the school, classroom, and at home.”

Karen did say that she had met at least one parent of every child except for one child. She said that families are allowed to visit the classroom anytime, but they usually do not and are not very involved in their child's education. No parents or families volunteer on a regular basis. She reported that she communicates to them through mid-term progress reports, report cards every 9 weeks, daily communication folders, and family conferences once a year and more if needed. She also has a website and sends a newsletter home every 2 weeks. When talking with her about this subject, she gave the impression that she does not go out of her way to encourage parents to participate with their child at school or at home. Karen did say she is there for them if they want to contact her, but other responses indicated lines of communication and a solid relationship with the families did not appear to be a top priority for her.

Karen somewhat disagreed with the DAP statement "Primarily, teachers should build on children's internal motivation." This statement is one that completely characterizes the constructivist approach. If teacher's build upon children's internal motivation and their current knowledge, then students are interested in learning and develop a love for it. However, during observations Karen did not give children choices about what they would learn or opportunities to discuss with the class about their interests. When asked if children ever help make any decisions that affect the whole class, she said that the class gets to vote on choosing t-shirts. There were no themes, projects, or special interest topics that were being learned during the observation period. It was written on the board for the day that they would learn about fire safety, which was a school wide unit, but they did not. Rather, she focused on students learning isolated skills in math, English, handwriting, science, and social studies with no integration among subjects. The curriculum consisted of what came next in the notebook for each subject. There was no opportunity for children to make choices.

## *Assessment of Practices in Early Elementary Classrooms*

*Social Context.* Results from the *APEEC* clearly reveal Karen's traditional style. There were six categories in the *APEEC* that measured the social context of the classroom. The outcome below shows how Karen scored in each category. As previously mentioned, "1" means inadequate, "3" means minimal, "5" means good, and "7" means excellent and is the highest number that can be attained. Table 6 depicts Karen's scores on the *APEEC*.

**Table 6**

### *APEEC Social Scores of Karen*

Categories	Score
Children's Role in Decision Making	2
Participation of Children with Disabilities in Classroom Activities (if applicable):	6
Social Skills	2
Diversity	2
Appropriate Transitions	4
Family Involvement	2

Karen scored 18 out of 42 in the social context category. She received four twos, one four, and one six.

### *Interview Questions*

During Karen's morning planning time, she was asked seven questions in an interview. Two of the questions fall under the category of social context and will be discussed now, and the remaining questions will be answered later.

3. Can you explain to me the theorists and theories that guide your teaching?

Karen responded that her theory is, “100% of students will be engaged in effective learning 100% of the time.” This is the school’s vision statement which was hanging on the wall. She did not name any theorists that guide her teaching or a theory from a theorist.

6. How are families involved in your classroom?

Karen responded, “Families are involved in my classroom when they come to parties, field day, lunch, Reader’s Theater, and volunteer for children to practice reading to them. They also come on Math night, when the second grade sponsors the event in the child’s classroom and families learn what their children are learning and get tips on how to help them at home.”

*Observations*

In addition to prizes awarded for collecting enough tickets, the students get to go outside and play each afternoon if they have not lost a certain number of points. When it was time for recess, on the day of the observation, the whole class formed a straight line, and walked through the school and down three flights of stairs to the outside exit. There was a classroom on the bottom floor where Karen said students would go and sit if they had lost their privilege to play. As the class stood on the flight of stairs in a long, single row, she held her clipboard and one-by-one told each child out loud whether he or she had made the cut as they reached the bottom step. Karen declared, “You have minus one, you have minus three, you are okay, you almost didn’t make it, you have minus four.” She also proclaimed, “Isabelle, one more and you couldn’t go outside!” Two groups soon formed of the students who got to go outside and those who did not, which were five of them who spent 30 minutes with the counselor finishing work. After recess was over, the class that participated in recess picked up the students from the counselor and walked back to the classroom.

*Betty*

*Primary Teacher Questionnaire*

*Social Context.* Betty strongly agreed with the DAP statement “Teachers can most effectively promote children’s social-emotional development by allowing peers to interact to make cooperative choices among appropriate activities.” Betty was aware that when children are allowed to work together and make choices, they are more likely to be fully engaged in the learning and at the same time develop responsibility and understand collaboration. During the observation children were observed talking amongst each other and discussing how to work a puzzle together at one learning station. The children asked each other questions and reasoned in their minds whether to take the advice of others. Betty gave the students opportunities to work together and bounce ideas off of each other throughout the day.

Betty somewhat disagreed with the traditional statement “Primarily, teachers should motivate children’s behavior through the careful use of rewards and punishments in the classroom.” It was observed that her students were well behaved and attentive throughout the observation. She did however have a stop light poster on the wall that had clothes pins with each child’s name on one clipped to the bottom green light. There were four clothes pins on the yellow light and none on the red. When children misbehaved, their clothes pin moved up to the next color and they received a consequence. She shared during the observation, “I hardly ever have to use it.” She never mentioned the traffic light during the day nor was it used as a threat. It wasn’t even noticed until the afternoon. The children managed their own behavior and were friendly towards one another. A points system was not observed, in which children tried to earn points to win prizes. They did however have a daily behavior chart in their communications folder that went home each afternoon, and it was marked with checks and stickers as to how the

child behaved that day. Parents had to return it signed. Observed during morning group time were the children reciting aloud the six guidelines that they agreed upon themselves in the first week of school in order to be reminded of what is expected of them for the day. On the poster board containing the guidelines, each child signed his or her name at the bottom stating that he or she consents to following all of them every day. The guidelines state, "I will do my personal best, I will tell the truth, I will use kind words, I will be an active listener, I will keep my hands and feet to myself, and I will have fun!" This is an example of a developmentally appropriate constructivist approach which allows children to have a personal investment in the decision, so they are likely to adhere to the principles and realize that their opinion counts.

Betty strongly agreed with the DAP statement "Teachers should deal with parents mainly informally, encouraging them to participate in the school, classroom, and at home." Families are encouraged to visit the classroom and some parents do on a regular basis as reported by Betty. Some volunteer each week to work with individual children on reading. There is a kindergarten book club and once a month, parents visit the classroom to read with their child and then stay and eat lunch with him or her. Parental assistance is encouraged when special events occur or elaborate activities are going to take place in the classroom. For instance, when children made gingerbread houses during Christmas, parent volunteers assisted children in making them, according to Betty. Betty also reported she sends home notes with children and calls families on the phone to talk about their children when the news is positive or negative.

#### *Assessment of Practices in Early Elementary Classrooms*

*Social Context.* Results from the *APEEC* show that Betty is in between traditionalism and constructivism in the social category. There were six subcategories in the *APEEC* that measured the social context of the classroom. The outcome below shows how Betty scored in

each category. As previously mentioned, “1” means inadequate, “3” means minimal, “5” means good, and “7” means excellent and is the highest number that can be attained. Table 7 depicts Betty’s scores on the *APEEC*.

**Table 7**

*APEEC Social Scores of Betty*

Categories	Score
Children’s Role in Decision Making	4
Participation of Children with Disabilities in Classroom Activities (if applicable):	NA
Social Skills	7
Diversity	2
Appropriate Transitions	6
Family Involvement	2

Betty scored 21 out of 35 in the social context category. She received one perfect seven, one six, one four, and two two’s. Even though Betty encourages families to be involved in her classroom and provides opportunities to do so, she received a two in that subcategory because family conferences only take place once a year and not two times. Also, diversity was not observed to be a part of the classroom environment.

*Interview Questions*

During Betty’s afternoon planning time, she was asked seven questions in an interview. Two of the questions fall under the category of social context and will be discussed now, and the remaining two questions will be answered later.

3. Can you explain to me the theorists and theories that guide your teaching?

Betty responded, “I follow the theory of multiple intelligences.” She did not specifically say Howard Gardner, but she said that she tries to incorporate all of the intelligences into activities throughout the day. She said, “For example, in literacy groups, we use five different intelligences.”

6. How are families involved in your classroom?

Betty responded, “Families are involved when they participate in kindergarten parent orientation, open house, kindergarten book club, special events, math night, and when they volunteer to read with children in the classroom.”

### *Observations*

There were no forms of diversity observed anywhere in Betty’s classroom, resulting in a two in that subcategory. She did not communicate a biased perspective through statements, displays, or activities, but rather diversity was not discussed at all or present in the classroom through materials or other forms of information. She commented that one child in her class is Muslim but that no issues have arisen due to that fact. Most of the children in her class are of Caucasian origin. It appears the students are used to seeing other students of the same race and ethnicity every day and are not exposed to people of different backgrounds, so diversity information integrated throughout daily activities or seen across multiple subject areas would be advantageous for the students and help them learn about different cultures and ways of life. Opening children’s eyes to diverse people and instilling in them the knowledge needed to respect all people for who they are as a human being was definitely lacking in Betty’s classroom.

Regarding appropriate transitions, the students in Betty’s class demonstrated self-sufficiency and were also alerted by Betty to where they had to be next. She provided advanced notice about all upcoming transitions within the classroom and those taking place outside of the

classroom. Children knew the routine of what the expectations were for the morning when they entered the classroom. They independently put away their belongings, moved their lunch tag, completed a handwriting page, and then sat on the carpet reading a book as they waited for calendar time to begin. There was a poster in the room that had children's names beside a job title for the week. Each child had a role and therefore assisted in helping the day run smoothly and efficiently. Music was also a major contributor in helping the transitions between activities occur in an orderly fashion. When children heard certain songs, they knew it was time to clean-up and move into a different activity. A daily classroom schedule posted on the wall, and reviewed with the children, as well as a related arts schedule with pictures on the wall, were other examples of evidence to show children were not confused as to what to do next.

*Linda*

*Primary Teacher Questionnaire*

*Social Context.* Linda somewhat disagreed with the traditional statement "The teacher's primary goal regarding children's behavior should be to establish and maintain teacher classroom control." There were no major behavior issues with children in Linda's class on the observation day. It appeared the children were taught to regulate their own emotions, learned life skills and also learned appropriate ways to handle difficult situations. During whole group time on the carpet, she discussed with them good character traits by using a black and white photograph of two boys. One boy was holding a ball, and it was evident that he had taken it from the boy who was not holding anything. Linda gave the children time to observe the photograph and then asked them questions about the situation. She started off the conversation by asking, "What do you do when somebody grabs a toy away from you?" One child raised his hand and answered, "Use an 'I' message!" Another student said, "Tell the teacher!" And a third child said, "Take

the ball back!” Linda posed two other suggestions to the students that they had not thought of, which were play together and share and take turns. Next, she asked the class to agree on the top three answers to solve the issue. The class decided that if the dilemma happened to them, they would first calm down, second use an “I” message and third play together. The students repeated the three answers in order out loud. The discussion continued with Linda asking the students, “What can the child do to calm down?” Three separate answers from students were take three deep breaths, count to five, and tell yourself to calm down. These are examples that Linda uses a constructivist approach in helping the students learn to solve their own problems in appropriate ways. She gave them a chance to talk about their feelings and guided them through the process of finding suitable resolutions on their own, which empowers them to believe in themselves and gain independence.

Linda strongly agreed with the traditional statement “Teachers can most effectively promote children’s social-emotional development by consistently using rewards and praise to give feedback about the appropriateness of children’s behavior.” Even though Linda used positive discipline approaches with the children sometimes, she also threatened the students with a use of a ticket system. There was a chart on the side of the filing cabinet that had a card with each child’s name on it and on the card were a certain amount of little boxes to get filled with check marks. To go along with this chart was a cloth hanging on another wall with pockets that had each child’s name on a pocket and four tickets in each slot. Students had to pull a ticket if they did not follow the rules. There were consequences for each ticket that was pulled, such as five minutes off of play time. However, students received a check mark on their card for each ticket still in their pocket. When the card was filled with 20 check marks, then students were able to choose a prize from the treasure chest. Because they could receive up to four check

marks a day, students had the potential of getting a prize from the treasure box every Friday. At the end of each day as students were gathering their belongings from their cubbies and getting ready to go home, Linda announced each child's name from the chart and asked him or her how many tickets he or she had remaining and then proceeded to make the check marks based on the answer. Students had to tell her out loud in front of their peers how many tickets they had. She made it known that students should want to do a good job during the day, so that they can receive their check marks, because check marks mean a prize. This practice is representative of her response to a traditional approach to children's behavior.

Linda strongly agreed with the DAP statement "The child is best viewed as a unique person with an individual pattern and timing of growth and development." A constructivist teacher recognizes the crucial fact that each child develops at his or her own rate and that no two children are alike. Linda is aware that every child has his or her own strengths, interests, and needs, which is a DAP philosophy. An example to support this during the observation is the students were starting a unit on fire safety, and Linda wanted to know what information each child knew on the subject. She gave them a preassessment test that would allow her make future decisions about the curriculum. She divided the class into three groups and rotated the groups during literacy time, so about six students were at the table at one time. She gave them each a test with multiple choice answers. Linda read the questions aloud to them, but each question also had pictures to help the child better comprehend the question. One of the questions was, "Which is the safest bathtub to get in?" Children circled their choice between one where dad has checked the temperature or one where you just get in. Linda said that at the culmination of the unit, she would give them a post-test to assess their knowledge again in hopes that they knew more.

*Assessment of Practices in Early Elementary Classrooms*

*Social Context.* Results from the *APEEC* clearly show that Linda scored in the middle between traditional and constructivist. There were six categories in the *APEEC* that measured the social context of the classroom. The outcome below shows how Linda scored in each subcategory. As previously mentioned, “1” means inadequate, “3” means minimal, “5” means good, and “7” means excellent and is the highest number that can be attained. Table 8 depicts Linda’s scores on the *APEEC*.

**Table 8**

*APEEC Social Scores of Linda*

Categories	Score
Children’s Role in Decision Making	2
Participation of Children with Disabilities in Classroom Activities (if applicable):	NA
Social Skills	7
Diversity	2
Appropriate Transitions	6
Family Involvement	2

Linda scored 19 out of 35 in the social context category. She received one perfect seven, one six, and three two’s. Even though Linda encourages families to be involved in her classroom and provides opportunities to do so, she received a two in that subcategory because family conferences only take place once a year and not two times.

### *Interview Questions*

During Linda's afternoon planning time, she was asked seven questions in an interview. Two of the questions fall under the category of social context and will be discussed now, and the remaining two questions will be answered later.

3. Can you explain to me the theorists and theories that guide your teaching?

Linda responded, "Every child is unique and different. One approach doesn't work with every child. I use a variety of practices." She failed to mention any names of theorists when asked again.

6. How are families involved in your classroom?

Linda responded, "Parents come into the classroom and help with reading. We have a kindergarten book club once a month, and parents come in and get a free book. They also listen to the teachers talk about tips for helping children read. At the end of the time they read with their child."

### *Observations*

In Linda's classroom overall, it was observed that children did not make many choices. There were a variety of learning stations to choose from at certain points throughout the day, but Linda placed children in groups herself, and there were exact procedures in how to accomplish the activities. In other words, there were no open-ended activities or experiments observed. The math lessons were constructivist in nature by allowing children to build upon their prior knowledge, but other lessons were not. Students did not participate in projects where they worked with one another to create something as a team. She did not discuss building a sense of community or have team meetings. Children did work well with each other though. They traveled around in small groups numerous times during the day, but their assignments were

already laid out for them and did not involve needing to collaborate with each other. It appears that from an outsider looking in for a short amount of time, one may view the class as constructivist. However, developmentally appropriate constructivist practices, such as children making their own decisions and regulating their own behaviors positively were only sometimes observed. At the end of the day when it was time to play, the children did get to choose their own center.

### *Question 3*

*Question 3: How is the classroom environment used in teaching and learning?*

Physical environment is the focus when answering research question #3. Answers on the *PTQ*, results on the *APEEC*, observation data and interview answers are used to analyze each individual teacher in response to Question 3.

*Karen*

### *Primary Teacher Questionnaire*

*Physical Environment.* Karen somewhat agreed with the traditional statement of “Teacher preparation time should be used primarily to prepare the materials used in seatwork and teacher-assigned activities.” Instead of using the planning period, which was an hour, to prepare the physical learning environment for hands-on activities, it was observed that Karen read the newspaper and ate popcorn. When asked when she planned her lessons for the day, she said that she comes in early in the morning and gets ready for the day before the children arrive. Because students do not participate in hands-on activities or projects and only do worksheets, it appears there is not much planning time needed. Lessons are taught chronologically out of workbooks; so therefore, it is automatically understood what will come next. She did not have any reason to prepare the environment differently during her planning time because children were not observed

using manipulatives or participating in activities that require time to gather supplies and organization for the activity.

Karen somewhat agreed with the traditional statement “Children should be assigned permanent personal space such as a desk where they are expected to work quietly by themselves.” Individual student desks were situated in rows facing both the teacher’s desk at the front of the classroom and dry erase board behind it. There was another large desk and work area on the left side of the room. There were natural borders surrounding her space around the desk at the side of the room, like a computer and filing cabinet, which alluded to the fact that nobody was allowed to go near the vicinity. Being near the area gave off a feeling of “do not enter!” There was a large portion of the room which was unused. It appeared the teacher wanted her space away from the students. Within this section of the room behind Karen’s desk and chair was plenty of unused counter space and a sink. The counter was completely bare. This could possibly be an ideal center for science or art. Based on how the students’ individual desks were placed during the observation it appeared that she values authority and control, characteristics of a teacher who teaches traditionally.

#### *Assessment of Practices in Early Elementary Classrooms*

*Physical Environment.* Results from the *APEEC* clearly show that Karen’s classroom environment is set up to represent that of a traditional teacher. There were four categories in the *APEEC* that measured the physical environment of the classroom. The outcome below shows how Karen scored in each category. As previously mentioned, “1” means inadequate, “3” means minimal, “5” means good, and “7” means excellent and is the highest number that can be attained. Table 9 depicts Karen’s scores on the *APEEC*.

**Table 9**

*APEEC Physical Environment Scores of Karen*

Categories	Score
Room Arrangement	2
Display of Child Products	1
Classroom Accessibility	6
Health and Classroom Safety	7

Karen scored 16 out of 28 in the physical environment category. She received the lowest scores for room arrangement and display of child products, and the highest scores for classroom accessibility and health and classroom safety.

*Interview Questions*

During Karen’s morning planning time, she was asked seven questions in an interview. The remaining two questions fall under the category of physical environment and will be discussed.

3. Can you explain to me why you set up the environment like this, and how does it encourage learning?

Karen responded that she sets up the environment like it is to be “accommodating for substitute teachers, visitors, and those needing to know the names of students.” She said that it is easier for substitute teachers if desks are in rows because they will easily be able to find children and know their names.

6. How often do you display children’s work, and when do you feel it is necessary to do so?

Karen replied, “I display children’s work for PTA open house and when they do Reader’s Theater. Also, when students publish a new piece of work and I place the old pieces in a file.”

### *Observations*

In Karen’s classroom, there were no child products displayed in the room. The walls were almost completely bare, but what did take up some space on bulletin boards and a couple of walls were teacher-made reminders for students, diagrams, guidelines, number charts, alphabet, calendars, and maps. They were all commercially bought or made by the teacher. Children’s artwork was found nowhere in the room nor was there any original work made by students. Writings, papers, group projects, structures, sculptures, or books produced by children were not present in the room. Outside of the classroom in the hallway, each child did have a story hanging on the wall.

The classroom was clean and healthy, and first aid equipment was kept inside the classroom. Karen said she was certified in first aid and CPR, and first aid manuals and information on what do to in a case of an emergency were present in the room. Children’s basic medical and emergency information was kept in a red folder inside the classroom, and more detailed information was kept with the school nurse as reported by Karen. The desks and furniture inside the classroom were appropriate for children’s sizes, and children could independently access the materials, games, and books located on the one book shelf. However, the room arrangement did make it feel as though it was crowded, and it was observed that children had difficulty navigating around each others’ desks. The classroom space was not designed for efficiency in mind; there was no flow. The room was divided into four main areas: computer center, teacher’s desk area, students’ desks, and carpet area at front of room with Karen’s other desk in front of the dry erase board. The closet was organized with children’s

belongings and extra teacher resources. Karen's classroom looks and feels sparse to the observer. There is not a wide assortment of manipulatives for children to choose from. The overall feeling in the room is bare; not many materials at all besides colorful bins of books.

*Betty*

*Primary Teacher Questionnaire*

*Physical Environment.* Betty strongly disagreed with the traditional statement "Teacher preparation time should be used primarily to prepare the materials used in seatwork and teacher-assigned activities." During the observation time with Betty she had a planning period. She was observed to be busy arranging the environment, assessing students' work, writing notes to parents, and getting the afternoon activities ready for when the children returned from their related arts classes. She shared that she uses all of the time each day for planning lessons and getting the classroom in order. Once a week during the planning period, all three of the kindergarten teachers meet together and plan lessons and themed units. The children hardly participated in seat work throughout the day. Seat work is interwoven with other instructional strategies. During one of the planning periods, Betty examined the crock-pot full of applesauce; stirred it; got bowls, napkins, and spoons ready; poured it into individual cups to begin cooling; cut apples into slices; cleaned tables; wrote on chart paper; got her camera ready for taking photos; made copies of the family newsletter; and checked the communications folders. She remained active and busy, just like the atmosphere observed in her classroom.

Betty somewhat disagreed with the traditional statement "Children should be assigned permanent personal space such as a desk where they are expected to work quietly by themselves." As a constructivist teacher, Betty values the opportunity to have three large group tables in her class, where children can sit among their peers and collaborate with one another

during activities. It was observed that the tables take up less space than do individual desks in rows and function well in the room, providing ample amount of room for children to spread their materials out and work without feeling cramped. Students had a chance to share their manipulatives, play games, and work puzzles together. The furniture in the room is appropriate for the students' sizes and arranged in a way that allows children to easily move around the room.

*Assessment of Practices in Early Elementary Classrooms*

*Physical Environment.* Results from the *APEEC* clearly show that Betty's classroom environment is on its way to becoming more constructivist but is not quite there yet. There were four categories in the *APEEC* that measured the physical environment of the classroom. The outcome below shows how Betty scored in each subcategory. As previously mentioned, "1" means inadequate, "3" means minimal, "5" means good, and "7" means excellent and is the highest number that can be attained. Table 10 depicts Betty's scores on the *APEEC*.

**Table 10**

*APEEC Physical Environment Scores of Betty*

Categories	Score
Room Arrangement	2
Display of Child Products	2
Classroom Accessibility	7
Health and Classroom Safety	2

Betty scored 13 out of 28 in the physical environment category. She received three low scores for room arrangement, display of child products, and health and classroom safety. Room arrangement received a score of two because besides the carpeting there were no soft furnishings

in the room. Display of child products received a score of two because the few child products found in the room were not changed at least monthly. Health and classroom safety received a score of two because Betty reported that children's medical and emergency information is kept in the clinic and not in the room. There is first aid equipment in the room, and a phone and walkie-talkies in the room, but first aid manuals or information is not kept in the room, and in addition, her first aid and CPR certification is expired.

### *Interview Questions*

During Betty's afternoon planning time, she was asked seven questions in an interview. The remaining two questions fall under the category of physical environment and will be discussed.

3. Can you explain to me why you set up the environment like this, and how does it encourage learning?

Betty responded, "I like to have a whole group area and individual areas. I've tried to make materials accessible, and I have learning stations. I am getting ready to have a plan sheet, so that the children will rotate centers more independently, and it will go smoother. My responsibility is to follow the curriculum map."

6. How often do you display children's work, and when do you feel it is necessary to do so?

Betty responded, "I have children's artwork displayed in the hallway usually. There is a word wall in the classroom, and each child is responsible for a letter. I select the pieces of work when we do a theme or when the students write a story."

### *Observations*

There were two empty bulletin boards in Betty's classroom. When asked about this, she responded by saying that she would fill one when the students publish a story. In addition, there were hardly any child products displayed in the classroom. There were definitely no three-dimensional pieces, and there was no evidence in the classroom that children participate in art projects. These observations are in contrast to a developmentally constructivist approach. Betty's classroom had a lot of commercially bought products on display around the room, such as birthday month posters, calendars, a job chart, number line, alphabet, and guidelines. There was a word wall that took up a large portion of one wall. Words that children had already learned were placed on the wall alphabetically. The word wall in Betty's room was partially created by the students themselves. Each child was responsible for a letter. Inside the letter squares, there contains the letter, a word, a sentence with the word, an object that starts with the letter in a Ziploc bag, name of a student in the class that begins with that letter, and a photo of the student. This was definitely an appropriate way of giving students the opportunity to be involved in displays within the room. Moreover, the students had also created a class book that sat on a shelf with other books. Each child made a page that said, "My name is \_\_\_\_\_!" The page was decorated and had a photo of the child on it. The colorful construction paper pages were laminated and bound together with rings through the hole punches. However, those two items do not change monthly and besides those, there were no other products displayed.

Betty's computer center was located against the wall, with three computers at one table and three computers at another table. Between the tables was a large piece of carpet that provided space for children to learn with manipulatives and use the Smart Board on the wall. Betty had her desk against a wall in the middle of the room, but it was definitely not a focal point, and she never sat at it during the day while the students were in the classroom.

Environmental print was appropriately placed around the room as most all things were labeled with written words and pictures, like soap, sink, counter, table, computer, and book. There was a restroom located in the room for children to use whenever they needed to and a sink area that children sporadically used. Lacking were specific centers with distinct objectives. For example, there was a large plastic tub with blocks in it, but it was not a block center. Learning stations were set up frequently during the day by Betty when she created them with her resources, but in regards to actual centers that are set up permanently for children to play in, computer and listening centers were the only ones available.

*Linda*

*Primary Teacher Questionnaire*

*Physical Environment.* Linda somewhat agreed with the DAP statement “Children should be allowed to use space flexibly to pursue a variety of learning activities alone or in small groups.” Since Linda demonstrates constructivist characteristics, she knows that certain spaces in the learning environment are more conducive than others for children to maximize their potential in forming new knowledge. Consequently, children rotated learning stations frequently and moved from the carpet to the group tables several times during the day. Also, an appropriate listening center was provided in an area of the classroom that invited children to sit in the bean bag chairs and read or complete work at their own pace. Linda’s room has a clearly defined space for a relaxation area including soft furnishings. She also had carpet squares available for the children to use. During the observation, the students were learning about community helpers and discussing what it would be like to work in a restaurant. Besides that, they were also learning about fire safety. During center time, the home living center was turned into a restaurant, and the students created their own environment in which they could experience

working in a restaurant. They creatively used the materials provided to transform the areas into a place they imagined would be fun and entertaining. Students took each other's orders and cooked the food. They played fireman and firewoman in the block center and battled blazes in houses that students built from the blocks. Fireman uniforms were provided for them to wear.

Linda somewhat disagreed with the traditional statement "Children should be assigned permanent personal space such as a desk where they are expected to work quietly by themselves." There were three large group tables in Linda's room for children to work at intermittently throughout the day. There was a small plastic bucket placed in the middle of each round table that served as a trash can. Students placed their paper scraps and trash in the bucket, and one person emptied it occasionally. This was an example of a sense of community that was felt among the students during the observation in this classroom. One child from each table would retrieve the art materials from the counter in the room and bring them back to the table for all to share. The storage for materials in children's work areas was adequate, and the materials were very organized together.

#### *Assessment of Practices in Early Elementary Classrooms*

*Physical Environment.* Results from the *APEEC* clearly show that Linda's classroom environment is on its way to becoming more constructivist but is not quite there yet. There were four categories in the *APEEC* that measured the physical environment of the classroom. The outcome below shows how Linda scored in each category. As previously mentioned, "1" means inadequate, "3" means minimal, "5" means good, and "7" means excellent and is the highest number that can be attained. Table 11 depicts Linda's scores on the *APEEC*.

#### **Table 11**

*APEEC Physical Environment Scores of Linda*

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Categories	Score
Room Arrangement	6
Display of Child Products	4
Classroom Accessibility	7
Health and Classroom Safety	2

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Linda scored 19 out of 28 in the physical environment category. She received two low scores for display of child products and health and classroom safety. Display of child products did not receive a score higher than a four, because the few child products found in the room were not at children's eye level, did not include original, each child's piece is different from the others' work, and most children did not have at least one item displayed. Health and classroom safety received a score of two, because Linda reported that children's medical and emergency information is kept in the clinic and not in the room. There is first aid equipment in the room, a phone and walkie-talkies and first aid manuals or information, but her first aid and CPR certification is expired.

*Interview Questions*

During Linda's afternoon planning time, she was asked her seven questions in an interview. The remaining two questions fall under the category of physical environment and will be discussed.

3. Can you explain to me why you set up the environment like this, and how does it encourage learning?

Linda responded, “The environment is center focused, and the materials are labeled and easily accessible. If time permits we do free centers.” Free centers takes up the last 20 minutes of the day, and children get to play if the time does not have to be used for something else.

6. How often do you display children’s work, and when do you feel it is necessary to do so?

Linda responded, “Changing children’s display of products depends on the unit and what we’re doing. There is a board in the room, and I change it every 2 weeks. I select everybody’s work for display, and I put them up during seasonal themes and units.”

### *Observations*

In Linda’s classroom, the only drawings by children were four drawings taped to the wall beside her desk. When asked about them, she responded that children have brought them into her, so she put them on the wall. Therefore, they were not made in class. The theme taking place during the observation was apples, so there was a large piece of paper that had sentences on it about apples that the children had told Linda during large group time, and she transcribed it on the paper. She said that paper changes when themes change. There were many commercially bought products in her room, including calendars, birthday celebration posters, seasonal art hangings, schedules, and reminders. There was no children’s work placed for all to view. Visitors are unable to know what learning is taking place in the classroom based on wall displays. Not only does displaying work students have done give families and other school personnel an overview of the knowledge that is being fostered, but more importantly, children are reminded of what they have learned and develop a sense that the work they do is appreciated and treasured. The walls were consumed with commercially bought posters. The number line was taped so high on the wall that it almost touched the ceiling. It is located in a spot that is not

visible to the children. There were numerous plastic storage boxes with manipulatives in them. There were at least 40 present on the shelf at one time, along with bins of books and more books, a large clock, large number die, Ziploc bags of games, two scales, and a pile of folders. The shelves containing all of these materials were the focal point of the room. When entering the room, the eyes of the observer went directly to the front board and that piece of storage furniture.

### *Cross-Case Analysis*

The cross-case analysis section contains Tables 12-17 which show the three teachers' overall similarities and differences to each of the three research questions. Codes will be used in the tables throughout this section. For the *PTQ* tool, beliefs are represented as T for traditional, DAP for developmentally appropriate, or T & DAP for in the middle between traditional and developmentally appropriate. For the *APEEC* tool, interview, and observations, practices are represented as T for traditional, C for constructivist, or T & C for in the middle between traditional and constructivist.

*Question 1: Are teachers' traditional or developmentally appropriate beliefs congruent with the way they actually practice traditionally or constructively in the classroom with their students?*

The first research question will be answered based on the definitions of the terms of traditional teaching practices and constructivist teaching practices. Traditional teaching practices are defined as when teachers use a fixed curriculum that is based primarily on textbooks and workbooks, where teachers have complete authority and instruction is teacher directed and consists mostly of whole group learning. Constructivist teaching practices are defined as when teachers guide children in learning by using an interactive curriculum that builds upon their previous knowledge, gives students choices and bases value on the process as well as the product

in primary grades. Table 12 shows the overall similarities and differences among the three teachers in reference to question 1.

**Table 12**

*Cross-Case Analysis: Question 1*

Teacher	PTQ (Beliefs)	APEEC	Interview	Observations
Karen	T	T	T	T
Betty	DAP	C	C	C
Linda	T & DAP	C	C	C

Based on the overall results from the *PTQ*, Karen’s beliefs are that of a traditional teacher. Based on the overall results from the *APEEC*, it reveals that Karen’s practices are also that of a traditional teacher because she scored a 3.25 out of a possible 7. In the instructional category of the *APEEC*, Karen scored 18 out of 42, showing that she did not rate very high on the DAP scale. This information also matches the traditional answers she gave in her interview and correlates with the observations. The *APEEC* scores, interview answers, and field notes from the observations correlate to her traditional beliefs from the *PTQ*.

Similarly, based on the overall results from the *PTQ*, Betty’s beliefs are that of a highly developmentally appropriate teacher. Based on the overall results from the *APEEC*, it reveals that Betty’s practices are also that of a constructivist teacher, since she scored a 4.86 out of a possible 7. In the instructional category of the *APEEC*, Betty scored 39 out of 42, showing that she rated very high on the DAP scale. This also correlates with the constructivist answers she gave in the interview and the observations from her classroom.

Based on the overall results from the *PTQ*, Linda’s beliefs fell in the middle between traditional and developmentally appropriate. However, based on the overall results from the

*APEEC*, it reveals that Linda's practices are constructivist because she scored a 5 out of a possible 7, the highest among the three teachers in the study. In the instructional category of the *APEEC*, Linda scored 37 out of 42, revealing that she rated high on the constructivist scale. Her interview answers and field notes from the observations in her classroom also concludes that she practices in a constructivist manner. The findings from the *PTQ* are not the same as the findings from the *APEEC*, interview, and observations.

Both Karen and Betty's instructional beliefs from their *PTQ* scores corresponded to their scores from *APEEC*, interview answers and field notes from the observations. Another similarity is that Betty and Linda both consistently had constructivist practices for the *APEEC*, interview, and observations.

Linda's overall results are different than that of Karen and Betty, because there is not a similarity between her beliefs and practices. Karen's traditional results from the *APEEC*, interview, and observations are different than Betty and Linda's constructivist results from the same three pieces of data.

A common theme among all three teachers is that they have at least six computers in each classroom, and the children use them at various times during the week. The children have access to the computers and are able to use them for reading tests, games, activities, and looking up research on certain Internet sites.

Another theme among Betty and Linda's classrooms is that they are in constant communication with their students. The teacher-child language is rich in content about the learning taking place. It was observed that the teachers and children feel free to have open dialogue with each other.

*Question 2: How are teachers teaching constructively?*

Table 13 shows the overall similarities and differences among the three teachers in response to question 2.

**Table 13**

*Cross-Case Analysis: Question 2*

Teacher	PTQ	APEEC	Interview	Observations
Karen	T	T & C	T & C	T
Betty	DAP	T & C	C	T & C
Linda	T & DAP	T & C	T & C	T & C

The *PTQ* statements that Karen responded to relating to social context revealed that her beliefs were that of a traditional teacher. In the social context category of the *APEEC*, Karen scored 18 out of 35, which was in the middle between traditional and constructivist and her beliefs are traditional. This information also matches her interview answers, which were in the middle as well. The answer she gave about theorists was traditional, but the answer about family involvement was constructivist. The observations that were formed from observing in her classroom were traditional.

The *PTQ* statements that Betty responded to relating to social context revealed that her beliefs were developmentally appropriate. In the social context category of the *APEEC*, Betty scored 21 out of 35, which was in the middle between traditional and constructivist, and her beliefs are developmentally appropriate. The answers she gave in the interview were constructivist. The observations in the social context category about valuing diversity were traditional, but the observations about appropriate transitions were constructivist.

The *PTQ* statements that Linda responded to relating to social context revealed that her beliefs were in the middle between traditional and developmentally appropriate. Her *APEEC* scores showed that she was in the middle as well. In the social context category of the *APEEC*, Linda scored 19 out of 35. This information also matches the answers she gave to her interview questions and observations, which were in the middle between traditional and constructivist.

Karen, Betty, and Linda were all three similar in their scores on the *APEEC*, which was in the middle between traditional and constructivist. Karen and Linda's interview answers were similar, in the middle between traditional and constructivist. Betty and Linda's observations were similar, in the middle between traditional and constructivist. Linda and Karen's observations matched their beliefs. Betty and Linda's interview answers matched their beliefs. Another similarity is that the majority of practices in the social context category were in the middle between traditional and constructivist.

Linda differed from Karen and Betty, because her *APEEC* scores, interview answers, and observations matched her beliefs and their practices did not. Only Karen's observations matched her beliefs, and only Betty's interview answers matched her beliefs. Karen differed from Betty and Linda on the observations. Betty differed from Karen and Linda on the interview answers.

A common theme that was present among all three teachers was that they used a behaviorist system for classroom management. Betty's students were the most well behaved and attentive children out of the three classrooms. It was not observed that she monitored children's behaviors with rewards, but there was a system in place with consequences, not natural but behaviorist, in the form of a traffic light with clothes pins, if children did not follow the

guidelines set. Karen and Betty used a reward and punishment system. The children in all three classes were aware of what happens when they misbehave.

Another common theme present among all three teachers was that they do not acknowledge or discuss diversity or cultural topics. Diversity materials or information relating to gender, disability, family configurations, or languages and cultures was not seen in the classroom. It was observed that diversity information was not integrated throughout daily activities either.

*Question 3: How is the classroom environment used in teaching and learning?*

Table 14 shows the overall similarities and differences among the three teachers in response to question 3.

**Table 14**

*Cross-Case Analysis: Question 3*

Teacher	PTQ	APEEC	Interview	Observations
Karen	T	T	T	T
Betty	DAP	T	C	C
Linda	T & DAP	C	T & C	T & C

The *PTQ* statements that Karen answered relating to the classroom environment revealed that her beliefs were that of a traditional teacher. Similarly, her *APEEC* scores showed that she was traditional as well. In the physical environment context category of the *APEEC*, Karen scored 16 out of 28. This information also matches the traditional answers she gave to her interview questions. These three pieces of information are also congruent with the observations that were formed from spending time in her classroom.

Betty's developmentally appropriate beliefs from the *PTQ* corresponded with her constructivist answers on the interview questions and observations in her classroom. Betty's *APEEC* scores showed that her practices were traditional. In the physical environment category of the *APEEC*, Betty scored only 13 out of 28; therefore, her beliefs did not match her practices in this area.

The *PTQ* statements that Linda answered relating to the classroom environment revealed that her beliefs were in the middle between traditional and developmentally appropriate. This information also matches the answers she gave to her interview questions and the observations concluded from her classroom. Linda's *APEEC* scores showed that she was slightly above the middle point, leaning more toward constructivist because in the physical environment context category of the *APEEC*, Linda scored 19 out of 28. Her beliefs did not match her practices in this area as well.

Karen, Linda, and Betty were all three similar, because their interview questions and observations matched their beliefs in the physical environment category. Linda and Betty were similar in the physical environment area because both of their scores from the *APEEC* did not match their beliefs. Karen and Betty were similar because both of their *APEEC* scores revealed traditional practices.

Karen differed from Betty and Linda because her scores from the *APEEC*, interview answers, and observations matched her beliefs and theirs did not. Karen, Linda, and Betty's interview and observation results were each different. Betty and Linda's beliefs did not match their *APEEC* scores and Karen's beliefs matched hers. Linda's constructivist results on the *APEEC* were different from Karen and Linda's traditional results.

There was an obvious common theme within Betty and Linda's classroom environment that was not present in Karen's classroom environment. Karen's classroom environment differed greatly from that of Betty and Linda. Linda and Betty each have three large group tables where the students sit together and work during the day, a constructivist characteristic. However, in Karen's classroom, each child has his or her own individual desk, which was spaced out and not together in groups.

Another common theme among all three classrooms was that their rooms were neat and organized, and storage for materials and resources was excellent. In Linda and Betty's classrooms, children's shelves were low and contained numerous plastic storage boxes with manipulatives in them, in addition to centers full of appropriate materials. The small amount of materials Karen had for her students were neatly housed in appropriate places around the room. Karen's room contained a closet, and the other rooms did not. Regarding soft furnishings in the three rooms, Linda's room was the only one that also had a relaxation area, and in it were two large bean bags. She also had carpet squares for the children to use.

There was also a common theme among all three teachers pertaining to their displays of child products in the classroom. There were hardly any to be found inside the rooms. In Karen's classroom there were no child products displayed in the room. There was no original work by the students. In Betty and Linda's classrooms there were a select few pieces of work made by the students as a whole class, but no individual original pieces of work were found.

### *Summary*

Chapter 4 provided an analysis of the data, and Chapter 5 includes a summary, findings, implications, conclusions, and recommendations for further consideration.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

#### *Summary*

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate primary grade teachers who are teaching in the public school system and determine whether they are teaching the way they believe they are teaching. It was my intention that this study provide a better understanding of how beliefs have an effect on practices in classrooms by teachers in hopes they will be aware of the fact that their philosophies of education regarding how children learn and grow impact their students each day. Based on the review of the literature it is hypothesized that teachers who believe they teach in a constructivist manner using developmentally appropriate practices are in fact teaching constructively with their students. It is also hypothesized that teachers who believe that they teach in a traditional manner do indeed use a direct instruction method of teaching with their students. Therefore, I hypothesize that teachers' beliefs will have a correlation with how they actually teach every day. My hypothesis examines the relationship between teachers' beliefs and practices in primary grades.

The multi-case study consisted of two kindergarten teachers and one second grade teacher at one elementary school in Northeast Tennessee. They were chosen based on how they scored on the *PTQ*. "Questionnaires enable people to report information about themselves-about their life, condition, beliefs, or attitudes" (Thomas & Brubaker, 2008, p. 169). The questionnaire was a straightforward method of finding out background information of why they do what they do. According to Thomas and Brubaker, "Beliefs refers to respondents' knowledge and convictions about a topic" (p. 170). Many teachers fail to acknowledge their core beliefs and

values about how students learn on a daily basis and instead just go through the motions of being a teacher. Previous literature has shown that those beliefs are highly influenced by many factors, including family, social context, religion, and group identity (Rokeach, 1968). Moreover, personal beliefs not only vary in depth and importance but are also dependent on that particular society's norms and value system (Rokeach).

Data about the three teachers' beliefs were gathered through a questionnaire, and data about the teachers' classroom practices were gathered through a formal assessment, interviews, and observations in the form of field notes. These are the three questions that guided this research:

1. Are teachers' traditional or developmentally appropriate beliefs congruent with the way they actually practice traditionally or constructively in the classroom with their students?
2. How are teachers teaching constructively?
3. How is the classroom environment used in teaching and learning?

One of the participants was a second grade teacher named Karen; according to the *PTQ*, her beliefs are traditional. Another participant was a kindergarten teacher named Linda; according to the *PTQ*, her beliefs are in the middle between traditional and constructivist. The final participant was a kindergarten teacher named Betty; according to the *PTQ*, her beliefs are developmentally appropriate (constructivist) in nature. I spent a day-and-a-half in the classroom with each teacher. While in the classroom, I performed the *APEEC*, made observations in the form of field notes, and conducted individual interviews with the three teachers to determine the relationship between their beliefs and practices.

Data analysis in qualitative research is an inductive process, which means that theories are developed rather than tested (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1996). In addition, multiple methods of

collecting data are used for my study, including observations, interviews, and formal assessments, so triangulation of data was performed to enhance the dependability of the information. Individual and cross-case analysis was used to analyze the data and compare the similarities and differences among the three teachers.

### *Major Findings*

*Question 1: Are teachers' traditional or developmentally appropriate beliefs congruent with the way they actually practice traditionally or constructively in the classroom with their students?*

Karen and Betty's instructional beliefs are congruent with their instructional practices. Karen's beliefs are traditional and based on the overall results from the *APEEC*, field notes, and interview answers relating to this research question; her practices are traditional as well. Betty's beliefs are developmentally appropriate and based on the overall results from the *APEEC*, field notes, and interview answers, her practices are constructivist also.

Linda's instructional beliefs fell in the middle between traditional and developmentally appropriate. However, based on the findings from the *APEEC*, field notes, and answers to the interview questions, Linda's practices are constructivist and do not correctly correlate to her beliefs in the instructional category.

*Question 2: How are teachers teaching constructively?*

Karen's social beliefs are traditional. Her *APEEC* scores and interview answers are in the middle between traditional and constructivist, but her observations are traditional. Linda's social beliefs are in the middle between traditional and developmentally appropriate and her *APEEC* scores, interview answers, and field notes reveal that this is also true. Betty's developmentally appropriate beliefs corresponded with her constructivist answers on the

interview questions, but Betty's *APEEC* scores and observations were in the middle between traditional and constructivist.

*Question 3: How is the classroom environment used in teaching and learning?*

The *PTQ* statements that Karen answered relating to the classroom environment revealed that her beliefs were that of a traditional teacher, and this information correctly correlated with her *APEEC* scores, interview answers, and field notes, which were traditional. Linda's beliefs were in the middle between traditional and developmentally appropriate, which also matched the answers she gave to her interview questions and the observations concluded from her classroom but did not correspond correctly to her scores on the *APEEC*, which showed that she was constructivist. Betty's developmentally appropriate beliefs from the *PTQ* corresponded with her constructivist answers on the interview questions and observations but not to her scores on the *APEEC*, which showed that her practices were traditional and not constructivist.

### *Conclusions*

The following conclusions can be reached from my qualitative study. The beliefs that primary grade teachers have regarding the way they teach and help students learn each day in the classroom affects the ways they practice. Their beliefs do have a direct correlation to their practices, which is evident among the three teachers in the study. Overall, Karen's traditional beliefs matched her traditional practices, and Betty's developmentally appropriate beliefs matched her constructivist practices. Surprisingly though, Linda was more constructivist in her practices than her beliefs, in the middle between traditional and constructivist, revealed her to be. Also, Betty was not as developmentally appropriate as her beliefs implied she was but still had many constructivist practices in her classroom.

### *Recommendations*

There are recommendations that can further enhance this study and increase its significance in the field of Early Childhood Education. Professors in the teacher education programs on the university level should enhance discussions with their students on beliefs, giving more attention to theorists and guiding principles to inform students of why they should practice certain ways and stress the direct benefits it has on children. Then, teacher candidates going into the field will know what the literature states about educating young children. The principals in elementary schools should have professional training classes at least on a regular basis with their teachers, reminding them of their basic principles and guiding beliefs and also reminding them of how the school expects its teachers to practice. Teachers should conduct self-reflections on themselves frequently so that they will not become complacent in their teaching methods and leave children at a disadvantage in learning.

A larger sample size may produce significantly different results. A quantitative study with more participating teachers may show that their beliefs do not match their practices or may show even better that teachers' beliefs do correlate with their practices. However, valuable first-hand accounts of how teachers practice would not be present. Further research should be conducted to determine if certain variables have an impact on whether teachers' beliefs affect their practices. For example, does the college degree teachers have make a difference? Does the amount of time teachers have taught make a difference? Does the school where teachers teach or the social context they are a part of change their beliefs? Does gender or age play a role? There are many variables that could be considered and looked at more closely when conducting further qualitative research on this topic to make it more reliable and valid as well as enable it to be generalized to the population.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

AUDITOR REVIEW LETTER

TO: Lindsay Moore  
FROM: Tracey Crowe, Ed.D.  
SUBJECT: External Review of Field Notes  
DATE: 3/19/08

Thank you for providing field notes of your thesis, *Relationships Between Primary Teacher Beliefs and Practice in the Primary Classroom of a Small Urban School in East Tennessee*, for review. I have completed my external review of your field notes. I was able to gain a sense of the journey you have taken to develop and present these field notes through our discussions of your thesis. The reflective component of the study added perspective that highlighted the relevance of the topic for teacher beliefs and practices. The field notes along with the Assessment of Practices in Early Elementary Classrooms (APEEC) sheet provided the appropriate information for me to conduct a cross-reference for your thesis. I found your documentation to be trustworthy and reliable. I am glad to have had the opportunity to critically read your field notes and to participate in your research process. Best wishes through the next steps of your journey.

APPENDIX B  
MEMBER-CHECKING LETTER

February 13, 2008

Dear Teachers,

Last fall for my thesis, I conducted an interview with you during your planning periods. Please review the transcript that I am going to show you of the interview that took place. This process is called member-checking, in which participants are asked to check the data that was collected to ensure credibility and accuracy. This will guard against the researcher making mistakes or being biased with answers. If you feel that what you read is true, based on the answers that you gave on that day, then please sign your name at the bottom of this letter. Your participation in my thesis study is greatly appreciated. Thank you!

Sincerely,

Lindsay Moore

\*Yes, what I read is true. \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX C

### PARTICIPANTS' INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

September 4, 2007

Dear Teachers:

My name is Lindsay Moore, and I am a graduate student at East Tennessee State University. I am working on my Master of Arts degree in Early Childhood Education. In order to finish my studies, I need to complete a research project. The name of my research study is *Relationships Between Primary Teacher Beliefs and Practice in the Primary Classrooms of a Small Urban School in East Tennessee*.

The purpose of this study is to determine whether teacher beliefs are correlated with the way teachers actually practice in the field. I would like to give a brief questionnaire to all kindergarten, first and second grade teachers at your elementary school. It should only take about 15 minutes to complete. You will be asked questions about your beliefs of how young children learn. Since this project deals with your personal beliefs regarding how you teach, it might cause some minor stress. However, you may also feel better after you have had the opportunity to express yourselves about your philosophy of education. This study may provide benefits by allowing you to reflect upon your views of teaching and learning.

Your responses to the questionnaire will only be seen by me and my committee chairperson in order to determine which three teachers will be chosen for the qualitative project. After the teachers are chosen, names will not be used for the actual study and data will be kept confidential. I will then collect data from your classroom, conduct interviews with you, and rate your classroom environment by using the *Assessment of Practices in Early Elementary Classrooms (APEEC)*, which is a rating scale I complete that consists of questions related to the physical environment and social and instructional contexts. I will then compare the way that you actually teach with how you believe you teach. Although your rights and privacy will be maintained, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, the ETSU IRB (for non-medical research) and personnel particular to this research in the Early Childhood department at ETSU have access to the study records.

If you do not want to fill out the questionnaire, it will not affect you in any way. There are no alternative procedures except to choose not to participate in the study. Participation in this research experiment is voluntary. You may refuse to participate. You can quit at any time. If you quit or refuse to participate, the benefits or treatment to which you are otherwise entitled will not be affected.

If you have any research-related questions or problems, you may contact me at 741-7442. I am working on this project under the supervision of Dr. Pamela Evanshen. You may reach her at 439-7694. Also, the chairperson of the Institutional Review Board at East Tennessee State University is available at (423) 439-6055 if you have questions about your rights as a research subject. If you have any questions or concerns about the research and want to talk to someone independent of the research team or you can't reach the study staff, you may call an IRB Coordinator at 423/439-6055 or 423/439/6002.

Sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature

Lindsay Moore

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX D

### PRIMARY TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

#### DIRECTIONS

The purpose of this questionnaire is to find how much you endorse a number of statements about early childhood education. This is not a test; there are no right or wrong answers. You are asked to give your honest opinion of the degree to which you agree with these statements.

Record your answers on the Answer Sheet provided. Please be certain you respond to every question and that you leave no blanks. Make no marks on the Questionnaire itself, only on the Answer Sheet.

**Read each statement carefully and then answer**

- A) If you strongly disagree with the statement**
- B) If you somewhat disagree with the statement**
- C) If you somewhat agree with the statement**
- D) If you strongly agree with the statement**

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION**

## **PRIMARY GRADES TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE**

- A) STRONGLY DISAGREE WITH THE STATEMENT**
- B) SOMEWHAT DISAGREE WITH THE STATEMENT**
- C) SOMEWHAT AGREE WITH THE STATEMENT**
- D) STRONGLY AGREE WITH THE STATEMENT**

1. The child is best viewed in terms of a group norm determined by chronological age and grade level.
2. Curriculum should respond primarily to grade level expectations.
3. The school should be organized so that the individual teacher integrates instruction across the areas of the curriculum.
4. Instruction should consist mainly of reading groups, whole-group activities, and seat work.
5. In the child's acquisition of literacy, the teacher's role should be to guide children toward an increasing competence primarily through individual approaches.
6. Curriculum should primarily facilitate the child's meeting of group expectations as defined by grade level.
7. The teacher's primary goal regarding children's behavior should be to establish and maintain teacher classroom control.
8. A child's progress should be reported relative to the performance of other children within grade level.
9. Teachers should deal with parents mainly through formally scheduled meetings and conferences.
10. Learning materials should be symbolic and representational.
11. Instruction should be clearly divided into separate subject areas.
12. Curriculum should respond primarily to individual differences in ability and interest.
13. Teacher preparation time should be used primarily to prepare the materials used in seatwork and teacher-assigned activities.
14. Learning materials should be concrete and relevant to the child's life.

15. Instruction should consist mainly of projects, learning centers, and play managed primarily by children.
16. Children with special needs should receive special instruction outside the regular classroom whenever possible.
17. Opportunities for work-focused peer social interaction should predominate over whole-group and individual experience.
18. Staff assignments in the primary grades should be available only to teachers with specialized training in early childhood education.
19. For most of the time children should be encouraged to work cooperatively in informal small groups.
20. Grades are a better motivator of children than is the acquisition of competence.
21. Children should be retained or placed in a transition grade if they have not mastered basic skills at grade level.
22. Teacher observation is the most valid way to monitor children's performance.
23. Children should be allowed to use space flexibly to pursue a variety of learning activities alone or in small groups.
24. The most effective way to organize instruction is to have a class size large enough to allow for efficient whole-group approaches.
25. Teacher preparation time should be used primarily to prepare the physical learning environment for hands-on activities.
26. Teachers should deal with parents mainly informally, encouraging them to participate in the school, classroom, and at home.
27. Children should move at their own pace in acquiring important skills in areas such as reading and math.
28. Teachers can most effectively promote children's social-emotional development by consistently using rewards and praise to give feedback about the appropriateness of children's behavior.
29. The classroom group should vary frequently in size and age range depending on the needs of the children.
30. The classroom group should be determined primarily by chronological age and should vary little after the beginning of the school year.

31. In the children's acquisition of literacy, the teacher's role should be to diagnose and correct errors in a specified body of subject matter content and skills.
32. A test is the most valid way to monitor children's performance.
33. Teachers can most effectively promote children's social-emotional development by allowing peers to interact to make cooperative choices among appropriate activities.
34. Children should be expected to keep pace with the group in acquiring important skills in areas such as reading and math.
35. For most of the time children should be expected to work quietly on their own and in teacher-led small groups.
36. Primarily, teachers should motivate children's behavior through the careful use of rewards and punishments in the classroom.
37. Curriculum and instruction should primarily develop the child's individual self-esteem, sense of competence, and positive feelings towards learning.
38. The child is best viewed as a unique person with an individual pattern and timing of growth and development.
39. Curriculum should be primarily designed to develop the intellectual domain, stressing the acquisition of carefully defined discrete skills.
40. Primarily, teachers should build on children's internal motivation.
41. Staff assignments in the primary grades should be available to any teacher with elementary certification.
42. Children should be assigned permanent personal space such as a desk where they are expected to work quietly by themselves.

**PRIMARY GRADES TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE**

- A) STRONGLY DISAGREE WITH THE STATEMENT**
- B) SOMEWHAT DISAGREE WITH THE STATEMENT**
- C) SOMEWHAT AGREE WITH THE STATEMENT**
- D) STRONGLY AGREE WITH THE STATEMENT**

- |     |   |   |   |   |
|-----|---|---|---|---|
| 1.  | A | B | C | D |
| 2.  | A | B | C | D |
| 3.  | A | B | C | D |
| 4.  | A | B | C | D |
| 5.  | A | B | C | D |
| 6.  | A | B | C | D |
| 7.  | A | B | C | D |
| 8.  | A | B | C | D |
| 9.  | A | B | C | D |
| 10. | A | B | C | D |
| 11. | A | B | C | D |
| 12. | A | B | C | D |
| 13. | A | B | C | D |
| 14. | A | B | C | D |
| 15. | A | B | C | D |
| 16. | A | B | C | D |
| 17. | A | B | C | D |
| 18. | A | B | C | D |
| 19. | A | B | C | D |
| 20. | A | B | C | D |

- 21.        A    B    C    D
- 22.        A    B    C    D
- 23.        A    B    C    D
- 24.        A    B    C    D
- 25.        A    B    C    D
- 26.        A    B    C    D
- 27.        A    B    C    D
- 28.        A    B    C    D
- 29.        A    B    C    D
- 30.        A    B    C    D
- 31.        A    B    C    D
- 32.        A    B    C    D
- 33.        A    B    C    D
- 34.        A    B    C    D
- 35.        A    B    C    D
- 36.        A    B    C    D
- 37.        A    B    C    D
- 38.        A    B    C    D
- 39.        A    B    C    D
- 40.        A    B    C    D
- 41.        A    B    C    D
- 42.        A    B    C    D

VITA

LINDSAY COLLINS MOORE

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  Saks Inc. Scholarship through Proffitts' Department Store.  
  Dean's List, ETSU.  
  Panhellenic Day of the Scholar, ETSU.