QUALITY IN EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION:
MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES AND CRITICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN A DIVERSE CONTEXT

By

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A COLLABORATIVE DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

2016
To all the teachers who provide opportunities for children to be happy and successful and who believe in the power of love to make a better future
- Miriam and Ana

To early care and education professionals, who lovingly and dynamically engage in the challenging construction of quality on an ongoing basis - Miriam

To my mom, who always faced adversity with courage, and exemplified the meaning of dignity and hope until the end - Ana
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We want to acknowledge the support of our families. We first acknowledge our parents, for fostering a critical view of the world and a search for justice, valuing the constant pursuit of knowledge and fairness as unfinished business that requires a delicate balance between absolute and relative truths. Miriam thanks her husband, Drew, for his unwavering encouragement and support for this time consuming and involving endeavor. Miriam thanks her parents for modeling listening, learning, and loving and her twin sister, Grace, for being a lifelong friend and thinking partner. Ana thanks her husband, Christian, and children, Christian and Amelia, for assuming this pursuit as a family accomplishment and cheering her on, for keeping her grounded while exploring multiple perspectives and for sacrificing time that they could have otherwise spent together, and her dad and sisters for sharing the joy of learning.

We want to acknowledge our committee for believing in this collaborative dissertation as a worthy pursuit. We thank Brianna Kennedy-Lewis for suggesting we work together and continually pushing us to refine our thinking while encouraging our efforts. This process may have been double work but yielded more than double the meaning and satisfaction. We also acknowledge our teachers and professors, at UF and before, who nurtured our critical thinking about issues that are important for children, society and our practice, encouraging scholarship as an ongoing effort.

We want to acknowledge our critical friends, including professional peers, lifelong friends and siblings for believing in and encouraging our dreams. Miriam thanks Gladys Montes, a professional mentor who takes on the challenging pursuit of quality on a daily basis with intention, reflection, and authentic commitment to teachers, children, and families. Miriam also thanks Laura Haim, a colleague, friend, and peer reviewer who
supported and engaged her interest and questions about quality. Ana wants to particularly thank Raquel Diaz, friend, colleague and peer reviewer, for her encouragement to pursue this program exemplifying how great teachers have the ability to match interest and abilities with learning experiences and opportunities, and Pete Bermudez for encouraging and partnering in critically reflecting about education and social justice in Miami and the world.

We also acknowledge the ongoing efforts of organizations and people in our community who engage in the complex pursuit of quality in ECE. Miriam thanks the United Way of Miami-Dade Center for Excellence in Early Education, without which, her research would not be inspired or possible. Miriam is grateful to her focus group participants for their time and willingness to engage in honest, reflective dialogue about quality. Miriam’s love for their perspectives fueled her efforts to portray them. Miriam thanks each participant for pursuing quality on a daily basis and sharing their unique points of view. Ana thanks the FIU bilingual program, especially Angela Salmon, for their dedication to the teachers in Miami, and for providing the opportunity for Spanish speaking teachers to continue to develop professionally. Ana deeply thanks the teachers who chose to participate in her research, for their devotion to children and their willingness to speak up and share their beliefs, strengths, and needs. Ana hopes to have portrayed their passion and dreams.

Finally, we acknowledge one another as collaborators. We both feel grateful to have had the opportunity to engage in this collaborative process together. We have learned from and motivated, inspired, and provoked one another while conveying thoughts that never would have occurred alone - allowing us to learn and grow together.
in ways that surpass the purpose of this dissertation. Miriam acknowledges Ana’s scholarly and professional caring and commitment for children and teachers and thanks Ana for helping her grow as a critical, reflective thinker and introducing ideas and practical applications of quality that Miriam never would have known or applied alone. Ana acknowledges Miriam for her patience, professionalism, and humanity and for striving for excellence while engaging in a respectful and honest thinking partnership with an amazing ability to make what might have otherwise seemed like disconnected ideas come to life and interact on paper.
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<tr>
<td>APPLE</td>
<td>Accredited Professional Preschool Learning Environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BS</td>
<td>Bachelor of Science</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCDF</td>
<td>Child Care and Development Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>CDA</td>
<td>Child Development Associate</td>
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<tr>
<td>CFE</td>
<td>Center for Excellence in Early Education</td>
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<td>CLASS</td>
<td>Classroom Assessment Scoring System</td>
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<td>CQO</td>
<td>Child Outcomes study</td>
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<td>CRP</td>
<td>Culturally responsive pedagogy</td>
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<td>CTTE</td>
<td>Curriculum, Teaching and Teacher Education</td>
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<td>DCF</td>
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<td>DLL</td>
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<td>ESE</td>
<td>Exceptional student education</td>
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<td>FACCM</td>
<td>Florida Association for Child Care Management</td>
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<td>FIU</td>
<td>Florida International University</td>
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<td>FoK</td>
<td>Funds of knowledge</td>
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<td>IDEA</td>
<td>Individuals with Disabilities Education Act</td>
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<td>IOM</td>
<td>Institute of Medicine</td>
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<td>ITERS</td>
<td>Infant-Toddler Environmental Rating Scale</td>
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<td>Description</td>
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<td>NCLB</td>
<td>No Child Left Behind Act</td>
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<td>National Research Council</td>
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<td>Outcomes Driven Training</td>
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<td>OEL</td>
<td>Florida Office of Early Learning</td>
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<td>PD</td>
<td>Professional development</td>
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<td>QC</td>
<td>Quality Counts</td>
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<td>Quality Counts Career Center</td>
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<td>Quality Rating Improvement System</td>
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<td>TCT</td>
<td>The Children’s Trust</td>
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<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations Children’s Fund</td>
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<td>US</td>
<td>United States of America</td>
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<td>UWMD</td>
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<td>VIPP</td>
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MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES AND CRITICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN A DIVERSE CONTEXT

By

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May, 2016

Chair: Brianna Kennedy-Lewis
Major: Curriculum & Instruction

In this collaborative dissertation, we explore local perspectives on quality in early care and education (ECE) and consider how professional learning can support enactment of quality in teaching and learning. Miriam conducted two focus groups about quality in ECE with fourteen participants holding a range of professional roles. While recognizing quality as a dynamic concept connected to particular contexts, unique children, and diverse families, participants viewed relationships as a unifying theme across ECE contexts. Conceptions of quality involved interrelated considerations like intentional use of time, shared moments and explorations, and a supported balance of ongoing learning and consistent implementation of practices. Tensions paralleling overarching conflicts between standardization and relevance within a diverse local context appeared especially in discussions about languages, environments, and assessments. Ana conducted two focus groups and seven individual semi-structured interviews to explore the perspectives of seven ECE practitioners in Miami who had recently concluded a one-year PD program. Participants shared the role of context in shaping their teaching identity and their pursuit of excellence, surfacing dilemmas of
practice and programmatic inconsistencies that affect their enactment of quality. Participants recognized early experiences as the foundation of future generations and emphasized the individual and social benefits of quality ECE. The ideal image of ECE teachers portrayed by participants includes understanding teaching as a vocation and seeing love, care, and observation as the basis of teaching. Participants valued their cultural, ethnic, and demographic identification with children and families in Miami and were cognizant of the importance of combining formal education, experience, and continuous learning to meet the needs of young children. Points of confluence across our findings include: the centrality of teachers in enacting quality ECE; a prevailing view of quality as rooted in social responsibility and vocation; love as a precursor to nurturing relationships, which form the foundations of learning; and, quality as an intentional, ongoing, dynamic process, the challenging pursuit of which is supported by reflection and professional learning. We emphasize culturally responsive practices that support construction of meaning and negotiation of tensions and identify issues that merit additional inquiry from feminist and LatCrit perspectives.
SECTION 1

In this section, we provide an overview of our collaborative work. We begin by discussing the background, significance, and national, state, and local contexts of quality and professional development (PD) in early care and education (ECE). We describe our shared research and professional contexts and highlight the literature and concepts that inform our work and interrelationships between our individual studies. We then review the scholarly literature on quality in ECE and PD. We describe dominant and alternative understandings, perspectives, and approaches to quality and PD and consider PD as a space to construct ECE quality. We emphasize culturally responsive pedagogy and attention to local perspectives. Then, we focus on our individual studies about quality and PD in ECE. We elaborate on our research contexts, expand upon qualitative data collection and analysis methods, and conclude with subjectivity statements and reflections on our methodological collaboration and collaborative writing.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Background and Significance of the Problem

Next, we discuss the context and literature framing our collaborative work. We describe: the background, significance, and contexts of quality and PD in ECE; scholarly literature on quality in ECE and PD; and, dominant and alternative understandings and approaches to quality and professional learning in ECE.

Benefits of Quality Early Care and Education (ECE)

During the period from birth to age five, children develop more rapidly than at any other time in their lives, making these years critical for developing strong foundations for children’s cognitive, language, motor, social, emotional, regulatory and moral development (NRC & IOM, 2000). High quality ECE is widely recognized as key to children’s social, academic, and future life outcomes (Barnett & Lamy, 2013; Garces, Thomas, & Currie, 2000; Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2001; Reynolds, Ou, & Topitzes, 2004). Widespread connection of quality ECE with academic and social outcomes for children, as well as recognition that ECE has the potential to close achievement gaps, have led to the rising importance of improving ECE quality in both the public and private sectors (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2001; Pianta, Barnett, Burchinal & Thornburg, 2009).

Increased attention to ECE has emerged over recent decades due to growing awareness of the importance of children’s early years and dramatic rises in participation in ECE (Fuller, 2007). Recognition of the significance of a child’s cumulative early opportunities and experiences and the impact of quality ECE for children, families, and society is a common theme in literature across disciplines, ranging from brain research...
to economics (Anderson et al., 2003; Heckman, 2006; Schweinhart, 1993; NRC & IOM, 2000). Research indicates that early exposure to stimulating environments increases a child’s likelihood of success in school and life by minimizing physical, cognitive, and emotional disadvantages (Anderson et al., 2003; Campbell & Ramey, 1994; NRC & IOM, 2000). Developmental research linking early experiences with disparate opportunities and outcomes, together with a consistent body of evidence suggesting that high quality ECE yields significant benefits for “disadvantaged” populations, highlight the promise that quality ECE can ensure equitable access to desirable outcomes (Anderson et al., 2003; Barnett & Lamy, 2013; Burchinal et al., 2008; Campbell & Ramey, 1994; Currie, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Halle et al., 2009; Hart & Risley, 2003; Loeb, Fuller, Kagan, & Carrol, 2004; Love et al., 2005; Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2001).

While compelling research evidence demonstrates the lasting positive effects of ECE on young children’s development, no evidence suggests that average programs produce benefits comparable to model programs. Research suggests that children’s participation in an ECE program is insufficient to predict outcomes, as the quality of a given ECE program predicts outcomes more accurately (Burchinal et al., 2008; Gilliam, 2009; Pianta et al., 2009). Despite the potential of ECE programs, inconsistencies in actual program quality may compound, rather than alleviate, inequity (Darling-Hammond, 2010). For example, a typical school day for some preschool students includes meaningful learning activities with responsive teachers who provide consistent feedback and encourage critical thinking. In contrast, a typical day for less fortunate students may predominantly include sitting, watching a teacher react to behavior issues,
and completing rote, teacher-directed activities, such as worksheets (Pianta & Hamre, 2009). As growing evidence and awareness highlight the importance and impact of quality ECE for children, families, and society, it follows that there is widespread interest in researching, investing in, and improving the quality of ECE.

**Defining Quality**

Within the foregoing context, the field of ECE finds itself entrenched in what has been called “the age of quality” (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2013, p. 92). While various constituencies commonly promote quality in ECE, the definition of quality varies widely: quality is nationally and locally defined according to varied measures and assumptions. Professional literature related to quality improvement policies, as well as scholarly literature related to attempts to measure quality, point to a need to explore different stakeholders’ definitions of quality (Austin et al. 2011; LaParo et al., 2012; Snow, 2006). Despite frequent points of difference, currently prevailing questions and conversations about ECE quality assume that quality is an objective, essential entity that can be discovered, defined, measured, and influenced. Such assumptions appear in the form of common questions, such as, “What is quality? How do we measure quality? How do we assure quality?” (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2013, p. 4).

Various stakeholders’ desire to determine, measure, and assure quality has led to the identification of specific indicators of quality that can be defined, studied and measured, such as: student-teacher interactions; learning environments; and teacher qualifications. For example, recognizing the role that adults play in ECE has led to increasing interest in understanding the characteristics of the ECE workforce and its influence on children’s development. This interest is reflected in the purposes of a 2011 workshop conducted by the Board on Children, Youth, and Families of the Institute of
Medicine (IOM) and National Research Council (NRC), with the support of the Administration for Children and Families of the US Department of Health and Human Services. The stated purposes were to: (1) define and describe the nature of the current ECE workforce; (2) examine characteristics of the workforce that affect the development of children; and (3) describe the context of the workforce and how to build the ECE profession in ways that promote program quality and effective child outcomes while supporting the essential individuals who provide ECE (IOM & NRC, 2012). The IOM & NRC workshop report’s overall message is that the nature and effects of ECE depend in large part on the adults who care for children (IOM & NRC, 2012).

**Centrality of Teachers in Providing Quality ECE**

The report highlights how early childhood practitioners influence children’s healthy development as well as their later school success (IOM & NRC, 2012). In addition, the report asserts that factors such as attitudes, education, training and professional development, compensation, and mental health of teachers and caregivers influence interactions, behaviors, and teaching practices (IOM & NRC, 2012). Acknowledging the centrality of the adults’ role in ECE underlies increased efforts to improve the quality of the workforce, including greater PD efforts (IOM & NRC, 2012). Because early childhood practitioners impact children’s development, they should prepare to facilitate high quality experiences that benefit young children. It remains unclear, however, how to best recruit, prepare, assess, and support ECE practitioners to enact quality practices. Similarly, enabling ECE practitioners across a wide range of programs to improve quality, while simultaneously honoring their uniquely local culture, perspectives, and values, remains challenging. Despite wide recognition of the importance of the
The concepts of quality in ECE and quality in PD for ECE practitioners, both concepts lack clarity and involve unexamined assumptions and underlying values.

In our collaborative research, we focus on ECE professionals’ perspectives on the distinct but related concepts of quality in ECE and quality in PD for ECE in Miami, Florida. We explore interrelationships between understandings of quality in ECE and approaches to PD for ECE practitioners. Before describing the particular local context, we present an overview of the national and state contexts because they influence our immediate context.

**National Context**

**The ECE “Non-System”**

ECE in the US consists of programs that vary widely with regard to: the ages and populations served; how the programs are organized, funded and managed; the types of services provided for children and families; and their respective degrees of academic and social emphasis. Rather than being a national system, ECE in the US is more accurately characterized as a “non-system with disparate funding streams, eligibility requirements, program quality standards, teacher qualifications, and governance structures” (Kagan, Kauerz & Tarrant, 2007, pp. 60-61). Fuller (2007) describes the decentralized ECE system as simultaneously reflecting “organizational diversity and uneven quality” (p. xv). The range of fragmented, uncoordinated programs operates in public and private sectors and at blurry intersections between sectors (Kagan, Kauerz & Tarrant, 2007; Miller, 2013). Different funding and programmatic orientations relate to variations that are represented by “a complex array of public and private, center-based and home-based, and for-profit and not-for-profit microenterprises” (Kagan, Kauerz & Tarrant, 2007, p. 61).
US ECE policies and programs have emerged in recent decades to meet needs ranging from childcare for working families to providing relatively more education-oriented experiences based on the perceived needs of children (Fuller, 2007). Federal, publicly funded ECE programs include the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF), Head Start and Early Head Start, and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) parts B and C programs that entitle young children with disabilities to free and appropriate education (American Psychological Association, 2014; Kagan, Kauerz & Tarrant, 2007). Federal level stakeholders include the US Department of Education, US Department of Health and Human Services, and the US Administration for Children and Families. Each of these federal stakeholders provides different streams of ECE funding that translate to local settings in various forms, including Head Start, Universal Pre-Kindergarten, and childcare vouchers for low-income families. Federal funding policies broadly reflect interest and investment in the pursuit of quality in ECE. For example, CCDF policy requires that States designate a minimum of four percent of federal child care grant funding toward quality improvement in order to address disparities between licensing requirements and early learning standards; however, CCDF provides only vague guidance with respect to implementing this policy, leaving room for local interpretation of how to define, measure, improve, and report quality.

Although federal departments publicly subsidize one-quarter to one-third of ECE programs, parental fees exclusively fund some private ECE programs (Fuller, 2007). While a portion of non-profit programs function independently, others are part of larger religious or community-based, civic organizations, like the United Way. Some ECE advocates and scholars suggest that the current, decentralized system is problematic
and should be restructured through public school reform centered on universal preschool with uniform quality indicators, while others focus on the issue of who has access to, and benefits from, quality ECE (Fuller, 2007). Paralleling the non-system of ECE in the US, diverse stakeholders, including governmental, quasi-governmental, and private organizations attempting to improve the quality of ECE in a simultaneous, often overlapping, and, less frequently coordinated manner, characterize the current landscape of ECE provision.

**The Role of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)**

The National Association for the Education of Young Children, a well-known US nonprofit organization, is a key player in setting professional standards that guide ECE programs. NAEYC demonstrates national influence through conferences, publications, standards, and certification of ECE programs as high quality through a national accreditation system. In addition, NAEYC (2009) has standards for early childhood professional preparation programs and suggests that their standards include core knowledge, understanding, and methods necessary for ECE practitioners across multiple settings and in multiple roles, expressing a "national vision of excellence for early childhood professionals" (p. 2). NAEYC (2009) asserts that "standards contribute to the development of a solid, commonly held foundation on unifying themes from which diverse programs may arise, incorporating the wisdom of local communities, families, and practitioners" (p. 2). Notably, while NAEYC’s standards define a common vision of excellence and standard expectations for ECE practitioners nationally, its position suggests the importance of considering and incorporating what local practitioners already know and believe. NAEYC’s standards imply that practitioners’ backgrounds
might not only serve as prior knowledge on which to build, but might actually represent
cultural, linguistic, social and professional assets that can be leveraged to better serve
children.

The Emergence of Quality Rating Improvement Systems (QRIS)

While NAEYC has set standards for, and accredited, ECE programs for
approximately 30 years, a trend gaining national popularity over the last 10 years has
been the development of quality rating improvement systems (QRIS) to "induce ECE
programs to improve their quality" (Kagan, Kauerz & Tarrant, 2007, p. 119). Generally,
QRIS initiatives establish quality standards, maintain data systems, assess and publicly
communicate levels of quality, and are voluntary (Brandon, Maher, & Scarpa, 2008).
QRIS discourse also tends to describe limitations in access to quality ECE in terms of
market failures including inadequate supply, demand, and accountability (Brandon,
Maher, & Scarpa, 2008; Goffin & Barnett, 2015). Although QRISs were recently
described as having become "a ubiquitous tool for standardizing" ECE programs
(Goffin & Barnett, 2015, p. 179), challenges to the national policy dominance of QRISs
arise from limited evidence that QRISs effectively increase "program quality to a level
that positively affects children's learning and development, alters choices made by
families when choosing an ECE setting, or reduces ECE's programmatic and systemic
fragmentations" (Goffin & Barnett, 2015, p.179).

QRIS initiatives vary across states with respect to the people who run them,
funding sources, degrees of participation, content of standards, and types of supports
offered to ECE programs (Austin et al., 2011; Elicker et al., 2013; Kagan, Kauerz &
Tarrant, 2007). While QRIS goals and strategies vary across states, and statewide
QRISs do not exist in a number of states including Florida (Austin et al., 2011), QRISs
tend to divide quality into several components, such as: learning environments; curriculum; and staff qualifications. For example, in a recent iteration of Miami’s local QRIS, the “staff qualifications” standard explicitly connected educational levels of ECE professionals with the number of stars the quality improvement initiative publicly assigned to ECE programs. Formal education and Continuing Education Unit (CEU) bearing PD experiences were “counted” when the QRIS rated the staff qualifications of local ECE programs, arguably creating an incentive for programs to make their teachers attend CEU bearing PD regardless of the relevance of the PD content for a particular teacher.

**The ECE Workforce**

The National Survey of Early Care and Education Project Team (2013) conducted a nationwide survey to characterize the ECE workforce in four types of ECE locations: school-sponsored centers (accounting for about 6% of workers); Head-Start (accounting for about 14% of workers); Public Pre-Kindergarten (employing about 21% of workers); and other centers (the largest category accounting for all other types of ECE programs and 59% of employed workers). Institutional and systemic conditions associated with “the nascent, struggling ECE system” (Kagan, Kauerz & Tarrant, 2007, p. 60) influence a primarily female ECE workforce that tends to have low levels of formal education, low compensation, and turnover rates approximately double those for K-12 teachers (Kagan, Kauerz & Tarrant, 2007). The mismatch between quality ECE as a national priority and the low professional status and wages of ECE practitioners suggests a need for existing practitioners to engage in PD that supports the enactment of high quality practice.
Professional Development

ECE differs from K-12 education, in which there are more homogeneous expectations and standards for teacher preparation and PD. In ECE, the types and goals of PD that practitioners receive vary significantly, with degree of preparation and PD depending more on the source of funding than on work functions and expectations (Fuligni, Howes, Lara-Cinisomo, & Karoly, 2009). ECE PD currently ranges from formal higher education to specialized, on-the-job, in-service training. Common forms also include: coaching and/or consultative interactions; communities of practice; and, increasingly, Web training (Sheridan et al. 2009; Snyder et al. 2012). Despite multiple definitions and forms, most of the literature on ECE PD focuses on a few of the common modalities and usually focuses on ECE practitioners who are already working in the field. In spite of increased attention to the PD and performance of ECE educators, an extensive literature review conducted by the US Department of Education (2010) concluded that inconsistent professional standards and requirements have defined a field characterized by low educational levels and limited specialized ECE training (US Department of Education, 2010). Moreover, the review states that current PD strategies inadequately prepare ECE educators for “the array of responsibilities, knowledge, and skills they are expected to demonstrate in their work with young children and their families” (US Department of Education, 2010, p. ix). These assertions point to the importance of carefully looking at the type of PD that can effectively prepare ECE practitioners, not just in terms of a required number of hours to be met.

State Context

State level involvement, increasing over the past 20 years and evidenced by state standards and funding of ECE programs, adds another layer to the already
complex ECE landscape (Kagan, Kauerz & Tarrant, 2007). State level stakeholders include the Florida Office of Early Learning (OEL) and Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF). DCF enforces licensing standards oriented towards safety and commonly regarded as reflecting a minimum standard of quality. While DCF monitors most ECE programs, others are license-exempt. State level programs include Florida’s Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK) program, run by the OEL and intended to prepare four-year-olds for K-12 success. In 2002, 59% of Florida voters approved the VPK ballot initiative, which directed the creation of “high quality pre-kindergarten learning opportunities for all families” (Fuller, 2007, p. xi). Some scholars argue that Florida’s approach to providing universal access to preschool education has diluted quality to such a degree that its educational value is unrecognizable (Barnett & Lamy, 2013). Although rising state involvement in ECE reflects growing public awareness of the importance of quality ECE, critical consideration yields additional concerns.

**Critical Issues Regarding State Standards**

Increased public funding and accountability measures associated with the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) have led to increased efforts to standardize ECE, promoting the use of common criteria for determining quality at the state level. The trend towards standardization has included a more clearly defined role for early childhood practitioners and what they should know and be able to do. For example, many states, including Florida, have defined core competencies for early childhood practitioners (Steps to Success, 2010). In 2011, the OEL published the Florida Early Learning and Developmental Standards for children from birth to age five in an effort to unify previously disparate School Readiness and VPK standards. In addition to OEL standards and NAEYC accreditation and standards, accreditation through the Florida
Association for Child Care Management’s (FACCM) Accredited Professional Preschool Learning Environment (APPLE) system is also accepted in Florida as an official certification of quality, which provides tax benefits and increased reimbursement rates for ECE programs receiving public subsidies. APPLE accreditation standards differ from NAEYC accreditation standards, with NAEYC accreditation generally regarded as more rigorous. While there is no statewide QRIS in Florida, there are regional versions, adding another set of standards by which to rate, and presumably improve, ECE program quality.

Within linguistically diverse communities, including Miami, the language of instruction in ECE becomes a particularly challenging issue. There is ongoing discussion regarding the education of young children, and the extent to which standards, including English language standards, should guide teaching practice (Krashen & McField, 2005). Some argue that as the number of languages and cultures in our communities and classrooms increase, the English language should be reinforced, ensuring that all children are proficient in English by the time they enter elementary school (Krashen & McField, 2005). Others argue that building on a child’s home language and culture helps children progress in ways that meet their social capabilities and cognitive strengths and makes classroom instruction more consistent with the cultural orientations of ethnically diverse students (Gay, 2010; Krashen & McField, 2005; Tabors, 2008). Recent studies about dual language development illuminate particular needs of dual language learners and implications for early childhood programs, including the need to provide opportunities to engage in useful and
purposeful first-and second-language and literacy interactions (Tabors, 2008; Espinosa, 2013).

The prevalence of standards poses particular challenges for multicultural settings and places teachers in what Achinstein and Ogawa (2012) identify as a “double bind,” reflecting contradictions between accountability policies, professional demands, and dimensions of culturally responsive teaching. In the process of complying with systemic demands associated with accountability-based programs and policies, teachers attempting to draw upon their own and their students cultural resources may encounter important tensions. In Achinstein and Ogawa’s (2012) five year study examining the influence of accountability policies upon culturally responsive teaching, new teachers of color experienced tensions between: “a) cultural and linguistic relevance versus standardization, b) community of learners versus teacher transmission, and c) social justice versus enhanced test scores” (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2012, p.1). While accountability proponents link state-mandated testing with educational opportunity, participants viewed internalization of this rationale, along with fear of compliance oriented monitoring, as systemic mechanisms forcing them to enact contradictory practices.

Florida’s ECE PD

In Florida, both the desire to meet national and state standards and broader recognition of the influence of the early years on school success have led to a surge in PD efforts for ECE practitioners. The focus of these efforts ranges from helping teachers achieve higher levels of formal education and the core competencies determined by OEL, or meeting locally determined quality standards, to completing training focused on complying with emerging state requirements. However, an OEL
(2013) study of the Florida ECE workforce professional learning needs suggests that ECE practitioners are often discouraged by PD that wastes their time and money and gives them few tools for enhancing their daily work with children, provides limited options, and does not enable them to go further in their careers (OEL, 2013). It is important to explore whether a focus on short-term fixes and disregard for practitioners’ cultural and linguistic assets may contribute to this discontent and to a disconnection between theory and practice. It is also important to explore how a prevailing deficit mindset that focuses on what ECE teachers do not have or cannot do emphasizes weaknesses rather than strengths and may affect the effectiveness of ECE PD in Florida by reproducing inequities and limiting their ability to support children of diverse backgrounds.

**Local Context**

Various local quality improvement efforts reflect the high level of awareness of the importance of quality ECE in Miami as well as the value placed on ECE in the community. However, despite apparently common purposes, ECE efforts are not necessarily well coordinated across groups. Kagan, Kauerz, and Tarrant’s (2007) statement that “ECE is not functioning as a whole, but as a set of highly idiosyncratic and uncoordinated arrangements” (p. 62) seems particularly true within this local setting, as ECE programs are subject to even more layers of complexity and standards of quality. Multiple sources fund Miami’s ECE programs, which reflect a variety of service delivery models and organizational structures serving racially, economically, ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse populations of children and families along with a similarly diverse workforce. Multilingual issues are particularly relevant in Miami due to its increasingly multicultural composition and large number of dual language...
learners. Census data show that 72.3% of homes in Miami speak a language other than English (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). While multiple ethnicities are represented, according to The Children’s Trust (2008), more than 100,000 children under age five in Miami have Hispanic heritage and 57% of all children speak Spanish at home. Yet, despite the diversity prevalent in the local context, different points of view regarding the meaning of quality in ECE and the best ways to elevate it rarely seem openly and candidly discussed.

In Miami-Dade County, agencies like the United Way of Miami-Dade (UWMD), The Children’s Trust (TCT), and the Early Learning Coalition of Miami-Dade/Monroe (ELCMDM), each have missions related to improving quality and access to ECE. These social agencies and others like them attempt to elevate quality in ECE and are essential to understanding “the realities of change at the local level” (Fullan, 2007, p. 16). One program explicitly designed to improve the quality of ECE is the local QRIS, called Quality Counts (QC). QC is “a voluntary rating system that reviews early learning programs according to standards using a five-star rating and offers supports and incentives to help providers reach their goals” (Early Learning Coalition of Miami-Dade/Monroe, 2015). While there seems to be consensus at the community organization level that standards and monitoring are important aspects of quality in ECE, this area of consensus seems paradoxically problematic because each of the multiple entities involved imposes different monitoring requirements that seem to create counterproductive burdens, confusion, and frustration for ECE practitioners. This phenomenon relates to Fullan’s (2007) suggestion that “fragmented initiatives compound the problem of meaning” (Fullan, 2007, p. 39).
We have discussed multiple local interests in elevating the quality of ECE, pointed to the complexity of the Miami ECE context, and suggested that limited coordination between approaches and lack of articulation and communication between multiple local interests has led to, and may reflect, different understandings of quality. We will now focus on the ECE workforce and its role in enacting quality.

**ECE Workforce**

In a Florida ECE workforce study, Clements, Kalifeh and Grass (2014) gathered statistics from the ECE workforce in Miami showing the cultural and ethnic composition of ECE practitioners working in programs that participate in QC. Sixty-one percent of practitioners reported Spanish as their primary language, and 75% named a country other than the US as their country of origin. Eighteen percent of the staff in ECE programs had a Bachelor’s degree, and 67% had an educational level of high school or lower. These statistics provide a picture of the local workforce and important characteristics that must be considered when designing PD, such as linguistic and cultural heritage. ECE practitioners’ linguistic and cultural backgrounds are similar to those of families and children served in Miami, yet they are often cited as evidence of gaps that need to be addressed by PD efforts. Although demographic (e.g., ethnic, cultural, linguistic, socioeconomic, etc.) similarities may represent tremendous opportunities for providing high quality and culturally responsive services if adequately leveraged, culturally and linguistically diverse teachers rarely share such assets with the children and families they serve in local ECE programs. In Miami, top-down, standards based approaches to quality arguably prevent acknowledgement of the cultural and linguistic assets ECE practitioners could bring to their professional practice and learning, and to the children and families they serve.
**Current Focus of PD**

The case of Miami presents particular challenges and opportunities regarding the preparation of ECE practitioners. The report commissioned by OEL (2013) to assess the situation of PD of early childhood practitioners in Florida identifies challenges including time, resources, and lack of adequate information that connects practitioners to available opportunities. The report also identifies educational challenges, and little access to opportunities that can really help practitioners overcome these limitations (OEL, 2013). Notably, the report identifies the fact that many native Spanish-speaking practitioners are not proficient in English as a challenge.

OEL (2013) findings point to a need to better understand the ECE context and the PD needs of those who work in this field. Critical consideration of the findings also raises important issues regarding the implementation of PD experiences that effectively support the development and learning of young children, including what theories of teacher learning guide current PD efforts and whose knowledge and culture are privileged. Other critical issues worth exploring include the extent to which standards and accountability policies affect teachers’ practices within multicultural settings and the way in which teachers’ perspectives and cultural and linguistic assets are perceived and leveraged in PD. These issues relate to what Gay (2010) has termed culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP), which involves using “the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective to them” (p. 31).

**Shared Research and Professional Contexts**

We now describe our shared contexts in terms of our previous employment with the ELCMDM and our enrollment in the University of Florida (UF) Professional Practice
Doctorate. We have each worked in the field of ECE in Miami for over nine years. While we have collectively occupied a number of different positions over the years, they have all broadly involved attempts to improve the quality of ECE in our community. We both worked for years at the ELCMDM during overlapping periods of time. But, there was minimal overlap between our professional roles and little communication or collaboration between our programs. However, our collaboration during the UF doctoral program in general, and on this dissertation in particular, led us to realize that we experienced shared contexts in regards to parallel struggles, questions, and reflections that occurred while working for the organization.

Overall, we shared discontent with what we experienced as a hierarchical, uncoordinated system characterized by hegemonic, large-scale, top-down approaches to ECE policies and limited attention to local or cultural relevance. For example, we both grappled with inequitable but unquestioned repercussions of policies like tying VPK funding to narrowly defined accountability measures, ratings, and sanctions. We were each sensitive to how these practices disadvantaged minoritized groups including dual language learners, children with special needs, and their teachers. We also both experienced inconsistent understandings of what developmentally appropriate practice is, and how it should translate to diverse local contexts, which often resulted in counterproductive quality improvement efforts. These experiences influenced our interests in attending to local perspectives and practitioner voices in an effort to articulate shared meanings of quality that support authentic, culturally responsive, professional learning. We developed our thinking and began to critically reflect on, and
interact with, our professional struggles collaboratively throughout our doctoral coursework, particularly this collaborative dissertation.

**VIPP ECE PD Facilitation in Miami**

Ana provides PD and UWMD coordinates grants focused on ECE PD in Miami-Dade County through its CFE where Miriam worked, writing and managing grants. We previously collaborated in training community PD facilitators in Visualization in Participatory Programmes (VIPP). VIPP is an approach that relies on visualization, dialogue, and facilitation to promote active participation and positive group dynamics during group events such as trainings (Salas, Tillman, McKee & Shahzadi, 2007). VIPP has roots in Latin America and Germany and has been used globally by grassroots and international development organizations, including the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), where Ana became familiar with the approach. VIPP is grounded on Freirian principles, Latin American traditions of popular education and Participatory Action Research, and German planning methodologies (Salas et al., 2007). In stark contrast with the traditional deficit approach to PD that assumes communities of color have cultural deficiencies (Yosso, 2005), VIPP facilitators acknowledge the importance of personal and community experiences as sources of knowledge, with an emphasis on the experiences of traditionally oppressed groups and people (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005).

Our collaboration in offering VIPP facilitation to ECE PD providers in Miami emerged from a conversation about the current system of PD and how it reflected a dominant approach by promoting standardized training and ignoring local assets. We discussed how there were other approaches, often disregarded in our local context, which offered alternative tools which valued people’s multiple voices and supported
collaborative learning. Soon after that conversation, Miriam incorporated VIPP into a grant proposal to provide PD through a community wide training grant. The grant was awarded, the use of VIPP was encouraged, and local facilitators are now using VIPP techniques they have learned from Ana that more effectively engage the diverse learning needs of participants in our community ECE trainings. As the CFE was awarded additional grants, Ana worked with PD facilitators on VIPP. The fact that Ana had never been able to use this approach to its full potential in her decade of being involved with ECE PD in Miami serves as evidence of how what people “bring” to Miami is often dismissed in favor of hegemonic practices. The fact that we were part of changing that trend suggests hope for elevating the status of what ECE professionals bring to the table within the local quest to elevate quality in ECE.

Significance of our Collaborative Research

We intentionally collaborated as we conducted and wrote about our complementary studies about two interrelated topics in ECE: quality and PD. Our combined studies represent opportunities to elicit and understand the perspectives of early childhood professionals in Miami regarding the concept of quality in ECE, and to recognize the ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and professional assets that ECE practitioners bring to their practice. These insights can illuminate how different features of quality interact with and apply to specific programs, contexts, and populations as well as build understanding around which professional learning experiences satisfy the growing needs of diverse ECE professionals. Our studies provide opportunities to consider how quality improvement efforts, including PD, can: support culturally responsive environments for multicultural populations; become spaces for constructing shared meaning about quality, and; support local articulation and constructive negotiation of
tensions between differing perceptions, meanings, ideals, philosophies, and practices as they relate to quality ECE.

Exploring perspectives on the concept of quality in ECE is timely given the current national, state, and local emphases on the importance of elevating access to, and quality of, ECE. The results of this exploration represent unique perspectives situated within a local context rich with efforts to enhance quality in ECE. Rather than treating the problem of quality in ECE as something that can quickly be fixed through universal methods, we critically explore the concept of quality and the possibility that dialogue and reflection offer to “unmask and free ourselves from existing discourses, concepts, and constructions, and to move on by producing different ones” (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2013, p. 84). By exploring the concept of quality and how it is constructed in our context we shed light on participants’ perspectives and understandings. We believe that exploring and documenting participants’ diverse perspectives and understandings is relevant because they should be considered when designing and implementing initiatives to elevate quality. By looking at how PD experiences contribute to teachers’ current understandings and beliefs, we uncover meaningful, effective, and culturally responsive methods to support shared understandings and dialogue about issues of quality.

Conclusion

We have provided an overview of the national, state, and local contexts surrounding ECE, quality, and quality improvement and have characterized the ECE workforce and state of PD efforts both nationally and locally. We also briefly discussed our shared research and professional context and highlighted VIPP facilitation in Miami ECE PD. Next, we review the literature related to the major issues shaping our studies.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

In this review of literature, we explore themes related to the concept of quality in ECE, perspectives on quality PD, and the role of PD in the pursuit of quality in ECE. As a guiding principle, we assume that meaningful quality improvement in ECE through PD is a continuous, time-consuming, and challenging endeavor (Fullan, 2007; Huberman & Miles, 1984 as cited in Guskey, 2002; McLaughlin & Marsh, 1978 as cited in Guskey, 2002). We hope this collaborative study, including this literature review, contribute to the understanding and inclusion of unique perspectives that might challenge dominant assumptions and create new spaces for the kind of doubt that Dewey described as the basis for genuine thinking (Garrison, 2006, p. 3 as cited in Webster-Wright, 2009).

Dominant assumptions are usually taken for granted, and Webster-Wright (2009) points out that “challenging assumptions involves conscious awareness of them” (Webster-Wright, 2009, p. 722). Policies that tacitly reflect the opinions and values of dominant groups, while failing to represent the perspectives of other groups, exemplify this assertion.

There are currently conflicting philosophical paradigms that permeate ECE educational thinking, policies, and programs. On one hand, the positivist paradigm presumes that quality is a fixed, objective truth that can be measured and characterizes current dominant thinking (Bloch, 2014; Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2013; Nagasawa, Peters, and Swadener, 2014). On the other hand, those who critique dominant thinking about quality in ECE highlight the role of context and point out the constructed and value-laden nature of concepts like “normal” child development, and developmentally
appropriate “best practices” (Bloch, Swadener, & Cannella, 2014; Kessler, 2014). Such critiques reflect the constructivist paradigm because they suggest that quality is socially constructed, and cannot exist, or be measured or improved independently of context.

Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence (2013) emphasize that ECE is one of many inextricably interwoven strands that make up context. Tensions between positivist and constructivist research paradigms are particularly evident in discourses about quality, pedagogy, and evaluation (Bloch, 2014; Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2013). In dominant quality discourse, “the concept of quality is primarily about defining, through the specification of criteria, a generalizable standard against which a product can be judged with certainty” (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2013, pp. 98-99) and the emphasis on standards, outcomes, assessments, and efficiency, reflects positivist assumptions (Bloch, 2014). In contrast, pedagogues, the gatekeepers of quality in ECE, tend to rely on a socio-cultural perspective and constructivism as a more appropriate paradigm to explain and support young children’s learning (Edwards, 2003; Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 2011).

The constructivist and positivist paradigms evoke a constellation of opposing ideas including about the nature of knowledge and truth, and its relationship to power and privilege. Dominant groups, including policy makers and administrators, tend to favor positivism when defining research, policies, and programs in their search for objective, measurable outcomes, particularly after NCLB. For example, Hatch (2014) argues that NCLB codified positivist assumptions into a prevailing modern understanding of normal research as scientifically-based and quantitative. Nagasawa, Peters, and Swadener’s (2014) experience and research focused on a state QRIS further associates prevailing ECE quality discourse and public policy with neoliberal
ideology, whose “unifying logic is the free market wherein the public good is served by consumer choices and product quality is assured through competition” (p. 279). It is notable that market-based quality improvement efforts represent assumptions including that: ECE is a service/product, families are consumers, and that by providing information about ECE program quality to parents, as consumers, the market will increase demand for quality and create beneficial competition among ECE service providers.

These opposing paradigms, and associated ideologies and assumptions, create problems for ECE professionals at every level, but particularly for those who work directly with children and families. As practitioners attempt to accommodate mandates and standards while serving and responding to individual children, families, and local realities, they are in a situation that exemplifies what Achinstein and Ogawa (2012) describe as a “double bind” (p.xx). NAEYC grapples with related contradictions by identifying three main considerations for the enactment of developmentally appropriate practice: what we know about child development and learning; what we know about the individual child; and what we know about the social and cultural context in which the child lives (NAEYC, 2009).

As we explore multiple perspectives, we highlight that dominant perspectives are often the product of specific sociocultural contexts and philosophical paradigms, notwithstanding that various constituencies tend to assume that these dominant perspectives are the best ways to elevate quality in ECE. We discuss several themes that reflect opposing paradigms, including: standardization versus cultural relevance; cultural funds of knowledge as deficits versus values; and perceptions of standardized
goals, methods, and assessments as tools to elevate quality versus hindrances to meaningful, culturally responsive change. Although we tend to present dominant and alternative perspectives as opposing, we must acknowledge that the reality of interacting with our contexts as practitioner scholars represents a more nuanced balancing act between extremes. In addition to exploring literature related to dichotomous themes, we consider how PD may offer a space for ECE practitioners to co-construct practical coherence through ongoing, collaborative negotiation of tensions between extremes.

We begin this literature review by discussing the current pursuit of quality in ECE, commencing with a discussion of the problems associated with a dominant perspective that focuses on its evaluation. We examine the use of quality measures in research and policy efforts aimed at elevating quality. Next, we explore alternative understandings of the concept of quality as a cultural construct, noting a set of problems with the dominant approach to quality that alternative perspectives suggest. Alternative perspectives include those aligned with constructivism and critical theory. Because both constructivist and critical perspectives highlight the importance of context, overlap exists; however, critical theory additionally emphasizes social justice for oppressed groups by challenging the neutrality of societal forces that preserve the status quo. Sensoy and Di Angelo (2012) describe critical theory as historically rising in response to the presumed infallibility of positivism, the scientific method, and rational thought. Critical theory challenges dominant scholarly approaches by questioning whose presumed objectivity and rationality underlie particular scientific methods (Sensoy & Di Angelo, 2012). Relevant to critical theory and this collaborative endeavor, a critical social justice
framework not only values academic scholarship but also knowledge that “includes the lived experiences and perspectives that marginalized groups bring to bear on an issue” (Sensory & DiAngelo, 2012, p.4).

We elaborate on how dominant and alternative understandings of quality inform PD practices and describe critical issues relevant to our local context of Miami. We also consider how critical concepts of hegemony and constructed consciousness relate to quality improvement, PD, and ECE practitioners. Then, we discuss various definitions of ECE PD and current understandings of how teachers learn and change their practice. In our discussion of theories of adult learning, we discuss Cochran-Smith and Lytle’s (1999, 2001) ideas regarding three forms of knowledge (for, in, and of practice) and how they prevail in different approaches to PD. We describe dominant approaches to PD, which are based on deficit thinking and place emphasis on standardization. We also explore attempts to identify key features of PD and posit some limitations to Desimone’s (2009) popular framework. We consider PD from alternative perspectives that explain the ecological, collective nature of ECE PD and take into account practitioners’ cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles. Next, we contemplate CRP as a relevant approach to ECE PD because CRP asserts and acknowledges the importance of personal and community experience as sources of knowledge, with an emphasis on the experiences of traditionally oppressed groups and people (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). Lastly, we discuss how this emphasis stands in stark contrast to the traditional deficit-based assumption that communities of color have cultural deficiencies (Yosso, 2005) and is useful to understand and address quality from a local perspective.
Quality

Varied understandings of quality in ECE reflect different philosophical paradigms. For example, the positivist paradigm stresses a need for definitional consensus; aims to identify and address technical issues related to operationalization and measurement of quality; and prioritizes increasing student outcomes. In comparison, those with a constructivist perspective highlight the socially constructed nature of quality in ECE; question assumptions that are taken for granted within the dominant positivist paradigm; and welcome multiple, uncertain, locally determined and publicly-visible meanings of quality (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2013; Moss & Dahlberg, 2008). From a critical perspective, current categorizations of quality cannot fully encompass and represent the multifaceted subtleties of the complex construct of quality or the social conditions that the construct seems to depoliticize (Moss & Dahlberg, 2008). We begin by exploring quality from a dominant, positivist perspective and then consider quality from an alternative perspective.

The Dominant Perspective on Quality

Within the US policy context, the concern that ECE programs deploy funding in ways that effectively lead to positive outcomes for children appears to inextricably link the age of quality with the age of accountability. Accountability pressures in ECE regularly result in calls for: school readiness standards; assessments of young children; and increased qualifications of ECE teachers (Kagan, Kauerz & Tarrant, 2007). The push for quality in ECE affects a landscape that alternative perspectives suggest is dominated by “tightening discourses of standardization and testing of young children, increasing push-down of academics into the preschool years, and relentless assessment of ‘quality’ of programs…” (Bloch, 2014, p. 27). Some politicians reflect the
dominant perspective by explicitly connecting efforts to increase federal involvement in ECE with NCLB’s focus on raising test scores (Fuller, 2007).

Social sciences also reflect the dominant perspective as they predominantly favor positivist forms of knowledge based on the assumption that an objective, universal, culture-free truth can be attained if the correct scientific methods are used to measure it (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). The national focus on quality in ECE centers on measuring quality rather than defining it as a construct. Dominant quality discourse rarely includes critical considerations of philosophical, theoretical, and cultural bases upon which quality is defined (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2013; Nagasawa, Peters & Swadener, 2014). In addition, current research, evaluation, and measurement of quality tend to omit direct examinations of children’s perspectives and experiences (Layzer & Goodson, 2006; Wiltz & Klein, 2001) and arguably silence teachers’ and families’ unique perspectives on quality (Adair, Tobin & Arzubiaga, 2012).

While the dominant perspective does not question assumptions embedded in the construct or the idea that quality can be objectively measured, it raises issues related to current scientific terms, methodology, and measurement. Positivist challenges to evaluations of quality in ECE focus on technical inadequacies in the presumed scientific search to discover, clearly describe, accurately measure, manage, and increase quality. For example, scholars recently identified frequent flaws in current research measurement methods used in ECE environments and incorrect associations between quality measures and children’s outcomes (Gordon, Fujimoto, Kaestner, Korenman, & Abner, 2013; Layzer & Goodson, 2006).
Although the search for an objective definition of quality in ECE seems pervasive, dominant assumptions appear flawed in light of multiple definitions used in research and practice. For example, Kagan, Kauerz, and Tarrant (2007) describe lack of clear definitions and inconsistent use of terms in ECE research, analysis, and advocacy as historically characterizing and plaguing the field. LaParo et al. (2012) similarly note that the lack of clear, shared understandings of quality in ECE makes it difficult to operationalize and measure the construct. For example, 72 studies that used the same classroom observation measure to operationalize quality inconsistently defined the concept and conceptualized quality in multiple and vague ways; and certain studies defined quality by the tool used to measure it (LaParo et al., 2012). Although ECE research focuses on quality, there is recognition of methodological and practical challenges related to the measurement of the multidimensional construct and the way different aspects of quality translate to optimal experiences for children (LaParo et al., 2012; Layzer & Goodson, 2006). Notwithstanding widespread consensus that quality ECE can improve outcomes, there remains continuous debate regarding “essential elements of a high-quality experience…how to measure quality, and about the level of quality that might make a meaningful difference in outcomes for children” (Layzer & Goodson, 2006, p. 556).

While definitions of quality vary, powerful stakeholders similarly use predetermined criteria to evaluate ECE. These criteria presume an expert-defined, objective and stable definition of quality, and evaluators measure criteria in quantitative terms. Subjects of evaluation include programs, classrooms, educators, and children. Typically measured program level characteristics include curriculum, family
involvement, and staff development; classroom characteristics include ratio and group size; and educator characteristics include experience and education (Layzer & Goodson, 2006). Together with activities and interactions, these factors are viewed as influencing the quality of a child’s experience and therefore nurturing child development (Layzer & Goodson, 2006). Notably, informal care arrangements, including care by friends and relatives, are more likely used by low income families, yet none of the common environmental measures address aspects of informal settings cited as most important by families, such as common values, social support, and ability to accommodate siblings (Layzer & Goodson, 2006).

Current categories of quality evaluated in ECE, ranging from Head Start to QRISs, include structural/environmental factors, educational or instructional process/dynamics, and combinations of structure and process, which are known as global measures (Cryer, 1999; LaParo et al., 2012; Layzer & Goodson, 2006). Cryer (1999), an author of popular rating scales, advances core elements of quality that she argues are relatively stable, including health and safety practices, a child-centered and individually oriented approach, developmentally appropriate practice, and positive frequent verbal interactions. Popular measures in ECE evaluate both the structures and processes of ECE. Structure generally includes materials, curriculum, ratios, and teacher education; and process relates to teacher-child and peer-peer interactions.

Key limitations across structure, process, and global quality measures include: “(a) they are usually one-time snapshots of the care setting; (b) they do not capture the experience of the individual child; and (c) they are easier to develop for more formal settings, so that assessment of informal settings has lagged behind” (Layzer &
Goodson, 2006, p. 565). Wiltz and Klein (2001) conducted observations and interviews examining more than 100 culturally diverse four-year-olds’ perceptions of their experiences in different ECE centers that varied in quality based on the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS-Harms, Cryer, & Clifford, 2005) and Classroom Practices Inventory (Hyson, Hirsh-Pasek, & Rescorla, 1990). Children in Wiltz and Klein’s (2001) study understood procedures, events, and activities, and while their responses about how these unfolded varied by classroom quality, their primary dislikes did not. Moreover, Wiltz and Klein (2001) contend that children offered an optimistic outlook that transcended the quality of the setting. Wiltz and Klein (2001) note the problematic oversimplification of programs as “high” versus “low” quality and underscore the limitation of evaluating settings using a one-time snapshot (Layzer and Goodson, 2006). They argue that understanding the dynamics, character and appropriateness of an environment, as well as the responsiveness of teachers and engagement of children, requires extended observation.

Global Measures

Global tools, which also tend to function as one-time snapshots and measure a combination of structure and process features, are often used in research and quality improvement initiatives (Layzer & Goodson, 2006). For example, Miami’s local QRIS uses the ECERS, Infant-Toddler Environmental Rating Scale (ITERS) (Harms, Cryer, & Clifford, 2003), and Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) (Pianta, LaParo, & Hamre, 2008) to inform the quality level assigned to local ECE programs. The ITERS and ECERS belong to a family of assessments known as Environmental Rating Scales (ERS), which generally include measures based on expert opinion that are historically regarded as standard and primary measures of quality. ERS tools tend to dominate
discussions of quality in ECE and use dimensions of quality presumed to reflect universal, objective values and transcend cultural differences (Burchinal & Cryer, 2004; LaParo et al., 2012; Layzer & Goodson, 2006). However, Cryer (1999), an author of the ERS tools, acknowledges that “the priorities of those who define quality will determine any quality definition” (p. 52). Although ERS scales were originally developed for program self-assessment (LaParo et al., 2012), Miami’s QRIS employs outside observers to rate classrooms using the scales. An additional technical concern is that QRIS initiatives tend to assume that meaningful improvements are reflected within the range of acceptable inter-rater reliability (one point on a seven point scale) (Layzer & Goodson, 2006). A more overarching concern is that global assessments provide limited information about aspects of ECE related to positive child outcomes, such as instructional strategies, approaches to literacy, math, and science, teacher support, and outdoor environments (LaParo et al., 2012).

The ECERS has played a role in research studies used to determine program quality and funding and to conclude that ECE quality is mediocre. In their study of over 700 children ages four through eight, which is part of the frequently cited Cost, Quality, and Outcomes (CQO) study, Peisner-Feinberg et al. (2001) examined effects of community child care center quality on longitudinal patterns of cognitive and social emotional development. Peisner-Feinberg et al. (2001) used several measures, including the ECERS, to measure quality in a subsample of 160 center-based community child-care settings in four regions across the US. The mean ECERS scores fell in the mid-range, “suggesting that children were attending centers where their routine care needs were likely to be met, but where there were more limited
opportunities for learning activities, individual attention, or language stimulation” (Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2001, p. 1541). In their related discussion of definitional and measurement issues pertaining to “quality” in ECE, Layzer and Goodson (2006) suggest the ERS family of tools, including the ECERS, are used to support broad claims that child care is of mediocre quality and to justify funding for quality improvement activities. However, there is limited empirical evidence supporting widespread adoption of the ECERS as a broad indicator of quality in policy and research (Gordon et al., 2013; LaParo et al., 2012). In their systematic examination of 76 studies published between 2003 and 2010 that used the ECERS to measure a component of quality in ECE, LaParo et al. (2012) found a wide range of definitions of quality appearing in the methods sections, pointing to inconsistencies in the ways researchers conceptualize the term despite using the same tool to operationalize the construct. For example, LaParo et al. (2012) point out the contradiction that the ECERS tool was designed to assess process quality in ECE, yet process quality was the least frequently used definition of quality in the sampled studies.

LaParo et al. (2012) criticize the ECERS as being over-relied on in the field and suggest that the tool broadly characterizes quality in ECE. LaParo et al. (2012) argue that the tool inadequately guides quality enhancement initiatives and contributes to amorphous meanings and varied definitions of quality (La Paro et al., 2012). While broadly measuring classroom quality, the tool fails to measure other aspects of quality including teacher characteristics and teacher-child interactions (LaParo et al., 2012). LaParo et al. (2012) call for future research to include multiple perspectives and refined conceptualizations of quality, suggesting the need for tools and definitions that measure
depth in addition to breadth, which they suggest the ECERS represents. A recent factor
analysis examining the criterion validity and structural and process validity of the revised
ECERS supports critiques of the tool (Gordon et al., 2013). Validity issues include
limited associations between the tool and child outcomes, reflection of multiple
dimensions within a single indicator, and likelihood of missing dimensions of low and
high quality due to the developer’s category ordering (Gordon et al., 2013).

The CLASS (Pianta, LaParo, & Hamre, 2008), which focuses on emotional
support, classroom organization, and instructional support is an alternative to the ERS
(including ITERS and ECERS) scales and similarly has a family of standardized
observation measures of classroom quality for different age groups. The CLASS
measures process dimensions of classroom environments and teacher-child
interactions and, like the ERS scales, is used not only in educational research, but to
inform accountability and PD (Lopez, 2011; LaParo, Pianta, & Stuhlman, 2004). The
CLASS observation, which is based on an accumulation of theoretical and empirical
evidence about the types of interactions that support development, globally measures
classroom quality (Hamre et al., 2012; Pianta & Hamre, 2009) and has gained
popularity as a tool to measure quality in ECE. For example, the Office of Head Start
recently adopted the CLASS as part of its monitoring process (Hamre et al., 2012).
Also, several states use the CLASS as a component of their respective QRISs, and the
CLASS is currently used in Miami’s QRIS.

Like the ITERS and ECERS measures, an outside observer administers the
CLASS in a sample of classrooms in the local QRIS, and the classroom scores
contribute to the quality rating assigned to the program. Using standardized measures,
such as sampled classroom observation scores and teacher education levels, to generate quality ratings of entire programs reflects the dominant, positivist paradigm, overlooking important issues of culture and context. Conducting ERS and CLASS observations on only some classrooms is technically problematic because quality varies significantly among classrooms, and differences between classrooms are primary sources of variation in achievement gains (Burchinal et al., 2008; Pianta & Hamre, 2009). For example, in their recent study of variation in classroom quality among more than 400 ECE centers participating in Colorado’s QRIS, Karoly, Zellman, and Perlman (2013) found that over a quarter of the variation in quality scores captured by ERS measures occurred across classrooms serving the same age children in the same centers. Results indicate error associated with the common QRIS practice of generating a program quality rating based on assessments of only a sample of classrooms, which risks mischaracterizing program-wide quality (Karoly, Zellman, and Perlman, 2013). Despite practical issues related to the use of the CLASS in only a sample of classrooms, including mischaracterization of program quality and limited value for PD, the CLASS is notable because it attempts to account for context-dependent variables by assessing aspects of interpersonal relationships like emotional supports.

Researchers associated with the CLASS recently examined the psychometric properties of the tool in 721 linguistically and ethnically diverse state-funded pre-kindergarten classrooms (Downer et al., 2012). Downer et al. (2012) found CLASS observations predicted school readiness for Latino and Dual Language Learner (DLL) students, which may suggest the tool accurately assesses quality interactions across linguistically and ethnically diverse pre-kindergarten classrooms. However, other
research suggests specific teacher behaviors measured by the CLASS inconsistently relate to student achievement across groups. For example, in her examination of the relationship between teacher behaviors assessed by the CLASS and Hispanic and non-Hispanic student achievement across 46 elementary classrooms in a midwest, urban setting, Lopez (2011) found that observed variables contributing to the achievement of non-Hispanic students did not contribute to the achievement of Hispanic students, suggesting that unmeasured cultural differences impact the generalizability of CLASS assessments.

Lopez (2011) concludes that the CLASS is an inappropriate and inadequate tool to assess the quality of teachers of Hispanic students, suggesting that overwhelmingly White teacher and student norming sample populations used across CLASS studies may “preclude its validity across populations” (p. 353). Such generalizability concerns raise critical questions about the use of assessments that are inconsistent with the norms of non-dominant groups to inform accountability and PD (Lopez, 2011). Consideration of context-dependent variables, like cultural norms, involved with assessing quality in ECE leads to consideration of the culturally constructed nature of the concept of quality itself.

**Quality ECE as a Cultural Construct**

Tobin’s (2005) discussion of quality in ECE uses examples from his ethnographic work in Japanese and French ECE settings to illustrate the culturally constructed nature of quality standards. By considering how quality ECE is conceived and enacted in distinct countries, Tobin (2005) questions the most basic US quality standards and explicitly challenges the dominant understanding of quality standards as culture free, non-contextual, universal, and generalizable. Instead, Tobin (2005) describes standards
as “reflections of values and concerns of particular people in a particular time and place” (Tobin, 2005, p. 426). This is consistent with Sensoy and DiAngelo’s (2012) description of socially constructed knowledge as “reflective of the values and interests of those who produce it” (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012, p. 7).

Japanese and French notions of quality in ECE do not necessarily include US trends in quality; therefore, programs in these countries do not reflect standards that are presumed to be objective in dominant US educational discourse. For example, Tobin (2005) describes Japanese and French preschools as out of compliance with the majority of NAEYC quality standards. Preschools in France and Japan have ratios of more than 25 children to one teacher, showing different cultural perceptions of the role of student to teacher ratios in quality. The influence of culture is particularly clear given that, although US research suggests that lower ratios relate to higher quality, this relationship does not always appear across cultures (Tobin, 2005). Tobin (2005) points out that even dominant US multicultural education practices, like having diverse dolls in dramatic play areas, are culturally bound.

Critical Issues with the Construct of Quality

While dominant attempts to evaluate quality using presumably objective tools are problematic for reasons we have discussed, an additional set of problems relates to the presumed neutrality of the positivist, technical, outcome-oriented socio-historical context in which the construct of quality is situated (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2013; Moss & Dahlberg, 2008; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence (2013) explicitly contest the dominant ECE quality narrative as globally hegemonic, reductionist, and mechanistic, arguing that the construct of quality embodies non-neutral assumptions and values. In their discussion of the origins of the discourse of quality in
the historical context of industrialization and globalization, Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence (2013) cite several definitions of quality offered by business “gurus” which involve themes of control, reliability, dependability, predictability, consistency/reduced variation, satisfaction of needs, freedom from deficiency, and conformity to requirements in relation to goods and services. Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence (2013) argue that the dominant, Anglo-American discourse positions early childhood institutions as “enclosures where technologies are applied to children to produce predetermined outcomes…the service acts like a machine, and quality tells you if the machine is working well, providing evidence that purports to be objective and certain” (p. xvii).

From the point of view of an international group of scholars and educators who Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence (2013) describe as forming a “resistance movement” (p. ix) in ECE, the problem with quality lies in a “sense and an unease that what has been approached as an essentially technical issue of expert knowledge and measurement may, in fact, be a philosophical issue of value and dispute” (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2013, p. 6). Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence (2013) challenge the prevailing assumption that the secret to high returns on investment in ECE is a universal formula for quality: “In this narrative, ‘quality’ has no need of context or complexity, diversity or democracy” (p. vii). The subjective experiences and diverse beliefs of children, teachers, and families seem minimized within this dominant quality narrative. Fundamental questions related to the pursuit of standard definitions, measures, or formulas for quality include: “How could quality take into account context and values, subjectivity and plurality? How could it accommodate multiple perspectives, with different groups in different places having
different views of what quality was or different interpretations of criteria?” (Moss & Dahlberg, 2008, p. 22).

Such questioning of current ECE quality discourse contrasts, highlights, and problematizes philosophical and political assumptions underlying dominant research and policy traditions. For example, questions arise involving how nationally, politically, and academically supported attempts to universalize and measure quality using a limited number of context-less criteria and standards may ignore, devalue, or neutralize contextual complexities, national diversity, and local specificity (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2013; Tobin, 2005). One important contextual complexity to consider in ECE is the group of professionals charged with providing quality ECE and the PD they receive. Within Miami, ECE professionals and the children and families they serve constitute a particular, culturally and linguistically diverse contextual complexity worth careful examination.

**PD as a Space to Construct ECE Quality**

The National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2007) posed that positive relationships influence the architecture of the developing brain and therefore society would benefit from having better trained personnel in ECE settings. In a more recent report, the IOM and NRC (2012) continue to assert that ECE practitioners are essential to providing quality and that in order to be effective they need skills, attitudes, behaviors, and characteristics as well as a supportive workplace. Yet, the report also notes that there is great variation in the degree to which ECE practitioners meet these requirements (IOM & NRC, 2012). According to the IOM and NRC (2012), there is still debate in the field as to what are the “right” qualifications for early childhood teachers and about the relationship between teacher degrees and/or the amount and types of PD
to the quality of their care-giving and teaching, as well as to children’s outcomes. In addition, results from seven major ECE studies of teacher education, classroom quality, and children’s academic skills found null or contradictory associations between teacher education, classroom quality, and academic gains (Early, 2007).

In an attempt to better understand patterns in the characteristics and preparation of the ECE workforce, Fuligni, Howes, Lara-Cinisomo and Karoly (2009) conducted a study that looked at formal education, ECE training, and mentoring of a diverse group of urban early childhood educators. Fuligni et al. (2009) explored patterns of teacher preparation, sources of support, supervision, and mentoring across different types of education settings and concluded that different pathways to education and training are associated with varied beliefs about children and with the quality of interactions with children. Looking at the characteristics of ECE PD recipients, Fuligni et al. (2009) also found different patterns of demographics and ECE PD across three program types: public preschool, private preschool, and family child-care. Fuligni et al. (2009) conclude that while formal education, such as attaining a BA, is important to raise the quality of the pool of early childhood educators, mentoring, supervision and monitoring might be more relevant to help educators in each of their diverse settings to develop effective teaching behaviors. Snyder et al. (2012) conducted a systematic review of 256 studies to identify key features of ECE PD. Snyder et al. (2012) provide a descriptive characterization of the who (characteristics of participants), what (content focus), and how (types) of ECE PD and discuss the need to reach consensus about reporting key components of PD and their relationship to improvements in practice, and desired child outcomes. These attempts to categorize ECE PD point to the complexity of the ECE
field and the challenges it presents for straightforward dominant approaches as well as the relevance of ECE practitioner characteristics as they embrace new knowledge, skills and dispositions.

**Defining PD**

Paralleling, and perhaps reflecting, a lack of definitional consensus around the concept of quality in ECE, it is similarly challenging to find a consistent definition of ECE PD, including indicators of its quality and measures of its effectiveness. However, consensus suggests that short-term results of in-service PD modalities include advancing knowledge, skills, dispositions and practices of ECE practitioners and long-term goals are related to children’s learning across developmental domains. Child-related improvements are commonly seen as the best representation of success for PD initiatives (Downer, Kraft-Sayre and Planta, 2009; Snyder et al., 2012; Sheridan et al., 2009; US Department of Education, 2010). Overall, research on the quality and impact of ECE PD is at an early stage and most of it is descriptive and correlational (US Department of Education, 2010; Sheridan, Edwards, Marvin & Knoche, 2009). Also similar to the case of quality in ECE, theories underlying most PD are rarely made explicit. However, Wayne, Yoon, Zhu, Cronen and Garet (2008), Sheridan et al. (2009) and Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2001) explicitly address theories in their respective discussions of teacher instruction and change and differing understandings about relationships between knowledge and practice. We will consider these ideas as they inform dominant and alternative approaches to PD.
PD and Changing Practice

Wayne et al. (2008) assert that effective PD interventions rest on at least two related theories of instruction and teacher change. The theory of instruction involves perceived links between the knowledge and instruction that the PD emphasizes and expected changes in student achievement (Wayne, et al. 2008). The theory of teacher change refers to the features of PD that are thought to promote change in teacher knowledge and/or practice (Wayne, et al. 2008). The theory of teacher change also includes assumptions about the mechanisms through which features of PD support teacher learning (Wayne, et al. 2008). Assumptions include that structural features such as duration and engagement in certain types of PD activities will result in the specific outcomes that the activities are expected to foster (Wayne, et al. 2008).

Sheridan et al. (2009) reviewed the literature on ECE PD to identify process issues and provide research directions, and suggest that research in this area should focus on how PD experiences influence practitioners’ skills, behaviors, and dispositions. Sheridan et al. (2009) describe the process of PD as involving the move from awareness (knowledge) to action (practice), and the adoption of particular dispositions as part of professional repertoires. Sheridan et al. (2009) suggest that adoption of new practices often involves three stages: “a) awareness of new strategies that are expected to achieve important child outcomes; b) application of these strategies, at first in a somewhat awkward fashion; and c) refinement of these skills so that they are implemented automatically and in a practiced masterly manner” (Sheridan et al., 2009, p. 386). Sheridan et al.’s (2009) description of the process of translating awareness to action underscores the importance of considering ECE PD as a process of translating knowledge into practice.
Knowledge and Practice

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999, 2001) differentiate between three prominent approaches to teacher’s PD that they call: “knowledge-for-practice”, “knowledge-in-practice”, and “knowledge-of-practice.” These three approaches reflect different philosophical paradigms and associated ideologies. Knowledge-for-practice generally relates to a dominant approach, based on the assumption that university produced knowledge generated following professional standards generally has more value, accuracy, and applicability across contexts. On the other hand, “knowledge-in-practice” and “knowledge-of-practice” represent a constructivist paradigm because they place more emphasis on the process by which the learner interacts with new ideas and constructs new knowledge in practical contexts. “Knowledge-of-practice” represents the most critical of the three approaches, emphasizing individual and collective inquiry as essential to enact educational processes that serve all children. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999, 2001) explain that the “knowledge-for-practice” approach assumes that formal knowledge and theory generated by university-based researchers are necessary for teachers to use in order to improve practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, 2001). In comparison, the “knowledge-in-practice” approach refers to PD that relies on what is often described as practical knowledge, which teachers learn from experience and from reflecting on their practice. In this practically oriented approach to PD, aspiring or new teachers are exposed to, and have opportunities to probe, expert teachers (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, 2001).

The “knowledge-of-practice” approach represents an alternative set of assumptions and is based on an understanding of formal and practical knowledge as inextricably connected. Following the “knowledge-of-practice” approach, teachers
assume an inquiry stance and use knowledge and theory as generative material to investigate their own classrooms and schools (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, 2001). In this process, teachers gain and construct the knowledge they need to teach and continuously improve. As stated by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2001), “teachers learn when they generate local knowledge of practice by working within the contexts of inquiry communities to theorize and construct their work and to connect it to larger social, cultural, and political issues” (p. 34).

Cochran-Smith and Lytle’s (1999, 2001) “knowledge-of-practice,” characterized by a continuous improvement stance, seems consistent with the idea of ECE PD not as a series of discrete events but as a complex, ongoing process of translating awareness to action (Sheridan et al., 2009). Soltis (1981, as cited by Putnam & Borko, 2000) similarly highlights the key role of interactions within one’s environment in “both what is learned and how learning takes place” (p. 18) so that knowledge, thinking, and the expression of ideas are understood as products of the group’s interactions over time. From this alternative perspective, which is aligned with the constructivist assumptions underlying Cochran-Smith and Lytle’s (1999, 2001) “knowledge-of-practice” approach, the challenge becomes to design PD that, as Webster-Wright (2009) proposes, allows us to “accept, celebrate, and develop insights...rather than deny, seek to control, or standardize the complexity of diversity of professional learning experiences” (p. 728). Webster-Wright (2009) calls for supporting professionals as they learn by encouraging a spirit of critical inquiry regarding their own learning and practice. On the other hand, the “knowledge-for-practice” approach, which privileges formal, expert-driven knowledge and de-emphasizes locally generated knowledge, seems consistent with dominant
approaches to PD. We will first consider dominant approaches then explore alternative approaches to ECE PD.

**Approaches to PD**

**Dominant Approach to PD**

As previously noted, although PD takes many forms, most of the literature on ECE focuses on practitioners who are currently working in the field and on overcoming perceived deficits of the ECE workforce regarding programmatic requirements. Webster-Wright (2009) suggests that dominant PD programs and research typically operate from the implicit assumption that learning can be mandated and that knowledge can be transferred to practitioners’ minds through attendance and engagement in PD programs to then be enacted in their practices. The US Department of Education (2010) points out that ECE PD should be “appropriate for the organizational context and aligned with standards for practice including guidance provided by expert research panels and professional organizations as well as national and state standards” (p. 85). In Florida, there have been advances in terms of developing standards of professional practice and according to the Florida OEL (2013), there are now “core competencies” for practitioners in ECE programs, directors and technical assistance specialists, career advisors, trainers, infant-toddler developmental specialists, and afterschool practitioners. These sets of competencies outline the knowledge, skills, and abilities required by each of these roles.

Similarly reflecting a push to define standards, Desimone (2009) consolidates and articulates core components of effective PD. Desimone (2009) argues that based on several decades of case studies, correlational, quasi-experimental and experimental work, there is sufficient research consensus on core features of effective PD. Desimone
(2009) proposes that the systematic inclusion of these core features in effectiveness studies will facilitate understanding of the relative importance of each feature in improving student achievement across different contexts. Desimone’s (2009) framework consists of five core features: “content focus, active learning, coherence, duration, and collective participation” (Desimone, 2009, p. 184).

Desimone (2009) suggests that content focus “may be the most influential feature” of PD (p. 184). Desimone (2009) also recommends subject matter focused PD that considers how students learn content because it “increases teacher knowledge and skills, improvements in practice, and to a more limited extent, increases in student achievement” (Desimone, 2009, p. 184). Active learning, as conceived by Desimone (2009), could include activities ranging from “observing expert teachers or being observed, followed by interactive feedback and discussion; reviewing student work in the topic areas being covered; and leading discussions” (p. 184). Coherence refers to “the extent to which teacher learning is consistent with teachers’ knowledge and beliefs” (Desimone, 2009, p. 184), and with “school, district, and state reforms and policies” (p. 184). Duration refers to both the timespan and number of hours of the PD. Desimone (2009) explains that “while research has not indicated an exact tipping point” (p. 184) it does tend to suggest that activities that are “spread over a semester and include 20 hours or more of contact time” (p. 184) are more effective. Collective participation of teachers from the same school, grade or department in the same PD session is another key feature of PD because joint interactions and discourse are considered powerful forms of teacher learning (Desimone, 2009).
While this common set of core features may improve the technical quality of empirical studies and strengthen conclusions as they can be drawn across studies, this approach to PD research reflects dominant approaches and positivist paradigms and risks missing important contextually relevant features. For example, although Desimone’s (2009) framework considers teacher learning and the extent to which teachers’ knowledge and beliefs are coherent with school, district, and state reforms and policies, the framework doesn’t address how to reconcile inconsistencies. Dominant interpretation of coherence might assume ECE practitioners are responsible for negotiating tensions between their personal knowledge, beliefs, and experiences and top-down policies and requirements. Such interpretations of Desimone’s (2009) core features could support standardization of PD efforts in ways that fail to promote an inquiry stance or recognize local ECE practitioner assets.

It is worth considering the unintended, negative consequences that the discourse of standards and related accountability policies and practices may produce, particularly for new teachers and teachers of color and for children from low-income and non-dominant racial and cultural communities (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2012). As discussions about standards and regulations unfold, ECE practitioners, including providers of PD, tend to be considered mere implementers—expected to follow prevailing mandates and switch gears on demand. Teachers’ and PD providers’ cultural and linguistic resources seem to be dismissed in favor of standardized practices in the service of standardized outcomes (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2012). For example, PD providers and ECE practitioners in Miami were recently affected by state and regional efforts to standardize the format of community trainings, requiring locally designed trainings to be scripted and
pre-approved, and ensuring that all PD providers were approved by certified Outcomes Driven Training (ODT) facilitators. This view of ECE professionals as implementers of top-down policies ignores that practitioners are cultural and linguistic beings with complicated perspectives and subjective experiences, each having varied understandings of quality in ECE, including the value they place on their own culture and language in their own practice. The dominant view also ignores the social nature of learning and presumes learning as an individual experience that can be standardized across learners and contexts. Despite the value of a common framework for studying the effectiveness of PD, additional considerations emerge as a more complex picture of ECE is painted and greater understanding of the nature of PD in multicultural settings is pursued.

**Alternative Approaches to ECE PD**

Alternative definitions and approaches to PD portray the multiple layers of variables that interact in ECE PD. In her commentary about ECE PD, Zaslow (2009) argues for the need to use an ecological framework for understanding the effects of PD initiatives and calls for description of the characteristics that both the ECE practitioner and the PD provider bring to the process. Application of an ecological model lens prioritizes taking contextual variables into account when assessing the quality of ECE PD including not only the key features of the PD itself, but also the particulars of several layers. These layers include characteristics of, and relationships between, the PD provider and recipients, formats of PD activities, and characteristics of the workplace that facilitate implementation (Zaslow, 2009). The ecological lens suggests that ECE PD effectiveness is intricately related to who the practitioners are and the contextual realities in which their practices are enacted. Helterbran and Fennimore (2004) suggest
that quality PD “must recognize and strengthen the authentic teacher voice while linking that voice to genuine opportunities to improve practice in areas of genuine importance and interests” (p. 268) and that action research can help teachers engage in self-inquiry and ongoing problem solving. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2001) point to the collective and critical nature of this process and assert that inquiry should be understood as a lifelong stance and PD should be considered “a long-term collective project with a democratic agenda” (p. 56) allowing for uncertainty, posing problems and dilemmas, and questioning and challenging the system (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001). In this light, and considering the characteristics of the Miami ECE workforce, CRP offers important insights about how to approach ECE PD.

**Culturally responsive pedagogy in PD.**

An emerging body of research and evidence suggests that teachers of color can promote positive educational outcomes for students who share their racial and cultural backgrounds and that their experiences, beliefs, values and knowledge represent important resources for teaching and learning (Achinstein & Ogawa, 2012; Hedges, 2012; Monzo & Rueda, 2003). Teachers’ informal knowledge, gained from life experience, is a primary influence on teachers’ practice and likely to be prioritized over theory and research in teachers’ pedagogical decision-making in ECE (Hedges, 2012; Monzo & Rueda, 2003). It is therefore important to understand and consider what Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez (1992) term “funds of knowledge” (FoK), and how teachers’ sociocultural contexts and lived experiences impact their beliefs about teaching and learning (Monzo & Rueda, 2003).

Moll et al. (1992) use the concept of FoK to describe culturally specific bodies of knowledge, including cultural and cognitive resources, which contribute to household
functioning, development, and well-being. Rios-Aguilar, Marquez, Gravitt and Moll (2011) explain that the concept of FoK refers to the wherewithal and resources that Latina/o and low income families often barter through social networks with other families and that the concept of FoK emerged to counter the deficit perspectives common in depictions of these families. FoK counters prevailing deficit perspectives by highlighting and valuing the resources embedded within students, families, and communities (Rios, et al., 2011). Hedges (2012) adds that the concept of FoK has expanded to include implicit knowledge that teachers use in pedagogical decision making including strategies, information, ways of thinking and learning, practical skills and approaches to learning drawn from their personal lives and daily practice. With regard to teachers, FoK can serve as important scaffolding tools in PD as well as powerful means to connect with children’s and families’ prior knowledge, particularly when teaching children with similar cultural and community experiences as their own (Monzo and Rueda, 2003).

Citing Sheets (2004), Achinstein and Ogawa (2012) contend that while teachers may possess valuable cultural and linguistic resources, these resources must be acknowledged and developed for teachers to enact such practices.

Within a constructivist and critical approach to ECE PD, considering ECE practitioners’ FoK seems particularly important in a multicultural setting such as Miami. From this point of view, practitioners’ FoK constitute relevant starting points from which to scaffold new learning, appreciate multiple cultural perspectives, and develop CRP (Hogg, 2011). Moreover, building upon FoK has tremendous potential because of the “ability to identify what is, rather than what is not; and to engage with individuals rather than assumptions and stereotypes” (Hogg, 2011, p. 667). The FoK approach may
function to overcome the dominant deficit mentality associated with the ECE workforce in the same way that it is essential to eliminate existing deficit mentalities about children and their families, as it requires engagement in critical thinking and participation in constructive dialogues that challenge misrepresentations (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011). In this regard, Adair, Tobin and Arzubiaga (2012) propose using the FoK approach between and among immigrant and nonimmigrant teachers to validate and acknowledge ideas about curriculum, both as professionals and as members of multiple cultural communities.

In line with CRP, meaningful professional learning opportunities allow ECE practitioners to be critical thinkers who examine their experiences and cultural backgrounds in a process that values their FoK (Seitz, 2011). PD activities should focus on ECE practitioners as humans with their own important experiences, cultures and values, rather than merely on the content that they are expected to teach children (Rightmeyer, 2011). To become culturally responsive as teachers, practitioners need to experience firsthand as learners what it means to co-construct knowledge in culturally responsive ways as part of their professional learning. CRP is particularly relevant in Miami where prevailing approaches to quality improvement can be perceived as hegemonic, in the sense that quality discourse attempts to standardize the work of a primarily female, low-status workforce (Clements, Kalifeh & Grass, 2014; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012).

Understanding the perspectives of ECE practitioners could be an important goal of ECE PD in Miami in order to integrate opportunities for teacher empowerment and to help them identify and overcome structural forms of oppression and find support in each
other. This understanding can also inform PD design, to effectively prepare practitioners to integrate multicultural practices and an antiracist curriculum, facilitating, as Sensoy and DiAngelo (2012) point out, “opportunities to challenge their socialization” (p. 124) and help them make “the lifetime commitment of overcoming oppression” (p. 124). In this light, CRP in PD can include opportunities to challenge inequity and assert a view of cultural diversity as wealth, thus counteracting prevailing deficit perspectives in ECE.

**ECE practitioners, constructed consciousness, and intersectionality.**

Hinchey’s (2010) discussion of constructed consciousness is relevant to understanding the effects of dominant approaches to quality improvement on ECE practitioners. Hinchey (2010) describes constructed consciousness as taking the form of a group adopting a set of values or ideas that places it at a disadvantage and “allows inequity to go unexamined and unchecked” (p. 19). Hinchey (2010) asserts that when hegemony is operating, the less powerful do as they are told and unquestionably accept the inferior roles assigned to them. In Miami, those closer to ECE service provision seem to be placed in roles at the bottom of a hierarchical power structure and are required to comply with multiple bureaucratic mandates. In addition, because the majority of ECE practitioners in Miami simultaneously belong to several minoritized groups, these professionals may encounter compounded forms of oppression in their life and work. ECE practitioners, who are mostly poor, black and Hispanic women in a low status job may simultaneously face institutionalized sexism, classism, racism, nationalism, and authoritarianism. The critical concept of constructed consciousness suggests how ECE practitioners may exacerbate the power of these oppressive forces. As Hinchey (2010) points out, “people act against their own interest because of constructed consciousness: they accept a value system that demeans their own worth”
(p. 20) and “cooperate in their own oppression by uncritically accepting ideas that permeate their culture” (p. 22). Individual and cultural beliefs and perceptions, as well as local perspectives and realities, constitute important starting points in the improvement of ECE that can be leveraged as practitioners engage in PD experiences.

**Considering Local Perspectives**

Attention to the local seems a thematic response to both the problem of quality and deficit based models of PD as they are conceived by those who question dominant, positivist conceptions. For example, as Tobin (2005) suggests, the problem with quality is not necessarily that NAEYC standards like low ratios, or the value that the ECERS places on child-selected materials are wrong, but lies in failure to recognize that quality standards are bound by context, culture, and time. In his discussion of local and universal forms of scientific knowledge, Tobin (2005) argues that decontextualized ECE quality ideas, standards, and programs represent a threat to "local approaches that are well adapted to their local context" (Tobin, 2005, p. 427). From this perspective, it can be argued that ECE practitioners should play key roles in determining locally meaningful constructions of quality and may reasonably question decontextualized knowledge, evaluations, and ratings imparted by outside experts. The challenge of democratically constructing shared meaning around quality in ECE is even more complex within the local context due to the multitude of groups with different worldviews, dreams for children, histories, cultures, beliefs, and languages. Rather than conceiving of quality in ECE as a set of facts to be discovered and imparted through PD, quality could be recast and approached as “an open-ended conversation, privileging no party and seeking neither consensus nor a final truth” (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2013, p. 62).
As we explore local issues related to quality and PD in Miami, certain concepts and approaches seem particularly relevant, including FoK and CRP. Explorations of such concepts, approaches, quality narratives and perspectives that challenge assumptions could be understood as contributing to a movement that contests the dominant Anglo-American positivistic narrative and questions claims of universal truth, intentionally valuing cultural variation, local community context, perspectives, and goals for children over hegemonic interpretation (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2013; Tobin, 2005). This common intention and belief in the value of understanding and addressing local perspectives guides our methodology.

Conclusion

We have reviewed the literature and explored themes related to the concept of quality in ECE, perspectives on quality PD, and the role of PD in the pursuit of quality in ECE. We examined dominant and alternative paradigms and explored literature related to dichotomous themes, considering how PD may offer a space for ECE practitioners to co-construct practical coherence through ongoing, collaborative negotiation of tensions between extremes. Throughout this discussion, we elaborated on how dominant and alternative understandings of quality inform PD practices and described critical issues relevant to our local context of Miami. Lastly, we contemplated CRP as a relevant approach to ECE PD and discussed how this approach contrasts traditional deficit-based approaches and is useful to understand and address quality in our local context. Next, we describe our methodologies.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Our combined studies represent opportunities to elicit and understand the perspectives of early childhood professionals in Miami regarding the concept of quality in ECE, and to recognize the ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and professional assets that ECE practitioners bring to their practice. These insights can illuminate how different features of quality interact with and apply to specific programs, contexts, and populations as well as build understanding around which PD experiences satisfy the growing needs of diverse ECE professionals. Our studies provide opportunities to consider how quality improvement efforts, including PD, can: support culturally responsive environments for multicultural populations; become spaces for constructing shared meaning about quality, and; support local articulation and constructive negotiation of tensions between differing perceptions, meanings, ideals, philosophies, and practices as they relate to quality ECE.

Unique to this collaborative dissertation, some parts of this chapter discuss our collaborative work and overlapping aspects in our qualitative approaches while specific sections address our individual research questions and data collection methods. In this chapter, we will: discuss our research purposes; justify and describe our qualitative methods; describe our individual research contexts of the UWMD CFE and the QCCC-FIU bilingual program; present our individual but overlapping data collection methods and our joint collaborative reflective journal; discuss our individual but overlapping data
analysis methods; individually share our subjectivity statements; and, conclude with reflections on our collaborative writing process and relationship.

**Our Purposes**

Miriam was interested in exploring how diverse practitioners in the local ECE field understand quality because a more complete understanding of multiple perspectives and voices on the subject must influence different approaches to enhancing quality, and the work of the CFE is guided by the mission of elevating quality. On the other hand, Ana’s research interest stemmed from recognition of the centrality of the role of adults in ECE and the prevailing deficit approach to their PD. Since the concept of quality influences the design of PD and PD can potentially become a space for the construction of shared meaning around quality, our studies are complementary. Effective PD experiences could advance constructive dialogue, appreciation of differences, and shared understandings of quality while contributing to the professionalization of ECE practitioners and culturally responsive learning opportunities for children.

We were both interested in engaging in authentic dialogue with others as part of an ongoing attempt to critically consider and construct deeper meaning around the ever present but elusive concept of quality in ECE. Throughout this dialogue, we hoped to uncover the perceptions ECE practitioners in Miami have about themselves and about their professional learning needs with the goal of identifying ways in which their ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity might represent assets that can illuminate the design of learning opportunities that support CRP. Our shared purpose stemmed from our intentions to elicit, record, and articulate themes communicated by the varied voices, experiences, and personal meanings regarding quality expressed by local and diverse ECE professionals. We expected to develop themes, including areas of overlap and
tension with official definitions, standards, and measures. These themes reflect refined understanding of local perspectives and nuances in meaning. Through identification of common themes expressed by a range of voices, we hoped to articulate areas of shared meaning around the concept of quality in ECE and inform our understandings of quality PD for diverse, local ECE professionals.

**Justification for Qualitative Methods**

Qualitative research design allowed us to elicit, compile and tell the stories and perspectives of ECE practitioners in Miami. Miriam used qualitative approaches guided by the overarching purposes of exploring, understanding, interpreting, and thematically representing local perspectives related to the concept of quality in ECE (Clark & Creswell, 2010). Ana drew on practitioners’ perspectives regarding ethnic, cultural, linguistic and professional assets as well as their professional experience and learning needs. While Miriam’s goal was to collect and analyze forms of qualitative data that describe perspectives, meanings, and representations of quality in ECE held by professionals at the CFE, Ana’s was to uncover practitioners’ perspectives about their ethnic, cultural, linguistic and professional assets in the context of the QCCC-FIU bilingual program to inform ECE PD design, policies, and programming.

Our choice of methods was influenced by our desire to elicit perspectives and engage in dialogue that extends beyond standard technical, methodological discourse. Our aims included openness to political, philosophical, and ethical considerations and to practically value and consider context, values, subjectivity, complexity, uncertainty, and multiple perspectives (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2013). Consistent with the constructivist paradigm, a critical social justice framework, and qualitative methodology, our purposes for exploring our research questions did not lie in hopes for certain
answers but in a desire to impact our context through articulation of alternative perspectives.

**Voices About Quality and PD in Our Particular Studies**

Miriam’s methodology used a case study research design because her goal was to use qualitative procedures to explore perspectives on quality within the bounds of the CFE as a system attempting to represent and improve quality in ECE (Clark & Creswell, 2010). The case was a system of a range of ECE professionals bounded by a specific time and place (the CFE) and the method was oriented toward engaging in dialogue and developing deep and nuanced themes related to local beliefs, perceptions, understandings, and representations of quality in ECE. Miriam considered the CFE as a case bound in time since its inception in 2007 and this study provides a snapshot of the CFE at a moment. Miriam’s intention was to engage diverse colleagues in active dialogue, collaboratively construct meanings, and reflect on specific, concrete representations of quality in ECE. As Tobin (2005) highlights, participating in dialogue and conversations about quality standards is a way to address quality in a way that is consistent with the constructivist approach, which is often advocated for in ECE and is active at the CFE’s Demonstration School.

Ana used a qualitative study of ECE practitioners regarding their professional identities, and their perspectives about PD. Participants in her study worked in a range of settings and represented multiple nationalities and personal experiences, but had all been part of the QCCC-FIU bilingual program. Ana’s intention was to explore the complexity of ECE practitioners’ personal and professional selves and provide insights into how ECE practitioner’s FoK shape professional identities and teaching practices. Ana was interested in understanding interrelationships between gender, race, class,
language, culture, education, immigration status, and other factors that might influence ECE practitioners in Miami in order to inform PD policies and programs. This study aimed to highlight the importance of context in determining how FoK may be utilized and how these individual experiences and resources can inform professional learning for ECE practitioners in the local cultural-historical context of Miami (Hedges, 2012). By considering the languages, experiences, social identities, cultural resources, and FoK of ECE practitioners (Powell, 2011), we planned to influence more effective and empowering professional learning opportunities.

Research Contexts

Miriam’s Research Context: UWMD CFE

Miriam conducted her research within her professional context, where she worked as director of grants at the time of the study. The mission of the UWMD CFE is to “elevate the quality of early care and education in Miami-Dade and beyond.” The guiding principles of education, demonstration, and advocacy support the CFE’s mission. As ECE change agents, the focus of the CFE is on ECE programs and practitioners- who encounter multiple innovations initiated by various stakeholders based on varied quality standards aimed at elevating the quality of ECE.

The CFE has two floors with distinct but related functions. The downstairs portion is the Demonstration School, which serves approximately 120 children ranging from birth to age five and acts as a model program for ECE practitioners as well as other parties interested in quality ECE. The CFE is the only member of the nation-wide Educare Learning Network in Florida, which promotes a comprehensive approach to ECE and models how to use blended funding streams to provide high quality services for children and families of all incomes. The CFE Demonstration School, a model of
blended funding, is influenced by and publically represents multiple definitions and certifications of quality. The school is funded through a combination of sources including Early Head Start, Head Start, VPK, and private pay. Each of these certifiers and funders of quality have different standards, reflecting different definitions of quality but affecting the same program. In addition to being an Educare site, and implementing their core features and quality indicators, the school is accredited by two different accrediting bodies, APPLE and NAEYC, and nominally participates in QC. While the Demonstration School portrays quality in these official senses as well as when it comes to scoring highly on standard measures of quality, the school also seems to have adopted unique forms of enacting and representing quality.

The upstairs portion of the CFE, where Miriam worked, is focused on adult learning and houses offices, a resource library, a gallery featuring documentation of Demonstration School practices, and meeting spaces. The focus on adult learning upstairs intersects with the focus on child learning downstairs. For example, participants visiting the resource library or attending professional learning events and meetings upstairs pass the gallery and have the option of touring the Demonstration School and observing how the school implements Educare core features, as well as unique features like the dual language program and inquiry focus. At the time of data collection, the second floor offices housed staff dedicated to community grants focused on professional learning including a federally funded Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership (EHS-CCP) grant, a local TCT funded Early Childhood Program Administrators Institute (ECPAI), and the central QC Program and Professional Development Network. This context is particularly unique because, in addition to
administering direct ECE services funded through a range of sources and operating community wide grants focused on quality improvement and professional learning, the CFE is also part of UWMD, which awards, supports, and monitors grants to local ECE programs through the community investments department.

Although it is possible that CFE ECE professionals had been indoctrinated into one or many of the existing officially sanctioned conceptions of quality influencing its intersecting programs, Miriam began this study believing that the adults who work within the CFE had different understandings than those advanced by official local, state, and national certifiers of quality. Miriam worked at the CFE for six years and witnessed a distinct, yet difficult to describe, identity. One concrete aspect of the identity of the CFE is that staff, predominantly Hispanic females, reflect locally diverse ECE demographics. Less tangible but defining aspects of the CFE’s identity that do not seem to be captured by official quality representations include influences like the Reggio Emilia approach, Harvard’s Visible Thinking, the ideas of Bronfenbrenner and Vygotsky, a constructivist philosophy, pedagogical documentation, and dual language instructional practices that have a strong emphasis on promoting inquiry for young children, particularly through the project approach (Helm & Katz, 2011).

**Ana’s Research Context: The QCCC-FIU Bilingual Program**

Ana’s study was set within the bilingual program implemented by the QCCC in collaboration with FIU, where she taught at the time of the study. This bilingual program came about in response to existing challenges and demands from ECE programs for which the QCCC provides career advising. QCCC approached FIU to partner with them to design a PD program for in-service early childhood practitioners who are part of QC. The program assists practitioners in developing Florida’s ECE core competencies
(Steps to Success, 2010), and completing a college-credit certificate that helps advance their “career pathway,” making them eligible for additional compensation through the Child Care WAGES® Florida project. In addition, college credits gained in this program can be transferred to a degree program (contingent on meeting enrollment requirements) if participants decide to pursue college level degrees. The overarching goal of this PD project is to provide ECE practitioners in Miami, the majority of whom are English-language learners, access to high quality ECE PD. The program also supports an enhanced understanding of the relevance of practitioner roles and how to apply “evidence based” practices related to supporting early learning, particularly in areas such as literacy, critical thinking, and social-emotional development.

The content of the program has been developed considering the expressed needs of participants. Since QCCC provides career advice to practitioners who work in centers that participate in QC, QCCC is familiar with the professional needs and barriers faced by these practitioners. Through this existing relationship, practitioners have also developed a level of trust that facilitates openly communicating their learning wishes. The program focuses on child development and learning, and on teaching strategies that are aligned with state early learning and development standards, curriculum and assessment requirements. Throughout the program, practitioners become familiar with standards and evidence-based practices while developing the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that translate into improved practice in the classroom. One distinctive characteristic of this program is that it is taught in Spanish by bilingual professors.

In Ana’s work in this program, she experienced discrepancies between dominant discourse of quality in Florida, the constructivist approach promoted by ECE
professionals, and the cultural and linguistic context in Miami. Ana struggled with her students to find common ground and adequately inform their ECE practice in culturally responsive ways. Using a critical lens has provided additional insights into existing inconsistencies and the need to better understand ECE practitioners FoK in order to improve their PD.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

Across both studies, data collection and analysis broadly involved asking questions, engaging and listening to diverse perspectives, interpreting meanings, reflecting on our own evolving understandings, and articulating and representing nuanced and alternative meanings. While designing our independent studies, we discussed our methodological approaches, which emerged from our interest in qualitative methods that allow participants to share perspectives, and our collaboration in providing VIPP workshops. As we thought about the most appropriate ways to elicit participants’ points of view in a culturally responsive manner that provoked dialogue, VIPP tools emerged as ideal for our purposes. We shared our original design ideas with each other and offered suggestions and support. We now revisit our research questions and describe data collection and analysis, which include similar but independent data collection for our respective studies as well as overlap regarding parallel data analysis methods and collaborative reflection and writing.

**Miriam: Quality Focus Groups Data Collection Setting.**

Quality focus groups occurred at the CFE in two different rooms on the second floor. Designed for group interactions, both rooms were comfortable and aesthetically appealing with natural light, plants, and wood floors. One group met in a training room
with couches. The other group met in a conference room with comfortable chairs around a large table. Refreshments were available.

Participants.

After attaining the CFE Vice President and Demonstration School Principal’s support, Miriam sent an open invitation to participate via email to all CFE staff. Miriam issued a broad invitation for participation in a focus group among the population of ECE professionals working at the CFE and planned to select 10 to 20 participants who represent a range of roles. The invitation described focus group participation as both an opportunity to engage in open dialogue around the concept of quality in ECE, as well as to participate in the research project. Miriam sent a reminder email one week after the first email and provided up to two weeks to volunteer to participate.

Everyone who volunteered was selected. A total of 14 individuals participated in the quality focus groups, with six participants in the first group and eight participants in the second group. 100% of focus group participants were female, similar to the primarily female ECE workforce. Participants’ average age was 38.5 years, slightly younger than the average age of the local ECE workforce, which is 44 years (Clements, Kalifeh & Grass, 2014). Participants ranged in age from 26 to 63 years.

Consistent with local ECE practitioners, the majority of participants spoke Spanish as a primary language, with 11 reporting Spanish as their native language, one reporting both English and Spanish, and two reporting English. There was wide variation in countries of origin, with six participants reporting the United States as their country of origin and the following eight countries represented by each of the other participants: Argentina, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Puerto Rico, and Venezuela.
The number of years reported working in ECE ranged from 2 to 31, with a median of 7.5 years, an average of 11 years, and an average of 4.5 years working at the CFE (The CFE began 2007 so eight years would have been maximum possible at the time of data collection). Of the 14 participants, seven had roles associated with the school and seven had roles associated with community programs. Focus group participants occupied 12 different roles at the time of the focus groups. Roles included program administrators, professional learning facilitators, and teachers. Many participants also previously occupied different roles at the CFE, including as literacy coaches.

As in the local ECE workforce, focus group participants held a wide range of degrees. Participants reported anywhere from a high school diploma to a specialist degree in the following areas: Early Childhood Development; Exceptional Student Education; Elementary; Higher Education Administration; Psychology; Early Childhood Education; Occupational Therapy; School Counseling; Leadership; and English Literature. Overall, focus group participants held higher degrees than the local ECE workforce. Participants most common highest degree was a Bachelor’s while the most common among the local ECE workforce is a high school diploma (Clements, Kalifeh & Grass, 2014).

Guiding Questions.

The following questions served as a guide for quality focus group protocols and conversations and addressed Miriam’s research questions:

- What does the concept of quality ECE mean to you?
- From your perspective, what are some ways the CFE represents quality in ECE?
• What are some ideas about quality that you have in common with others?
• What are some ideas about quality that you have that are different from others?

**Facilitation.**

Miriam designed and facilitated quality focus groups with an intention to engage diverse colleagues in active dialogue, collaboratively construct meanings, and reflect on specific, concrete representations of quality in ECE at the CFE. She conducted two focus groups and collected participant selected images of quality as well as artifacts resulting from VIPP tools (including drawings and writings about quality). By using these open-ended methods to solicit participants’ unique verbal and visual points of view, Miriam hoped to practically value subjectivity, complexity, uncertainty, and multiple perspectives.

Miriam approached the focus groups with an ideal to create spaces for dialogue that would explore multiple alternative meanings and enrich and transform points of understanding. She attempted to establish relaxed and trusting focus group atmospheres and practice a style of facilitating that allowed participants to feel willing to dig deeper and respond to follow up questions. While Miriam expected common themes to emerge, her goal was group dialogue, construction, and articulation of multiple meanings, not necessarily consensus.

**Protocols.**

Miriam collaborated with Ana to incorporate VIPP tools into the focus groups. As we discussed in Chapter 2, VIPP is used by UNICEF to engage diverse participants and was also being introduced at the same time to CFE professional learning facilitators. Miriam participated in a facilitator’s workshop on the topic (led by Ana) in November 2014, during which she developed a plan for incorporating VIPP tools into focus groups.
Miriam expected VIPP tools to influence a relatively democratic and participatory atmosphere and engage multiple modes of participation.

Intentional integration of visual formats distinguished the character of these focus groups from more conventional focus groups in which participants typically sit in a circle and orally share answers. Through engagement with VIPP tools and sharing and discussing photographs and drawings of quality, Miriam hoped participants could articulate details that may not have been captured through words alone. Using images to document, reflect on, and communicate practice is integral to the culture and pedagogical documentation practices of the CFE so Miriam viewed this method as responsive to the unique setting. Miriam also believed some messages may be more meaningfully represented or easily expressed by pictures instead of words because images uniquely offer a means to articulate alternative thinking “which cannot be said but which tries to make itself heard” (Readings, 1996 in Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2013, p. 43).

Miriam began with a “Visualized Presentation” (Appendix A) in which she introduced the unique process of the quality focus group. Then, she used the “Topsy Turvy” protocol (Appendix B) to creatively and mutually establish ground rules. Next, Miriam conducted a “Gallery Walk” (Appendix C), in which participants shared and discussed images of quality that they selected in advance of the focus group. Prior to meeting, she asked focus group participants to bring one photo they believed represents quality in ECE. During the gallery walk activity, participants shared these photos and, similar to the photo-elicitation technique (Creswell, 2013 citing Wang & Burris, 2004), were encouraged to discuss the contents of the photos. Miriam asked
participants to describe their reasons for choosing the photos, encouraged dialogue between participants, and selected pictures to illustrate themes and tensions in the findings.

Miriam then explicitly addressed her guiding questions through the “Card Collection and Clustering” protocol (Appendix D). Next, she adapted the drawing-focused “Development Means to Me” protocol (Appendix E) to further nonverbally explore the concept of quality, with an emphasis on diverse understandings. Miriam concluded with the “Mind Map” protocol (Appendix F) to collect and exchange ideas from participants regarding what quality is and is not to them. For a summary table of these protocols and their uses, see Appendix J.

**Language.**

Miriam facilitated the groups in English while encouraging participants who may have had an idea that was easier to express in Spanish, to do so. Since many of her participants were native Spanish speakers, Ana co-facilitated the focus groups to ensure everyone’s voice was heard, responded to, and recorded. Dialogue in both groups primarily occurred in English with occasional words, phrases, and sayings in Spanish. In one case, a participant shifted to Spanish due to difficulty expressing her intended meaning in English. In this case, Ana translated a two minute audio clip for the transcribed document.

**Transcription.**

Both focus groups lasted almost three hours with the first focus group at two hours and 55 minutes and the second group at two hours and 48 minutes. With participant consent, the group meetings were audio recorded, and then Miriam transcribed them. In order to ensure accurate transcription of each audio recording,
Miriam used software to slow the recording to a 50% speed. She then replayed the recording at 80% speed and corrected any mistakes she heard. Focus group recordings yielded 68 pages of transcripts.

**Quality focus groups: data analysis.**

Consistent with Creswell’s (2013) description of the iterative qualitative data collection and analysis process, Miriam approached data collection, analysis, and report writing as a set of interrelated, nonlinear actions. Connected and overlapping activities in this process included organizing participant words and images, transcribing, reviewing the transcript for accuracy, re-reading the transcript, identifying patterns of frequently occurring words and images, forming codes and related families of themes, considering how to meaningfully represent data for herself and readers, and interpreting findings.

Miriam started by transcribing and analyzing participant images of quality and their reasons for selecting and drawing these images. In order to gain an initial sense of important components of quality, she noted regularly occurring words, counted the frequency of each (using the search function in Microsoft Word), then created an emerging codes table including 26 participant words and word groupings suggesting important components of quality, frequencies of word occurrence, notes, connections, and sample quotes and images. As Miriam proceeded with transcribing the conversations that happened during the remaining parts of the focus groups, she kept the images, frequently occurring words, and ideas the images and words suggested about quality ECE in mind as potentially important signals for coding and theme development. Once Miriam completed transcribing the entirety of both focus groups,
she reviewed the initial frequency table of words, added a frequency column for the entire document, and noted patterns.

Miriam gathered and organized her data by creating one master document that included participant selected and drawn images of quality along with their reasons for bringing and drawing the images, artifacts from VIPP tools used in focus groups, and transcriptions of both focus groups. Miriam employed the triangulation validation strategy (Creswell, 2013) by using transcribed words, artifacts created during the focus groups including participant drawings, and the images participants brought to the focus groups as corroborating evidence supporting emerging themes. Miriam read through the entire transcript and reflected on the visual artifacts, noting reflections, connections, and tensions in the margins. She made 442 memos that included notes on emerging codes and connections between ideas, then revisited the emerging codes table with word counts and used her memos as a guide to adding images, notes, and sample quotes to build and refine the 26 initial categories, and noted five additional frequently occurring words suggesting important elements of quality.

Then, Miriam reviewed her table of important components of quality along with sample visual and verbal evidence and considered connections between components. Miriam created another document of emerging themes and tensions in which she collapsed and made connections between categories and evidence. For example, she combined categories with related meanings like: love, heart, care, and passion. Miriam then made connections between these characteristics and relationships. Miriam elaborates on how word counts and memos led to themes and connections when she discusses findings.
Ana: PD Focus Groups and Interviews/Data Collection

Next, Ana describes her data collection and participants, and details her data analysis, including the transcription and translation of data, interpretations, and reflections. Ana conducted a qualitative study of seven teachers who participated in the QCCC-FIU bilingual program. Her data collection focused on participants’ experiences as Ana attempted to understand participants’ perspectives and actions with the broader idea of identifying recommendations for ECE PD design and policy in her program. In identifying multiple perspectives across participants, Ana hoped to inform ECE PD improvement without oversimplifying potentially complex findings. Another important aspect of this study was the empowerment opportunity that it represented for participants as they engaged in the research process and revisited their own life experiences and voiced their opinions (Creswell, 2013).

Ana’s data collection consisted of two focus groups and seven individual interviews. Focus groups consisted of a series of VIPP activities that enabled participants to understand the purpose of Ana’s research and begin exploring the research questions, while reflecting on their personal and professional journeys as educators. Individual semi-structured interviews allowed deeper exploration of their perspectives. All focus groups and interviews were conducted in Spanish.

Research questions.
The following questions guided Ana’s research design and were addressed through the focus groups and interview protocols:

- What are ECE teachers’ beliefs about themselves as teachers and their ability to work with young children in Miami?
What professional, cultural and ethnic assets do ECE teachers in Miami bring to their practice?

What are ECE teachers’ perceptions regarding existing professional learning opportunities and how these opportunities build on their assets and respond to their learning needs?

Participants.

Studying seven ECE practitioners allowed Ana to explore the complex realities of ECE practitioners while describing the relevant assets that they bring to their ECE practice in an in-depth way. Since Ana had already met the participants, existing relationships served as starting points for deeper inquiry that would have been difficult to achieve without prior acquaintance, especially since she was interested in identifying epiphanies that have marked participants’ lives as ECE practitioners as well as the FoK that they bring to their practice. Participants in Ana’s study met the following criteria:

- Employed in an early childhood program (private or family childcare home).
- Working with children one to five years-old.

Participants had the following characteristics:

- Had more than three years working as an early childhood practitioner.
- Spoke Spanish as primary language with varying degrees of English proficiency.
- Were immigrants to the United States, ranging between three and thirty years of living in the US.
- Were originally from one of the countries that are represented in Miami-Dade County Quality Counts ECE workforce study (Clements et. al, 2014).
Ana invited all the students she had previously taught at the FIU bilingual program to participate in her research via email. Eight participants responded to her request for participation, expressing an interest in participating and providing additional information regarding their countries of origin, and experience in ECE. After four participants showed up to the first focus group, Ana sent a second recruitment email inviting additional participants. Three participants responded and Ana held a second focus group.

Participants varied in educational level, which included: High School degree (one participant), technical degrees (two participants), bachelor’s degree in education (three participants) and a law degree (one participant). In addition, all participants had completed the year-long FIU bilingual program and many other PD opportunities. Three of the participants were educators in their countries of origin, two teaching middle school, and one teaching high school and eventually becoming a principal and university professor. The other four had previous careers not related to education, but which included retail, law, and agricultural work. All of them became ECE practitioners after moving to Miami. In ECE, one had only worked with children younger than two years old, one was working with two- and three-year-old children, two were working with three- and four-year-old children, two were currently working with VPK, and one had been a center director for over 20 years. Three of the participants expressed instability in their work at the time of the interview. One of them was in the process of opening a Family Child Care Home. The first table summarizes participants’ countries of origin and ECE experience (Table 3-1).
Focus group.

Ana started her data collection with a two-hour focus group to learn about experiences, backgrounds and perspectives of individual practitioners. Ana conducted two two-hour focus groups, one with four participants and one with three participants. The first focus group took place at the CFE at the beginning of the summer of 2015, and the other in an ECE center located in Kendall, a southern part of Miami, at the end of summer the same year. Ana integrated VIPP tools to allow participants to express ideas in nonverbal ways and promote originality, creativity, and reflection. Focus groups were useful because practitioners were able to engage in dialogue with each other and build on each other's ideas and experiences, allowing for deeper exploration of their FoK, their perceived learning needs, effective PD experiences, and ways to engage and leverage their collective FoK. The VIPP tools Ana used are further described in Appendices.

Ana began with a brief “Visualized Presentation in Plenary” (Appendix A) to give participants some background information about the study and inform them of the process, followed with introductions, using the “Walking Billboard” (Appendix G). During this activity, participants had the opportunity to introduce themselves to the group and start sharing their experiences teaching young children and their beliefs about ECE. Ana used the “River of Life” (Appendix H) to surface life trajectories and key experiences as teachers and in PD. This tool was particularly useful because it allowed participants to reflect on turning points in their lives and careers. Ana then did a “Card Collection and Clustering” (Appendix D) regarding what they saw as assets that they bring to their practice and barriers that they confront. For a summary table of these protocols and their uses, see Appendix J. VIPP tools were useful in these focus groups.
because they promoted individual and group reflection and served as a visual recollection of the process. This visual aspect of VIPP supports collective construction of knowledge that is not only based on oral language.

**Individual interviews.**

Ana used a two-part semi-structured interview as the main individual data collection strategy to understand the ethnic, cultural, linguistic and professional assets that practitioners bring to the ECE practice and how they have developed these FoK. Individual interviews were conducted between July and October, 2015. The date and time of the interviews were scheduled during the focus groups and each participant chose the location of the meeting. These interviews were meaningful as practitioners shared individual beliefs and ECE stories, including their highs and lows as well as turning points in their professional lives (Creswell, 2013). Since participants started reflecting about their beliefs and ability to work with children during the focus groups, the first part of the interview (see Appendix I) contributed to deeper exploration of the professional, cultural, and ethnic assets that they bring to their practice. This information was essential to the study and easier to share in detail through individual interviews. The second part of the interview focused on professional learning opportunities available in Miami and how these opportunities address ECE practitioner’s assets and learning needs. Interview questions were critical in drawing answers that were rich and deep enough for the development of meaningful themes, and that triggered discussions about issues of identity and pedagogical practice. Because questions sometimes surfaced difficult and controversial issues related to race, ethnicity, immigration, language, and culture, Ana paid close attention to nuances that might substantively contribute to understanding contextual specificities and particularities of each story.
Transcription and translation.

Ana recorded all the conversations that took place during the focus groups as well as each individual interview and then transcribed them, reviewing each recording twice to capture what participants said. Ana then inserted pictures of artifacts participants created during the focus groups into the transcripts. Codes and code reports maintained the original expressions in Spanish. Ana translated data reports from Spanish to English during data analysis, as she integrated participants’ quotes into the findings.

PD interviews and focus groups: data analysis.

Ana engaged in an iterative data analysis process by rereading each transcribed interview to identify codes. Through this process, Ana identified a list of more than one hundred in vivo codes which she refined by combining similar codes into broader categories, forming a total of 28 defined codes (Table 3-2). Some of these codes were closely related to Ana’s original research questions, while others described topics that emerged in conversation with participants. This step of the analysis allowed Ana to capture the broader exchange with participants and identify multiple topics covered in conversations. Ana’s analysis focused on capturing diversity in perspectives represented by ECE teachers in Miami. In this sense, she attempted to capture any relevant ideas regarding any of the major themes that emerged, even when only one of the participants talked about it.

Ana used HyperRESEARCH software to code her interviews and focus group transcripts. All the transcripts were coded in Spanish. After coding, Ana realized that some of the codes overlapped, and that some topics had emerged that were not essential to the current research. Ana decided to focus on the 12 codes that best
addressed her research questions and generated a code report for each of these 12 codes. After creating the code reports, Ana reread her research questions and went back to the code reports to add memos that developed her thinking and documented the identification of major themes as well as participants’ quotes that supported or broadened those themes. Because of her qualitative approach, she tried to capture both convergent and divergent thinking around identified themes. Ana reread the original transcripts when necessary to support her analysis process and accurately reflect participants’ meaning.

**Commonalities in Data Analysis**

In both studies, we analyzed data using qualitative procedures following the interrelated steps in Creswell’s (2013) Data Analysis Spiral. We coded interview and focus group transcripts and used codes to identify emerging themes. As part of the process, we read and reread the transcriptions of our interviews and focus groups and looked at pictures, and artifacts as we went along. We also visually organized visual representations, including pictures, index cards, and different artifacts, in order to recognize and interpret patterns and relationships between codes and themes and to see parallels and differences in participants’ responses and interactions.

We first followed these steps individually looking for themes related to our individual research questions. We both identified examples of quotes for each of the themes represented by participant voices. We then looked at each other’s data to double check themes and understandings and engaged outside peers in debriefing. Lastly, we built upon our understandings of our own and one another’s data to address our common questions.
We both analyzed data with the goal of richly describing perspectives and used Creswell’s (2013) general strategy of being open to codes that might emerge during data analysis. We expected Czarniwska’s (2004, cited in Creswell, 2013) strategies to focus attention would help uncover and interpret meaningful segments of data. We extracted and interpreted themes emerging from these meaningful pieces of data. Using qualitative data analysis strategies may have allowed us to capture nuances in meanings associated with quality and practitioner assets most often not exposed through quantitative approaches.

**Trustworthiness.**

We articulated our own positions and perspectives throughout data collection and analysis, and actively reflected on how our own professional positions and perspectives associated with elevating quality in ECE influence everything from our beliefs that dominant approaches to quality and PD in ECE represent problems worth studying to the way we present our findings. It is important that, as researchers, we are critical of our research and open about our perspectives so that participants and readers understand our inferences, claims, and interpretations as adequately related to the data, and therefore trustworthy. Freeman et al. (2007) present the following guiding question that resonates with us as a starting point for identifying possible validity issues to consider in our research: “How can we best listen to, work with, and represent the people our work is intended to serve?” (p. 30). Collecting multiple types of data from multiple participants addresses the issue of listening while checking our interpretations of data with peers and one another may address the issue of representation.
Collaborative reflective journal.

While independently engaging in our parallel data analysis spirals (Creswell, 2013), we interpreted data with attention to what each other were learning. As part of our collaboration, we kept a collaborative reflective journal in which we reflected on our individual data and commented with each other regarding emerging themes and insights, especially as they related to our shared overlapping questions. We used weekly check-ins on this shared online document as a space to critically reflect on our research processes and to build upon our understandings of how each other’s developing themes addressed our common questions. Because we listened to each other’s perspectives, feelings, and insights while probing each other’s interpretations, this collaborative inquiry process served as a way to engage in a validation strategy of ongoing peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 cited in Creswell, 2013). Our continued dialogue increased our ability to be critical of our independent and combined research and open about our perspectives.

Together, we regularly documented and oriented our collaboration using the following two questions to guide our reflections: How are we collaborating?; How is our collaboration shaping our two studies as well as our pursuit of overarching research questions? Our common research questions are: a) What are meanings of quality in ECE and in what ways can local construction of shared meaning around quality support culturally responsive PD?; and b) How can PD support the construction of shared understandings of quality and practices that are culturally responsive to the local context? The practice of documenting and reflecting on our collaboration built upon the success of the collaboration and increased the trustworthiness of our collaborative work. We each engaged peers in additional forms of peer review.
Peer review.

After immersing herself in the transcripts, documenting evidence supporting emerging codes, and drafting an initial list of emerging themes and tensions, Miriam engaged in additional forms of peer review. First, Miriam shared her list with Ana so that she could check if the emerging themes tended to match her impression of the focus groups (since Ana attended both). Then, Miriam consulted someone who had not been involved in the focus groups in an effort to check if she missed any big ideas while occupied in the process. Her goal was to seek the opinion of another person who knows the CFE with a focus on their impression of the overarching ideas evident in the master document. So, Miriam conducted another form of peer review and built on the trustworthiness of her study through an external audit (Creswell, 2013), in which a peer reviewer who had worked at the CFE for over three years but was not involved with the focus groups read the entire document (which did not include names or memos) and reported her overall impressions using Miriam’s three research questions as a framework for providing feedback. Miriam reviewed the peer reviewer’s points and either confirmed that she had considered them or added them to her list of emerging themes and tensions. For example, Miriam confirmed relationships as a central theme she was developing as the reviewer noted the importance of relationships as a shared theme in both focus groups. In another example, the peer reviewer described differing perspectives about teacher quality in a way that Miriam had not yet developed, which helped Miriam articulate tensions between teacher quality related to passion versus training versus experience.

During data analysis, Ana also asked a colleague to review her original list of codes and to code two participant interviews. This colleague was an early childhood PD
facilitator in Miami who is also fluent in Spanish. This peer reviewer was familiar with Ana’s professional work, but not involved with the details of her research. As an outsider to the research, she read the transcripts in Spanish and coded without any input from Ana, other than a request to identify potential codes for data analysis based on the research questions. The goal of this peer review was to confirm if the codes Ana had identified captured and represented the main themes that participants talked about. This peer check confirmed that original code list could be consolidated to simplify analysis. This peer suggested 8 codes that fit the data well to help answer Ana’s research questions. These 8 suggested codes were already in the 12 code reports generated, so Ana’s analysis primarily focused on these 12 reports.

**Subjectivity Statements and Reflections**

We described how our collaborative journal and peer review served as strategies to ensure that our inferences, claims, and interpretations were adequately related to the data, and therefore trustworthy. Next, we openly present our subjectivity statements in an attempt to articulate how our experiences might influence our perspectives in regards to interpretation of findings and implications.

**Miriam’s subjectivity statement.**

My own evolving perspective and interpretation of the concept of quality in ECE in relation to the perspectives and understandings of others is central to this study so it is important to acknowledge my personal context including my professional history, experiences, and biases. My professional history has shaped my evolving understandings of quality in ECE as I have occupied roles ranging from pre-kindergarten exceptional student education (ESE) teacher in the public schools, inclusion specialist for an ELCMDM administered quality improvement program, literacy
specialist on federal and research grants intended to improve quality, and as writer, manager, and director of CFE grants related to quality improvement in an organization that has the mission of elevating ECE quality in Miami-Dade and beyond.

When I began my professional career as a pre-kindergarten ESE teacher, I became aware of, and struggled with, philosophical tensions that seemed to occur at the intersection of ECE and special education. For example, I experienced contradictions between the open-ended approach favored by the ECE curriculum I used (HighScope) and the predetermined annual objective and benchmark approach represented by the Individualized Education Plans I was responsible for writing and implementing for each of my students. I have experienced similar tensions as multiple paradigms intersect in the various professional positions I have occupied. No matter what my professional position, the tensions I experience when it comes to the language of measures, management, standards, and outcomes seems to persist because I believe in the value of ideas and experiences that cannot be universally defined, measured, managed, or standardized.

In my most recent work with CFE grants, I similarly practiced at a philosophical intersection as I encountered the challenge of writing and working with programs that may incorporate constructivist principles into positivist priorities, like fidelity to standardized practices and measurable (i.e. numerical) outcomes. I also struggled with the assumptions that seem to permeate grant making for community organizations (including those that provide ECE PD) in a manner paralleling dominant quality improvement methods directed towards ECE providers. I particularly disagreed with the
prevailing belief that competition between potential partners, whether they were community organizations or ECE providers, would yield the highest quality service.

I agree with Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence’s (2013) suggestion that uncertainty, complexity, and doubt offer truths unknowable through predefined, presumably objective and neutral, quality criteria. I also perceive tensions between the ideas of objectivity, democracy, and change, which may represent both personal motivation and bias. I am particularly interested in further exploring perspectives on the concept of quality in ECE from a constructivist, critical stance because I see opportunities for growth among myself and others with the shared vision of enhancing quality in ECE. I also personally relate to Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence’s (2013) unease and concern that the concept of quality has spread throughout ECE at a rate and force noticeably more visible than critical reflection around underlying philosophical assumptions and the problems the concept reflects and creates.

I find Tobin’s (2005) statement particularly relevant to my professional experiences: “We must balance the value of the dissemination of cutting-edge notions of quality in early childhood education with the dangers of participating in a decline of global diversity in approaches to early childhood education and of contributing to the loss of fit between a community’s beliefs and needs and their system of early childhood education and care” (p. 429). For these reasons, asking questions with the goal of constructing a more complete understanding of multiple perspectives around the concept of quality in ECE is an important part of my vision for change.

Ana’s subjectivity statement.

I moved to South Florida more than a decade ago from the Dominican Republic where I was born to Dominican parents of European descent and raised until I moved to
the East Coast of the US to pursue my B.S. and Ed.M. in Education. After completing my Ed.M. in an Ivy League university, I returned to the Dominican Republic during a time of system-wide educational reform in which I quickly became involved through roles within the Ministry of Education, the national equivalent to the Department of Education. After a few years, I started working with UNICEF, whose primary goal was supporting national counterparts (governmental and non-governmental) in promoting and protecting children’s rights. These personal and professional experiences represent important contexts and turning points in my life and career that shape my personal aspirations and biases, and my beliefs and practices as a professional. Throughout my career, I have been involved in national planning and policy, local program implementation and using critical pedagogy facilitation methods with local groups. My experience in these multiple settings and contexts informs my practice as I continuously look at how large scale policies, initiatives and discourses influence local practice in ways that are consistent (or not) with children’s rights, including the right to their own cultural identity, language and values (U.N. General Assembly, 1989).

In my work, I aspire to strike a balance between universal principles and wide scale policies, with building shared understanding about children and their education that responds to local cultures and realities. As an immigrant to the US and in raising my own children, I have experienced the complexity of culture as a social construct, language as a developmental process, the intersection between the two, and the critical issues raised by the way they are approached in educational settings, particularly as it relates to the education of multicultural, multilingual children and their teachers. As I conducted this study, I paid particular attention to how my own personal, ethnic, cultural
and linguistic background influenced my interpretations of the data. As a US educated, bilingual, Dominican, immigrant doctoral student, I had to acknowledge the extent to which my own experiences might be both similar to, and different from those of the participants in my study. I hope this study is useful in portraying multiple perspectives that can inform programmatic decision-making in large-scale programming and policies.

**Reflections On Collaborative Writing**

Our ongoing collaborative processes have lasted over a year and a half and included co-authoring our collaborative dissertation proposal, conferring regarding data collection, analysis and synthesis, on-going dialogue through a collaborative journal, and co-authoring our final dissertation. Next, we describe and reflect on collaborative writing.

During this collaboration, we have acknowledged and made explicit our own differing perspectives and positionalities and embraced and struggled with issues of power and ethical challenges that our collective approach entails. During the writing process, we held conversations and questioned each other’s understandings and assumptions, continuously seeking to clarify and make our uncertainties and disagreements explicit. We also tacitly acknowledged our cultural, linguistic, ethnic and professional backgrounds and how they influence our perspectives, and sought to collaborate based on them rather than in spite of them. For example, though we recognize and actualize parity in thinking and scholarship, we have acknowledged that Miriam brings strengths to the collaborative writing process related to being a native English speaker with experience writing professionally. We have also acknowledged how Ana’s unique experiences in her native country and as an immigrant Latina in the US evoke points of view that are relevant to our research topics and the collaborative
writing process. As we engaged in the collaborative writing process, our interactions implicitly acknowledged these differences and strengths, and how they complemented one another and enriched our collaborative relationship and process.

While we have respected one another’s unique perspectives, we have also pushed to co-construct and verbalize shared meanings that broadened our initial individual understandings. Related to Wheatley’s (2002) proposal that willingness to be disturbed functions as an agent of change, we listened for our different ways of seeing, thinking, interpreting and explaining, and embraced uncertainties as opportunities to creatively expand. Overall, we have used our individual abilities, perspectives, interests, and talents to complement one another’s work in an effort to achieve a collaborative construction that surpasses the sum of what we could have created individually. Practically speaking, we have respected our differing individual writing and thinking approaches and worked around each other’s schedules to meet timeframes and deadlines. We have made key decisions together and when we have agreed to divide tasks, we proceeded based on trust and respect for one another’s perspectives, capabilities, and ethics.

Our collaboration highlighted and clarified our perspectives as we constructed knowledge together, through the establishment of a dialectical relationship. We situated ourselves in positions in which we developed phillia, a kind of friendship that forms through opportunities for ethical reflection, as we took risks in our explorations with and through the support of each other (Siry, Ali-Khan & Zuss, 2011). As Siry, Ali-Khan, and Zuss (2011) propose, our collaboration resulted in dialogic construction of ideas, perspectives, and research that developed on both individual and collective levels.
Additionally, as Siry, Ali-Khan, and Zuss suggest, we experienced our collaborative effort of “writing in and around each other’s’ thoughts” (para. 20) as a delicate but valuable dance that pushed us from individualism towards a collective, constructive, ethical, and critical relationship in both research and practice.

**Conclusion**

We have discussed our research purposes, justified and described our qualitative methods, elaborated on our shared and individual contexts, presented our distinct but overlapping data collection and analysis methods, presented individual subjectivity statements, and concluded with reflections on collaborative writing. We will now present our individual and overlapping findings.
Table 3-1. Participants’ ECE experience and countries of origin

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Country of origin</th>
<th>Age of children currently working with in years</th>
<th>Years in ECE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AS</td>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AM</td>
<td>Nicaragua</td>
<td>0-5</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JL</td>
<td>Cuba</td>
<td>4-5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LR</td>
<td>Cuba</td>
<td>3-4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MB</td>
<td>Cuba</td>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS</td>
<td>Cuba</td>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>4-5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3-2. List of codes and generated reports

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code name</th>
<th>Generated code reports</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal characteristics brought to their practice</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characterization of the educational system</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work and professional climate</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication and relationship with children</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication and relationship among peers</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication and relationship with families</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical considerations</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social and cultural context of Miami</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs about how children develop and learn</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-emotional qualities of a good teacher</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational culture in ECE centers</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills and practices of a good teacher</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home education</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effectiveness of PD</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching strategies</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life experiences</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative PD experiences</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive PD experiences</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of ECE</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional identity and qualities that they bring to their practice</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PD achievements</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perspectives about bilingualism</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perspectives about quality and excellence</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perspectives about PD</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of a teacher</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings about being a teacher in Miami</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SECTION 2

In this section, we discuss our individual findings separately and conclude by considering how our findings overlap. Miriam first describes important elements of quality ECE that appeared during the beginning stages of data analysis. Next, Miriam addresses her research questions by presenting and reflecting on common meanings of quality ECE and exploring differences and tensions the concept of quality evokes for individuals working at the CFE. Ana then shares her participants’ perspectives regarding ECE, young children, their assets as ECE practitioners in Miami and PD opportunities, addressing her research questions. These multiple perspectives include many points of view that are shared and some that are unique to some participants often related to their particular experiences. We conclude this section considering points of confluence between our individual findings, including shared themes and tensions.
CHAPTER 4
MIRIAM’S FINDINGS

In this chapter, I address my individual research questions by articulating common meanings of quality and differences in perspectives. I begin by describing important elements of quality that emerged during the initial stages of analysis. Then, I present and reflect on common meanings of quality ECE shared by individuals working within the CFE. I consider ways participants believed the CFE uniquely represents quality because although participants agreed that the CFE represents quality and articulated common components, they perceived differences between the CFE and other ECE settings.

I explore the following common quality themes for CFE professionals: definitions and meanings of quality ECE are dynamic and connected to particular contexts, unique children, and diverse families; the CFE uniquely represents quality through practices and supports, including for family engagement and connecting professional learning to practice; implementing quality ECE requires intentional use of time that allows for moments of shared presence and engaged exploration; and, quality ECE depends on loving relationships within an interconnected, caring community of children, teachers, and families.

While the aforementioned common quality themes reflect shared meanings of quality ECE for CFE professionals, tensions reflect differences and nuanced understandings. Next, I consider language, environment, and assessment related tensions arguably manifesting an overarching conflict between individual, local, and cultural relevance versus standardization within a diverse context. I also consider the paradoxical nature of the CFE’s intent to model quality while understanding meanings of
quality as dynamic, irreproducible, and inextricably connected to particular relationships and contexts. I conclude by describing participants’ uncertainties related to factors influencing quality ECE teachers.

**Initial Important Elements of Quality**

At the beginning stages of transcription and analysis, I looked for initial evidence of patterns by documenting, comparing, and considering word frequencies across approximately six hours of focus group transcripts, including participant words written on artifacts. Participants most frequently mentioned quality, children, teachers, and families, around two hundred times each. Relationships, environments, community, school, home, love, passion, learning, teaching, knowledge, care, respect, language, culture, education, engagement, support, and happiness also appeared with notable frequencies, from about twenty to fifty times each. A group of words like intention, moment, perspective, understanding, and disposition also emerged between ten and twenty times each. On the other hand, participants only mentioned assessments nine times in both focus groups and I was surprised that each time, participants explicitly challenged their uses. Standards, mentioned six times, came up even less frequently than assessments.

I considered the frequency that participants used words as both signals of important elements of quality and as a starting point for building my own understanding of common themes and tensions. I also reflected on associations between frequently occurring words and visual evidence. For example, apparently related to frequent mentions of relationships, love, passion, and care, the heart symbol appeared in half of participant drawings of quality. Also, components of quality did not seem to stand alone but instead were understood as complexly intertwined. For example, in a participant-
drawn image shown in Figure 4-1, quality, language and cultures are depicted as interconnected with ideas, school, families and children. One focus group participant and creator of the drawing explained the heart, encompassing the interrelated components of quality, signifies “you can’t forget to care about the work that you do.” This image of the heart in Figure 4-1 surrounding interrelated language, ideas, culture, school, and people signifies participants’ views about both the encompassing importance of love and caring in quality and understanding of quality as dynamically related to context.

**Quality ECE: Common Meanings**

I have described initial important elements of quality that emerged during the beginning stages of data analysis. Now, I address my first two research questions: “What are meanings of quality ECE for individuals working within the CFE?” and “What themes are shared?” Meanings of quality ECE for CFE professionals relate to shared themes that emerged from analysis of the focus group transcripts, including visual and written artifacts. I first explore how participants relate the dynamics of meanings and contexts to quality. I consider the case of the CFE, which participants viewed as uniquely representing quality. I conclude by discussing the comparatively universal view of quality ECE as dependent upon loving relationships within an interconnected, caring community of children, teachers, and families.

**Definitions and Meanings of Quality ECE are Dynamic and Connected to Particular Contexts, Unique Children, and Diverse Families**

Considering the conflicting philosophical paradigms that permeate ECE policies and programs, participant definitions and meanings of quality appeared consistent with the constructivist paradigm and implicitly challenged positivist presumptions.
Participants across focus groups commonly referenced quality ECE as a dynamic, context-dependent, and relative process. No participant challenged such references or expressed a contrary view of quality as a static, predetermined, measurable entity or product. Figure 4-2, part of an artifact from the “Quality ECE is/is not” Mind Map exercise, shows how participants explicitly expressed that Quality ECE is not “one defined thing” and there is “no single definition.” Instead, participants described quality ECE using dynamic, process oriented terms like “moving,” “growing,” and “evolving.”

Participants tended to suggest that authentic, meaningful implementation of quality ECE is context-dependent, highlighting how the culture and dynamics of particular schools may affect definitions of quality in ECE. For example, in response to the Card Collection and Clustering prompt, asking “what are some ideas about quality you have that are different than others?”, one participant answered “each school community may have a different definition of quality” and questioned “is there really one form of quality in ECE?” Another participant emphasized the need to reflect on questions like: “What is meaningful to your own culture? To your community? Whatever center you are.” By raising critical questions like these, participants seemed to both challenge the possibility of a standard definition of quality ECE and value local meanings.

Participants also highlighted how understandings of particular children and families influence the dynamics of defining and implementing quality. As one participant recommended, “if you really want to provide quality in a place and you want to define quality, let’s think about what is the understanding that you have of that child that you have in your class.” Another participant emphasized how quality as a dynamic concept
is marked by ongoing collaboration between family and school: “quality is a collaboration between the child, the family, the school, the teacher and the house/the home. So as long as this keeps flowing in a continuous cycle, then I feel that quality will be present.” This quote demonstrates how understandings of quality as a dynamic concept are rooted in the context of ongoing, collaborative, responsive relationships among children, teachers, and families. The presence of quality seems fleeting in a sense, as it is marked by its flowing, continuous nature.

**CFE Uniquely Represents Quality**

When it comes to the particular context of the CFE as a system attempting to model and elevate quality, participants regarded the CFE as uniquely representing quality as an intentionally dynamic, irreproducible concept. This view seemed based on the idea that attempts to duplicate quality that are disconnected from local context, cultures, and beliefs about quality sacrifice meaning. For example, one participant critically reflected on the intentions of some visitors to the CFE to duplicate what they see when touring:

> It has to be very intentional. And it has to go with the culture of your school, with what you believe is quality. Because if you are doing this because we are the Center for Excellence and you just want to duplicate, then it is going to be meaningless for you.

This understanding of meaning as interdependent with local factors relates to the perceived role of the CFE in modeling quality: participants saw the CFE as having a social responsibility to encourage and support others to extend learning and practice, but not for others to duplicate the CFE.

Participants seemed to agree that the CFE uniquely represents quality in ways ranging from abstract to concrete. On a concrete level, participants emphasized the role
of CFE leadership in uniquely supporting quality whether through nurturing a welcoming feeling or reflective disposition, incorporating supports for connecting ongoing learning with practice, or enabling policies like home visits. A participant working as a teacher noted: “having master teachers and family engagement. That is such a gem to have that support.” On a more abstract yet practical level, participants explicitly linked supports for quality ECE with time. One participant commented: “I think that taking the time, like you are talking about home visits and parent conferences. Those things, you know, don’t happen in every place. Where a teacher actually has, is given, the time to do that.” Another participant similarly emphasized time: “leadership is the one that gives time, that values time, that invests time to create these moments.” Participants highlighted a range of supports at the CFE including: center climate, master teachers following through with implementation of professional learning, family engagement specialists and home visits, supports for inclusion like additional staff, and the policies that protect time and resources for such practices.

Participant responses to the Card Collection and Clustering prompt “what are some ideas about quality you have that are different than others?” also suggested agreement that the CFE uniquely represents quality. These written responses tended to focus on differences between the CFE and other ECE programs, emphasizing both the need for commitment and supports for quality. For example, one participant with extensive coaching experiences in local ECE settings submitted a blank response to the “ideas about quality I have in common with others” Card Collection and Clustering prompt and explained:

…in the community, in family child care providers homes, in centers. Like the teachers may really want to provide the children intentional instruction.
But they may just not know how to because they don’t have the guidance, they don’t have the support, they don’t have the master teachers. They don’t have whatever it might be even if they have the passion for it. And the administration may not follow whatever they need to follow to enhance the climate of the center. Or to have more leadership skills...personally, I don’t see it in the community as I see it here in the CFE.

Another participant surprisingly wrote that ideas about quality she has that are different than others are “quality matters; love for learning/curiosity can be taught; relationships matter.” The participant clarified that “I didn’t see that we were different as a group so I had to kinda think outside...I think that sometimes in education it is just more about getting things done rather than the quality of things.” This participant, who had years of experience working in the public schools, expressed some frustration along with her view that the CFE uniquely represents quality in comparison to the public school system. Although public schools have early education programs, this participant differentiated the way quality is strived for in ECE in general and at the CFE in particular from the norm she experienced in public schools. She stated:

Coming from the public school system...this is quality but what they do in the public school system is not quality...I know what quality is and I have seen it but it just doesn’t happen in K-12 education as much as it is strived for in early education. I think in early education there is almost like a movement to create this quality. I don’t see that movement, I don’t see that excitement in the public schools.

Other participants similarly differentiated early education from K-12 education. On the other hand, participants also emphasized that early childhood education goes through the third grade, and raised questions about different perceptions of quality associated with early childhood education compared to K-12 systems, whether public or private.
**Family engagement: “we are not only working with the child, we are working with the family”**

Participants agreed that the CFE uniquely represents quality in ECE through intentional acknowledgement and inclusion of families. Participants commonly referenced families as critical collaborators in quality ECE and valued family engagement rooted in relationships between school staff and families. For example, one participant urged: “Let’s not forget that every child that comes to the center, they have a family. So we are not only working with the child, we are working with the family.”

Another participant described her reason for bringing her image of quality (Figure 4-3):

> Quality is not just having a child walk out of a building and saying the ABCs. You have to know the family, the cultures, and I remember the conversation I was having with the parent and she was having a fear of leaving her child. So, I feel like this shows quality because she was included in her education.

While participants recognized the CFE for taking the time to build engaged relationships between children, teachers, and families, participants also expressed tension around having time to connect within the busy, fast-paced Miami culture. One participant who is a teacher reflected:

> I think that talking about culture and stuff…It is very fast paced, especially here in Miami. Like, I had one or two sets of parents that they don’t come. Just the nanny. So it is very difficult to…like unless I send an email, and for parent teacher conferences, it is like please be here this time. And they will come but that’s them, I can’t force them to do anything… maybe it’s the culture that has to do here. Like, sometimes unrealistic.

This conflict between intention to build collaborative relationships that acknowledge and include families in early education and the time pressures faced by working families within a context some see as fast-paced seemed to highlight the importance of caring relationships among and between connected systems of adults and children in quality ECE.
Connecting learning to practice: “you have to want to come here every day and do quality”

Participants regarded consistent implementation of practice as hard work that requires actively maintaining passion for, and “reinventing,” quality. Simultaneous values for consistency, creativity, and growth in teaching suggest a challenging, daily balancing act assumed by quality ECE teachers. The creator of the image in Figure 4-4, a teacher, explained:

All put together…the time that it takes to provide the quality care, relationships, open-mindedness, love, passion, um that’s a muscle flexing right there at the bottom [laughter]. But it takes strength to, I think to even want to provide quality care because it’s not easy. And it’s not just a [pause] one day thing or even a month. Because you have to want to come here every day and do quality care. And then creativity goes along with the muscle I guess. To just kind of reinvent your passion, reinvent your quality.

Participants regarded the CFE Demonstration School as uniquely effective in supporting consistent implementation of practices learned through PD. Participants agreed that the CFE cultivates an open-minded disposition for learning connected to scaffolded professional learning and continuous classroom support for implementation.

A quality focus group participant who is a teacher at the Demonstration School explained:

I like the way that I had my trainings. Because it was kind of like I guess level 1, level 2 and then it’s just getting—the more that I work here, the more extensive my trainings have been so the more complicated they are. And I think that um like it is the basic trainings but then they also extend those. It’s not like here’s the training you do what you want with it and that’s it. Our master teachers kind of like reinforce the training and make us practice it. Like, put into practice. Other than just learn it.
This statement illustrates participant values for scaffolded professional learning that is supported through implementation. Master teachers seem to promote a balance of growth and consistency as they encourage teachers to put learning into practice.

Another participant with coaching experience described her observation of Scaffolding Early Learning strategies developed by Dr. Bodrova and learned through PD as part of an Early Reading First grant in a CFE classroom:

I was in X’s room for two or three different sessions, and it was like I wasn’t even there. I mean even the kids, boom, boom, boom...It’s like they really do this every day. It’s not like, well X is here today so...And the kids will let you know that it’s not being done every day...when I did the observations here at the CFE it was very clear that the kids were getting quality, consistent instruction every day.

This statement signifies participants’ value for learning and implementing new practices while also cultivating consistency in the practices determined to matter most.

**Implementing Quality ECE Requires Intentional Use of Time that Allows for Moments of Shared Presence and Engaged Exploration among and between Children and Teachers**

Overall, participants connected the role of time in enacting quality not only with practical supports, but also with adults being in the present moment while they engage with children and one another. Participants emphasized the importance of the teacher’s intentional use of time and also acknowledged the role of school leadership in valuing and allowing that time. Participants frequently used the word “moments” when describing photos of quality. For example, one participant described her reason for choosing her photo of quality: “she’s just like having one of those really rare moments that we see in early childhood education where teachers have an opportunity to uplift a child.” To participants, the act of taking time to engage with a child represented caring, quality, and presence. As one participant referred to a peer’s image of quality (Figure 4-5): “I see the value of the teacher actually spending that time in which the message is, I
am caring for you, you are important, and I am spending probably two minutes with you. But of quality time.” Similarly, another participant stated: “Another thing that is important is the time. That the teachers are actually just spending time and not actually rushing the experience.” Participant descriptions of photos of quality also seemed to convey a sense of inexpressible shared moments. As one participant observed: “There is like a light that is going off in you know the teacher and the child.” The light seemed to signify a moment of nonverbal connection between teacher and child, perhaps similar to the flow another participant associated with collaborative relationships.

The participant who brought the image shown in Figure 4-6 similarly emphasized the role of time and moments in quality, as she explained:

I can see the powerful interaction between them...she is taking the time to actually engage with the child. And the child is also responding to her in a very, um, interesting way. He is being very connected with the teacher. And, that’s actually a teachable moment because he just brought something to her. And she actually took the time to speak and give him some vocabulary on what he was showing her.

This statement signifies how participants seemed to value time as a component of quality, a practical necessity for building relationships through shared moments, and a requisite for learning.

Demonstrating shared moments at a literal level, in the participant selected images of quality that featured adults interacting with children, adults and children were at the same physical level. Several participants explicitly referenced the significance of the physical/spatial relationship between adult and child. For example, one participant explained her image of quality: “she is on the floor sitting down so it is really about, um, making sure that the children feel comfortable with what she is reading and engaging both of them at the same time.” Another talked about the quality of “a moment where
you are at actual level.” In a sense, the image of the adult, usually a teacher, at children’s level represents intentional, caring moments of presence and shared engagement. In another sense, one may consider emphases on physically being at the same level as a metaphor for adaptability and prioritization of children’s interests on the part of the teacher.

Although participants tended to emphasize the importance of adults intentionally taking time to engage with children, participants also highlighted the moments adults intentionally allow for children to engage in explorations without adult agendas. Participants valued noticing children’s curiosities and allowing time for their uninterrupted pursuit. One participant, who is a teacher, described her reason for choosing her image of quality (Figure 4-7):

I think that we have to sometimes give children the time they need to explore. And maybe they are doing something at that moment but they go off because of their curiosity and interest and they find something different and we have to give them that time.

Participants agreed about the intentional use of time in quality, whether that time is intended to share moments or allow explorations. The role of the teacher in making intentional choices about time, which respond to ongoing dynamics like children’s curiosities, parallels the role of the teacher in enacting quality as a dynamic learning process among all parties. This focus on teacher’s intentional decisions notably lies at the core of NAEYC’s (2009) position on developmentally appropriate practice. Participants may have also seen intentional use of time as practically allowing the expression of loving relationships.
Quality ECE Depends on Loving Relationships within an Interconnected, Caring Community of Children, Teachers, and Families

While participants suggested that the CFE uniquely represents quality through supports like family engagement and master teachers, participants asserted relationships as the force underlying and unifying quality across settings. Participants frequently cited relationships as both a way the CFE represents quality and also a value related to quality that most people across settings share. Participants commonly promoted reciprocal, intentional, and engaged relationships between children, teachers, and families in a school community as central aspects of quality ECE. Understandings of reciprocal relationships within caring communities as contexts for learning are consistent with NAEYC’s (2009) guidelines for early childhood professionals. As one participant put it in her drawing of quality (Figure 4-8), “learning starts with relationships.” Another participant explained, “it all comes back to communication, relationships, and building that to be able to have that quality together.” Participants described relationships as both existing within, and building an interconnected system of, communities, schools, families, and children. As one participant stated:

If one part of that system is broken, it won’t work…everybody seems to understand that relationships are that part of that child’s system and has to intertwine in order for it to show quality in the work that we do.

This statement reflects the view that quality is based on relationships, which seem to act as both a foundation and bridge connecting different components of quality as a dynamic process.

Participants viewed relationships as the basis of learning and heart, caring, and love as foundations of relationships. One participant highlighted the role of passion in learning by writing that an idea about quality she has in common with others is that
“teachers’ passion is imperative to teach others.” The appearance of the heart symbol in half of the “Quality Means to Me” drawings illustrates the centrality of love, passion, and caring in participant representations of quality. Like relationships, participants seemed to regard the feeling-related characteristics the heart symbolizes as non-negotiable foundations of quality ECE. For example, the creator of the drawing of quality featured in Figure 4-9 concluded her explanation of its meaning, stating:

Basically...quality means to me, [that] even though we come from different backgrounds and different experiences...if we look towards the same directions we can go and we can embrace education...with happiness and with positive disposition and to get to do everything, like X was saying, with love. You know, to start with love.

Another participant similarly stated, “we need to, everything we do we put our heart into it.” While another echoed: “we should do everything with love.” Participants seemed to value love as the basis for relationships and caring enough to practice quality ECE.

**Quality ECE: Differences and Tensions**

I have discussed themes reflecting meanings of quality ECE shared by a range of CFE professionals and now address my final research question, “In what ways do perspectives differ?” I explore tensions related to the relative nature of quality and how those tensions manifested in focus group dialogues related to languages, environments, and assessments. I consider language-, environment-, and assessment-related tensions arguably manifesting an overarching conflict between individual, local, and cultural relevance versus standardization within a diverse context. I conclude by considering uncertainties about the relative importance of factors like education and personality when it comes to quality ECE teachers, who are the focus of Ana’s findings.
Individual, Local, and Cultural Contexts Versus Standardization

Common understandings of quality as a dynamic concept appear connected to voiced tensions surrounding notions of rightness and standards within a multicultural local context. As one participant wondered: “what they think they are doing is quality versus what we are doing we think is quality. So it is kind of like where is the standard thing with quality?” The overarching conflict between local relevance versus standardization within a diverse context evokes a group of questions, uncertainties, and tensions related to language, environments, and assessments.

Language related tensions: “How are you going to determine what is the 100% proper Spanish?”

I begin by considering an unexpected tension that emerged in the first focus group about use of the Spanish language in professional ECE contexts, specifically the CFE Demonstration School. The school practices a dual language approach that includes instruction in English and Spanish. Specific practices, such as documenting everything in color-coded English and Spanish, are consistently implemented. Participants explicitly mentioned dual language only twice in the focus groups, in written responses to the card collection and clustering prompt regarding ways the CFE represents quality. While participants seemed to take it for granted that a quality ECE program would use the same languages that families and children use, an extended and surprising discussion about the use of Spanish occurred. This discussion alluded to the locally important nuances of language in ECE, as the vehicle of communication between school and family.

Culturally and linguistically sensitive communications were a main area where perspectives differed within the first focus group. Debate about Spanish language
differences reflected conflicts between standardization and cultural relevance in relation to professionalism. In this dialogue about language, participants conveyed sensitively interconnected ideas about language, culture, understanding, respect, and adaptability within this diverse context. Participants engaged in extended conversation in which they shared opposing perspectives on the topic of the type of Spanish ECE professionals should use, noting the various countries families and teachers in Miami come from. This debate involved the question of extent to which teachers and school staff should tailor their vocabulary to their audience, specifically when it comes to the use of Spanish words and sayings that may be country-specific and misunderstood by Spanish speakers from another country.

The unexpected conversation began when a participant talked about a teacher who wrote a note to a family using the word “pomo,” which the participant described as a Cuba-specific term used to refer to a baby bottle. The participant who raised the topic argued the teacher could have acted more respectfully if she instead used a standard, neutral term for bottle (eg. “botella”) to ensure that the family understood the meaning of the message. Participants expressed different points of view about the need for teachers to use standard Spanish language in their communications with families. Some participants differentiated written communications from oral conversations, arguing for the relative importance of “standard” language in written communications. Some participants felt strongly that communications should use “standard” Spanish as a sign of professionalism and respect for families and argued that there is a need for teachers to use “neutral” Spanish language, which they attributed to the official institution responsible for overseeing the Spanish language based in Spain, the Royal Spanish
Academy. Other participants questioned “how are you going to determine what is the 100% proper Spanish?,” defended the use of local dialects and country-specific colloquial terms, and challenged the implication that ECE teachers should adapt their use of country specific language.

This debate, sparked by one word, parallels critical quality conversations because both evoke tensions between standards and cultures and highlight how dominant cultural groups determine what is standard and presumably neutral. Referencing the “pomo conversation,” the peer reviewer posed a question around ECE teachers’ uses of standard Spanish that hints at larger questions about adaptation and power: “Should teachers do all of the adapting to the families’ background, or should families also understand that teachers have their own background and adapt to them?” One participant expressed her feeling that “in this field you always have to be the one modeling [adaptability]. So it is not like a two way relationship.” Participants expressed tensions regarding whether and how school staff, including teachers, should adapt to parental and professional expectations. As one participant discussed regarding adapting her language when speaking with families: “Whatever I do, I just try to make them feel comfortable, without selling myself out.”

These language-related tensions are partly defined by a context in which ECE professionals and families come from multiple Spanish speaking countries. Within this context, links and tensions between language, adaptability, and power, appear. For example, the Spanish of Spain was portrayed as neutral by some participants while those same participants suggested use of a term specific to Cuba was disrespectful. Participants disagreed whether teachers should adapt to families in their
communications, with some associating professionalism with adaptability to standards and others associating adapting local language to "neutral" standards with cultural sacrifice.

Environment related tensions: “Are you saying quality is a clean carpet?”

Focus group participants shared general values for safe, nurturing, welcoming, loving, and engaging environments. However, participants expressed different points of view about the importance and character of physical environments. Some participants regarded the environment as an important factor in quality ECE while others suggested that a quality teacher can practice quality ECE anywhere. Representing the viewpoint that quality ECE can be enacted by a quality teacher anywhere, one participant recounted the first time she saw the CFE:

To me, quality, when I saw this center, I thought, ‘wow this is a state of the art center with beautiful furniture and materials.’ But to me that doesn’t make a quality center. I mean, I know that if you take some of our amazing teachers and put them in another center, in another area with less toys, less accessibility to material things, I know that they would do an amazing job anyways, and raise amazing children just as they would do here or in another country.

In contrast, other participants emphasized the role of the environment in enacting quality. One participant noted, “As teachers we are taught that the environment is the, you know, another teacher.” This phrase is associated with the Reggio Emilia approach, which influences the school and values the potential of natural, purposefully evolving environments to inspire and respect children’s interests and explorations. The participants who viewed environments as central to quality ECE also promoted minimalistic and natural environments. As the one participant who brought an image of quality (Figure 4-10) that intentionally featured the classroom environment explained:
I picked that one…because of the environment. I think that’s very important where you are teaching a child. As you can see, very simple, there’s not that many colors or many artwork, or anything like that on the walls. Or, not even that many materials. Um, you see a lot of natural things in the classroom. Such as the colors, such as the plants. You have real plants in the class.

This value for minimalistic, natural environments at the CFE related to discussions about differences in perspectives about quality environments. Another participant described quality environments in ECE as a topic that:

If we even use thinking routines, like circle of viewpoints, everyone is going to have a different perspective. Because you know quality in the classroom environment I feel like is one of those sensitive topics too. Because some people think that quality means my walls are covered. Some people think that quality is less is more.

Differing perspectives about quality environments raised questions related to how and why a demonstration school models its environment. Although participants considered the CFE environment as representing quality, they disagreed about the need for quality environments to be as well maintained or attractive as the CFE. Some participants raised challenging questions like: “Why do we showcase, why do we have this environment setup to show to others quality?”

Challenging conversations about the environment that the CFE models led to reflections around how painful it can be to demonstrate quality. As one participant reflected: “it is painful to be a demonstration school because demonstrating quality could be painful at times. Because it is not that you have to be perfect but that’s the expectation outside.” While this participant distinguished quality from perfection, she suggested quality is painful to model because others equate the concepts. Notions of growth and perfection did not seem to comfortably coexist. As another participant
reflected: “Imagine the name of our school. United Way Center for Excellence. Imagine this word...it’s scary.”

One may argue that such expressions of pain and fear when it comes to modeling quality relate to the paradox of attempting to demonstrate a dynamic concept that has multiple definitions and meanings. A mundanely specific symbol of the pain of demonstrating quality is the expectation that the carpet is always clean alongside the simultaneous question that arose in a focus group: “Are you saying quality is a clean carpet?” This tendency to reduce components of quality to disconnected pieces seemed to contradict participants’ tendency to view quality ECE as a holistic, interconnected, process and ongoing pursuit.

**Assessment related tensions:** “They are not all one size fits all for the whole gumbo of families and people we have representing here in South Florida”

Participants in the first focus group rarely mentioned assessments and measures, while, in the second focus group, participants indicated agreement that quality ECE is measured authentically and through culturally, linguistically, sensitive methods, not necessarily through standardized measures. During the infrequent instances that participants mentioned assessments, participants explicitly challenged their dominant uses and status as determinants of quality. As the peer reviewer put it, participants saw quality as “something that cannot be inventoried” and inclusive of culture and atmosphere.

Interestingly, participants argued that some of the tools the school is assessed with, and are used in community programs, do not indicate quality. For example, a participant shared that she does not agree with the use of the ITERS and ECERS as tools to set up classroom environments. Another participant responded to the “Quality
ECE is” Mind Map prompt: “more than tools.” Also, responses to the “Quality ECE is not” Mind Map prompt (Figure 4-11) included “assessment results,” along with specific mention of the ITERS, ECERS, and checklists. Another participant commented: “I also believe quality cannot just be captured in one shot.” This comment relates to Wiltz and Klein’s (2001) call for extended observation in order to understand the dynamics, character and appropriateness of an environment, as well as the responsiveness of teachers and engagement of children.

Written comments similarly questioned dominant assumptions that quality can be measured. In Card Collection and Clustering, a participant wrote that an idea about quality she has that differs from others is that “quality sometimes doesn’t show on paper or assessments.” Another participant implicitly challenged typically narrow school readiness skills assessments by writing that an idea about quality she has in common with others is the desire to assess different characteristics like curiosity, problem solving, and perseverance. A teacher reflected: “I think that it’s more like the observation that you do on a daily basis that shows what the child has learned, not just a standardized test or standardized score.” Participants’ focus on ongoing assessment seems consistent with understandings of quality, teaching, and learning as dynamic processes and cycles of responses to continuously changing circumstances and evidence.

One participant highlighted the local relevance of critical questions about the use of assessments that are inconsistent with the norms of non-dominant groups. She elaborated on her perspective that standard assessments do not capture quality within the diverse Miami context:
For me those assessments are unfair, the majority of them. Because you have children from different cultural backgrounds and different ethnicities that learn in different ways from what is standardized. So, it doesn’t always reflect exactly what the child knows. It reflects more what they don’t know according to mainstream. And, ok guys, we are in Miami. You know, we’ve got a lot of different cultures, we have a lot of different languages, a lot of different backgrounds, ethnicities, the whole nine yards. There is so many different dynamics that is not aligned with the standards, with school readiness, with whatever tool. They are not all one size fits all for the whole gumbo of families and people we have representing here in South Florida.

Just as quality ECE teachers may be expected to adjust practices on an ongoing basis according to evidence about strengths and needs, this statement suggests a need to consider whether dominant assessment practices respond to needs, build upon strengths, or promote ongoing learning by children and adults within the local Miami ECE context.

**Quality ECE Teachers do not Exist through Education or Personality Alone**

Participants agreed teachers play a central role in enacting quality ECE. In addition to referencing teachers more often than any other word in the quality focus group transcripts, teachers appeared in all but two of the participant-selected images of quality. Although participants agreed about the centrality of teachers in enacting quality and also agreed that teacher requirements or characteristics alone are insufficient to enact quality, participants demonstrated uncertainties about what makes a quality teacher. While not necessarily a topic of debate, both focus groups explored different factors that work together to influence a quality ECE teacher. The peer reviewer described teacher quality as one of the main areas in which perspectives differed, noting tensions between teacher quality related to passion versus training versus experience.
Discussions around the importance of education and personality in quality early childhood teaching suggested lack of consensus. For example, during clarification following Card Collection and Clustering prompts “what are some ideas about quality you have in common with / different than others?”, a participant reflected that she wrote two apparently contradictory statements about the importance of education (Figure 4-12). As she tried to explain her reasoning, she said:

so I kinda contradicted myself...I have in common that you do have to have—not that you do have to but that having a degree makes you a high quality educator. But I don’t believe that having a degree makes you a high quality teacher.

While participants didn’t believe degrees guarantee quality, they commonly referenced inadequate minimum educational requirements as a quality issue and agreed that the 45 hours required by DCF are not enough for a quality ECE teacher. As one participant said, “I feel like in this society anybody could be a teacher when it comes to paper but I don’t think that anybody can be a teacher.” Uncertainty about the role of degrees seems related to accompanying values for teacher commitment to enacting quality.

Unrelated to degrees, participants seemed to view commitment to ECE as key to quality and motivated by an awareness of ECE as a social responsibility. As one participant noted, “We are all thinking about that social responsibility we have when it comes to quality. You know, thinking that 85% of the brain develops during those first three years of life.” As one participant stated:

We are not here for an income, we are here for the outcome. Because we know that the income is not the main reason we are here, at least it is not my reason. We are here because of the outcome, because of the work that we do with the families. And so I think that personality has a lot to do with outcome.

Another participant emphasized the cultural assets teachers bring to their practice:
I think it matters obviously the professional development that teachers get but I think it also matters what they bring to the table that has nothing to do with teaching. You know, the fundamentals. I guess is what I am trying to say. I mean culture and engagement, all of those things have a lot to do with what teaching is.

Participants emphasized the need to connect teacher and staff passion, assets, attitudes, and behaviors with PD and degrees. As one participant urged: “Passion and positive disposition is important but also needs to go along with professional development in a meaningful way. Degrees are not important if they aren’t connected to what is important.” Participants even deemed advanced degrees insufficient without going along with ability to implement quality. As one participant stated, “You know, you can have all these degrees and you are awful with the kids, and that doesn’t help.”

Despite uncertainties, participants seemed to agree that quality ECE teaching could only be actualized at the crossroads of personality, implementation, and education. Participants regarded quality ECE practitioners as going beyond degrees, personality, or social commitment, but also requiring intentional connection between ongoing learning and practice. Participants valued continuous learning by teachers, families, and children and agreed that openness to learning and connection of that learning with action is part of quality. One participant described the process in which adults also “get their hands in the mess” and engage in exploration, dialogue, and learning with the child: “It is not just the child who has to learn…the teacher, or anybody, you know any adult that is interacting with the child, the child sees them as explorers as well, as learning with them as well.”

Participants also described observing children’s ongoing learning as one way educators maintain passion for the work. When it comes to ECE practitioners,
participants acknowledged that consistent connections of knowledge learned through PD and practice necessitate ongoing evolving, rethinking, and risk taking.

**Conclusion**

I have discussed how the CFE quality focus group findings address my individual research questions by presenting common meanings of quality and differences in perspectives. I explored understandings of quality shared by CFE professionals. The dominant theme framing my findings is that definitions and meanings of quality ECE are dynamic and connected to particular contexts, unique children, and diverse families. I considered aspects of quality uniquely represented by the particular context and case of the CFE. Conceptions of quality involved interrelated considerations like intentional use of time, opportunities for shared moments and explorations, and a supported balance of ongoing learning and consistent implementation of practices. I considered that, despite differences in representations and meanings of quality, relationships within an interconnected, caring community of children, teachers, and families are a unifying theme across ECE contexts. I also noted consistencies between participant’s emphases on intentional decisions and relationships and NAEYC’s (2009) position on developmentally appropriate practice.

Next, I discussed differences and tensions around meanings of quality for CFE professionals and reflected on language-, environment-, and assessment-related tensions paralleling the overarching conflicts between standardization and relevance to a unique local context. I noted the challenge of modeling quality and considered the paradox of attempting to demonstrate quality while understanding meanings of quality to be dynamic, irreproducible, and inextricably connected to contexts and relationships. I
concluded by describing participants’ uncertainties related to the influence of education and personality in quality ECE teachers.

When defining the purpose of my study, I expected to develop themes, including areas of overlap and tension with official definitions, standards, and measures of quality. I hope the themes and tensions I have articulated reflect a refined understanding of local perspectives and nuances in meaning as it relates to the construct of quality in ECE. Through identification of common themes and tensions expressed by a range of voices, I hope to have articulated differences and similarities in meaning related to the concept of quality in ECE at the CFE.

Understanding commonalities, nuances, and tensions in perspectives about quality ECE can also inform understandings of quality PD for diverse, local ECE professionals. Next, Ana takes a closer look at the perspectives, beliefs, and assets of ECE teachers in Miami and discusses how her findings address her research questions. Then, we explore points of overlap between my findings about local perspectives on quality and Ana’s findings, which focus on local perspectives on PD. We highlight points of confluence between our findings, and discuss shared implications for ECE in Miami.
4-1 Participant drawn image of quality: encompassing heart.

4-2 “Quality is/is not” mind map artifact: dynamics.
4-3 Participant selected image of quality: family. 
(Photo property of individual research participant and used with permission)

4-4 Participant drawn image of quality: “re-inventing quality.”
4-5 Participant selected image of quality: presence.
(Photo property of individual research participant and used with permission)

4-6 Participant selected image of quality: moments.
(Photo property of individual research participants and used with permission)
4-7 Participant selected image of quality: exploration.  
(Photo property of individual research participants and used with permission)

4-8 Participant drawn image of quality: “learning starts with relationships.”
4-9 Participant drawn image of quality: “start with love.”

4-10 Participant selected image of quality: environment.
   (Photo property of individual research participants and used with permission)
4-11 “Quality is/is not” mind map artifact: assessment concerns.

4-12 Uncertainties about the role of degrees in quality.
CHAPTER 5
ANA’S FINDINGS

In this chapter, I share my findings regarding my research questions and related themes that emerged from the PD focus groups and individual interviews. These findings are organized in three main parts addressing participants’ beliefs about ECE and young children, the image of a quality teacher and participants’ professional identity, and perceptions regarding professional learning opportunities. I first look at prevailing participants’ beliefs about the purpose and potential of ECE and children’s development and learning including the implication of these beliefs for working with young children. After making these beliefs explicit, I explore participants’ images of an ECE teacher and portray their perspectives regarding their evolving identities as ECE teachers in Miami, discussing assets that they bring to their practice. Lastly, I explore participants’ perceptions regarding professional learning opportunities in Miami, taking a close look at their dispositions and experiences with PD as well as the barriers they face to enacting quality ECE.

Beliefs about ECE and Young Children

While answering questions regarding characteristics of ECE teachers and participants’ ability to work with children in Miami, participants elaborated on their beliefs about the purpose and potential of ECE, about children, and the implications for teaching. These beliefs seem to inform participants’ practice and include: ideas about ECE as the “base and pillar of humankind”, beliefs about the principle of equality and the uniqueness of children, and conceptions about early childhood as a definite stage of human development. These beliefs also include ideas about what matters when working with young children, including: love and relationships as foundations of learning in early
childhood, learning through supportive interactions, the need to experience joy and success, and teachers and families as complementary. I now explore participants’ views on these topics.

**Beliefs About the Purpose and Potential of ECE: “Base and Pillar” of Humankind**

ECE teachers hold complex beliefs about themselves as teachers and their ability to work with children in Miami. These ideas seem permeated by their beliefs regarding the purpose and potential of ECE. Participants agreed that ECE is the “base and pillar” of future generations because early experiences leave long lasting foundations, which can be positive or negative. Recognizing the impact of early experiences, participants emphasized the individual and social benefits of quality ECE. For example, one participant described ECE as “the way that children will have a foundation to be better in their future and have the self-assurance to be successful at work and in teams, now during childhood and as adults.” Participants valued ECE experiences as the foundation of both individual brain structures and citizenship, setting the stage for both future learning and future society.

Beliefs that the future of children and society depend on quality ECE seemed to underlie a sense of shared purpose among participants. Focusing on the impact of early experiences, one participant urged:

The most important thing is to leave [positive] footprints. When the brain has footprints, it is impossible for them to erase them...those who, due to life circumstances, have bad experiences...then our function as teachers is to try in the time they are with us to give them good experiences.

Another participant added that consideration of the long-term effects of ECE requires teacher understanding of the complete life-cycle, and looking at children as “sujetos,” actors of their own acts. The concept of “sujetos” is related to constructivist
and critical conceptions of individuals as active learners and participants in their educational process and suggests an idea of ECE as the beginning of a continuous act of empowerment related to Freire’s idea of education as a practice of freedom (Freire, 1987). This conception contrasts dominant views of children as passive recipients of knowledge and education as an instrument of social integration, and is particularly relevant when considering the education of immigrant and minority children.

Participants expressed a dual purpose of ECE, as responding to the needs of each child while supporting socialization and participation in society. These two overarching purposes of ECE did not appear to cause conflict for participants, even though meeting them in practice raised important questions. Participants saw ECE as the foundation for learning and for future individual success and social well-being, requiring that ECE teachers intentionally model attitudes, knowledge, skills and behaviors for the children. In addition, participants’ views about how children develop and learn guided how they engaged with young children.

Beliefs About How Young Children Develop and Learn

Ideas about how children develop and learn appeared in participants’ discourse throughout focus groups and interviews. Participants’ views of young children included broad ideas regarding shared basic needs, differences in individual rates of development, interests, and learning styles. Participants’ beliefs about how children develop and learn also included ideas related to early childhood as a definite stage of human development with particular characteristics, and conditions and experiences that support development and learning, including love and relationships, supportive interactions, feeling important, and experiencing joy and success. After exploring these
themes, I discuss participants’ beliefs about the impact of diverse life circumstances, including socio-economic and cultural contexts, upon child development and learning.

**All children are the same but every child is unique.**

Discussions of child development and learning evoked tensions between the idea that all children have the same rights and developmental needs and the idea that every child is unique. Participants seemed to embrace these tensions, simultaneously believing that all children have equal rights, basic needs and developmental stages while also believing that those rights and needs take different forms depending on individual developmental characteristics, socio-economic status, and life circumstances. Beliefs that all children share basic needs and developmental characteristics seemed delicately balanced with beliefs that children’s needs are connected to context and their individual interests and curiosities, as actors in their own learning.

Focusing on the sameness of children independent of conditions, one participant expressed that young children have the same needs regardless of the countries, education and conditions in which they live. She stated, “[In Cuba] the education system is different, but the children are the same. Even when they are in different countries, and have different conditions, they all have the same needs.” This statement seems to refer to the specific needs of all children in this particular stage of life, but seems to also imply a principle of equality and social responsibility for the well-being of every child, that should prevail in every society.

Participants tended to frame learning in terms of standard, typical development as they frequently referenced goals, objectives and expectations for children in relation to their age groups. While participants spoke about objectives in broad and general terms, they mentioned curiosity, and the development of self-respect and self-assurance,
underscoring the relevance of social-emotional development and approaches to learning during the early years. Other discussions focused on the uniqueness of children and tied that uniqueness to individual characteristics and circumstances, highlighting their influence on how each child develops and approaches learning. This focus on individual differences included varied learning styles and interests as well as levels of development and ability, which posed implications for teaching.

Views about how specific learning occurs also varied among participants. While one participant expressed that children “learn to the extent that the teacher repeats and lets them know,” another participant privileged a child-directed approach and referred to ECE as a function of meeting a child’s curiosity and individual interests. This participant said:

the child has her curiosity, fulfilling her curiosity, and teaching her more about what she wants to learn; taking her to higher levels, but always with love, love and respect; and always alert about the child’s interests to fulfill them.

The other participant reflected on the practical application of a child directed approach and shared her hesitation about the degree to which children could guide their own learning, placing emphasis on the need for teacher direction. She stated:

Children have to learn by playing, but ...one should facilitate some pattern, because they need to develop. For example, their fine motor skills ... it’s about constantly doing, ... what she wants to do, what one calls a scribble. But if for example, I’m working [on] geometrical shapes, and I can give them a pattern, of a square,... I think she is going to know more, ...because one learns playing, but like, one could direct them a little more in the fine motor skills, because fine motor skills are important for them.

While these two participants may agree in principle that ECE teaching involves a balance of respecting curiosities while promoting developmental abilities, the practical
application poses a dilemma for teachers like this participant, who seems to be in the process of determining how much teacher guidance young children need. This process may reflect dissonance between her current beliefs and practice and constructivist ideas promoted by child-centered approaches. These two participants expressed views of children that ranged from more passive to more active participants in the learning process and corresponding views of ECE teachers as more directive versus more responsive to children’s individuality.

Focusing on working with groups of children, and teachers’ responsiveness to individual children, another participant discussed how children’s learning styles and preferences necessitate understanding, individualization and patience from teachers, noting how different children of the same age may demonstrate different levels of development and ability. Referring to the responsibility of supporting all children, she stated: “We have to take those who are less able to the same level of those who are more able.” Along similar lines, another participant demonstrated how she integrates developmentally appropriate practices (NAEYC, 2009) by planning curricular activities to meet a child’s developmental needs. She said:

I have to satisfy the need he has to jump, because he needs it. I spoke with the director and she told me, he lives in an efficiency, he has no space to run, nothing, a very small space, and then as a teacher you have to know all that, if you don’t..., you wouldn’t know what to do.

This statement shows how this participant considers information about the child’s living conditions in her individualized planning. Emphasizing that some children require specialized attention, one participant argued: “Individual problems, both learning and behavior problems...require that we know how to respond specifically, consult adequate resources that will help us solve problems.”
This participant highlighted the need for specialized knowledge to attend to special needs prevalent in early childhood and referred to the influence of socio-economic conditions, family circumstances, and culture on children’s behavior and achievement emphasizing the role of the ECE teacher in responding to individual circumstances. She stated: “We cannot say that 100% of the children are in the same behavior level, because each family is a specific unit, with their own diversity, their own social, socio-economic problems within their own family” and added that “If we don’t have an appropriate response, then we lose the connection and we create barriers for the child.” She suggested that acknowledging all forms of human diversity in children, including but not only cultural diversity, was difficult but necessary, especially in the context of ECE in Miami. While acknowledging the tension between sameness and uniqueness, participants understood that early childhood is a defined stage of human development with particular characteristics that make ECE different from other levels of education.

**Early childhood is a definite stage of human development.**

Several participants referenced early childhood as a stage of human development with distinctive characteristics. While some emphasized the individual’s social-emotional, linguistic, physical and cognitive development, others focused on more philosophical implications of early childhood in human development and saw the importance of their role as teachers in holistic terms. For example, one participant expressed that she set the goal for herself of knowing about all the different education levels, including infant toddler, preschool and afterschool, in addition to what she already knew about primary and secondary levels from her country, because it helps her “project the work as a function of the whole person in his different stages of
life...plan the education of a very young child so that he becomes a complete [hu]man in the future.” This participant added that such planning requires an ECE teacher “who masters the interests of the specific age.” While participants discussed early childhood as a definite stage within the human growth trajectory, they emphasized loving relationships as predicated such growth. Participants highlighted the need for love and relationships as essential conditions for development and learning, and supportive interactions as means for responding to individual learning needs.

**Love and relationships are foundations of learning.**

Participants consistently emphasized social and emotional needs as foundations of learning and as the primary focus of development in ECE. Participants frequently referenced and associated love, safety and respect along with acknowledgement and understanding with child development and learning. Several participants emphasized the need to sincerely love children in order to support their development and gain their buy-in to the learning process. For example, one participant expressed that “when you teach with love, understanding, and respect towards the child you can accomplish more things with them.” Similarly, and connecting with the concept of filial love, another participant focused on love as the foundation for learning and expressed: “the child gives himself (*se entrega*) more to us and is more open to learning. He feels more comfortable and at ease. He feels that someone is loving him, almost as what he could feel at home.” While another participant reflected: “It’s like...if you are treated with love, by a person, you receive more of what they are saying to you than if they tell you harsh words.” According to these participants, love builds attachment and supports the responsive caregiving and emotional conditions necessary to support the development and learning of young children.
Focusing on individualizing care in ECE, one participant described how caring for young children primarily entails a flexible blend of love and patience:

In early education we are going to discover them, and that is why they need our patience, because sometimes we think that a child arrives and we have to repeat the activity, and [instead] we need to convince ourselves of what approach to follow with her and find the way through which she will acquire knowledge, and that is [through] love and affection.

This participant also related children’s needs for affection and for someone who helps them in their learning to the socio-economic realities of families in Miami. She stated that “We are so multicultural, there is so much need for work, that parents arrive and leave them, they drop them off because they are against the clock, they leave them at 7 in the morning, pick them up at 6 in the afternoon.” This participant considered that for these reasons, love and affection not only help teachers provide individualized care, but also supplement social-emotional needs of children of working parents in Miami.

Along the same lines, another participant expressed that love is effective in overcoming learning challenges and provided an example of children who struggle learning to write. She stated:

There are children who resist for example to write, or resist something that they don’t like, and yet when they see that you are an affectionate person who treats them with respect, that you show solidarity with their feelings, then they simply come to you, and at the end one always achieves their learning, … the skills that they need for their age.

This participant suggested a belief that empathy and respect are expressions of love that support learning success.

These ideas about the importance of love in the early years are closely related to participants’ perspectives on attachment and relationships with caring adults and the need for teachers to develop affectionate and respectful dispositions towards the children for whom they care. As one participant expressed, teachers need “a lot of love,
a lot of patience, trying to improve oneself by all means, because these children need this understanding." The idea of love and relationships as foundational for development and learning closely relates to the emphasis participants placed on supportive interactions as a means of learning.

**Learning occurs through supportive interactions.**

Related to the common perception of love as the foundation for learning, participants saw learning as occurring within the context of authentic, supportive interactions. One participant referred to the importance of creating conditions that support effective interactions and feedback loops. In her own words, she suggested that connections, identity ties, and trust between the teacher and the child are necessary conditions to having “real interaction with questions and answers...that allow children to learn.” Another participant expressed:

> I have to try when I get at their level, when I sit on the floor and get close to their little eyes, that they see in me a person who is trying to help them to solve a problem, that when they are crying, they see in me the person that they need to lend them a hand and give them support. That’s why I think that the fundamental ability is closeness, being directly with them.

Along the same lines, another participant added that the ECE teacher’s role consists of interacting “to teach them and expand their knowledge, and to be...in connection so we can guide learning in that way.” In these examples, participants expressed a shared view of interactions as essential to learning, and close relationships as essential to those interactions.

As participants elaborated on their perspectives regarding what characterizes responsive and caring relationships, they described curriculum and ECE practice including their views about teaching strategies, routines and transitions, hands-on experiences, assessment, individualized planning, and attention. Specifically,
participants described the need for curriculum experiences that support early
development and learning, experiencing success to become persistent, curriculum
structures that include routines and smooth transitions, responsive individualized
attention and, for some, specialized interventions. Participants honed in on the child’s
experiences of joy and success as intricately connected with learning.

**Children need to experience joy and success.**

Participants talked about play, stories, art, music and movement as joyful and
interesting experiences for children. One participant said: “Anything that serves to
stimulate the imagination, appreciate colors, dance and music which are fundamental, is
what they enjoy the most because it’s what they identify with, and of course literature
also.” Along the same lines, another participant shared her fascination for the way
children engage in creative and joyful experiences and how “they love when you add
sounds and dramatization [to songs and stories], they love songs that they can dance to
and all that.” These examples portray how participants recognized the unique qualities
of an early childhood curriculum and an emphasis on experiences that are intrinsically
interesting and enjoyable for children.

While types of interaction and levels of teacher guidance were points of
contention, participants agreed on what the child should experience during these
activities, expressing, for example, children’s need to experience “small success to
become persistent.” One participant provided an example of how adding simple hands-
on activities for children can complement a familiar song and promote children’s
success. She said:

*when we sing *Barquito de Papel* ... they always understand it and like it,
and then we can make a little paper boat with them ... that makes them get*
closer to us and makes them feel important when they finish doing something that simple, a manual work and yet they manage to do it.

Building on this feeling of accomplishment, another participant expressed the importance of promoting positive experiences that outweigh negative experiences and provided an example of a particular child. She stated that even though what happens at home is beyond her reach “when he enters, when he is here [in the classroom], I do all that is possible for him to feel good, to fill in those spaces that are empty, because they are really empty.” Another participant was even more emphatic, expressing that her commitment to provide a foundation included “the foundation they need to be able not to give up, to keep going and not give up at first and not to look for easy paths to achieve what they want.” These participants were referring to the long-term influence of the experiences they provide in their classrooms, an idea related to their view of ECE as foundational. In addition to expressing ideas related to children’s need for joyous and successful learning experiences, participants emphasized the need for teachers and families to collaborate and complement each other. From the point of view of participants, individualization requires continuity in the kind of attention and support provided by teachers and families.

Children need continuity: teachers and families are complementary.

Participants expressed how prevailing socio-economic conditions affect the type of nurturing that many children in Miami experience at home and believed that ECE can and should complement and sometimes supplement that nurturing. In this sense, participants stressed the potential benefit of continuity between the ECE center and the home. One participant focused on children’s need for family attention and acknowledgement and expressed:
the family needs to listen to the child. They need to find time even if they work at dawn. ... and I aspire that parents stop [and listen to] their children,... get rid of what they bring from work and sit with the children on the floor, at their height... at their level, visualize them, that they [the children] see that they are important to their fathers... that the family sees the child as the most important thing in their nucleus.

While this participant acknowledged that family circumstances might hinder day-to-day interactions, she added that it was particularly important to provide continuity for what children are learning at this important stage of development. This participant provided examples of different ways that she builds this continuity and embarks on providing parental advice to meet her children’s needs.

Even though this participant expressed a relatively prevalent sense of frustration in terms of relationships with families, the examples she provided reflect a wider theme participants shared. For example, she shared how she supports the development of table manners and eating habits and concluded by stating that the mom “left with a smile, happy because she saw her child do something that he doesn't do at home.” This example might reflect a small aspect of the shared social responsibility that shows how ECE may support the preservation of cultural traditions and development of habits that are lost as immigrant families adapt to a new environment and lifestyle. For example, while it is still customary in many Latin cultures to have family style home-cooked meals sitting at the table on a daily basis, extended workdays and varying schedules in Miami might limit a family’s ability to eat together, creating challenges to teaching table manners. This interaction with a parent reflects participants’ understanding of the role of ECE teachers in going beyond encouraging the application of what is learned at school to home to developing habits in school that were traditionally learned at home and taught by parents.
I have explored participants’ beliefs about children’s development and learning, which are interconnected with participants’ beliefs about the role of an ECE teacher. Next, I look at participants’ images of a quality ECE teacher, which is interwoven with their own evolving professional identities.

**Image of a Quality ECE Teacher and Participants’ Professional Identities**

The image of the ideal or good teacher permeated participants’ professional identities and considerations of assets that they bring to their practice. I first explore participants’ ideal image of an ECE teacher in Miami, which includes understanding teaching as a vocation, and seeing love, care, and observation as the basis of teaching. I then address the assets that participants perceived as bringing to their own ECE practice.

**Teaching is a vocation, a calling.**

Participants considered vocation an indispensable characteristic of ECE teachers, even if they became ECE teachers by chance. “Vocación” in Spanish implies devotion, like a calling. Some participants asserted that you are “born a teacher,” while others suggested that they “fell in love with children” after they started to work in ECE. But, in all cases participants described a strong feeling of suitability for teaching young children as a prerequisite for excellence.

Most participants suggested that they don’t work just for money but for the “joy” of helping children learn and develop. One participant shared the implications of this level of commitment, expressing how being a good teacher is about loving the work more than the money and not seeing time in terms of Monday through Friday. She stated “You cannot look at the clock, the clock is to keep track of time, to make sure that every child has rotated from the activities so he can meet the objective…but your schedule is
flexible.” Another participant expressed “Teachers become adequate teachers or good when they really want to teach because they want to teach, not because they get assigned to teach.” Participants considered this vocational aspect a key ingredient of quality practice, and expressed that ECE teachers without this type of vocation affected ECE in Miami. Participants highlighted negative implications of ECE teachers who don’t have this type of calling, emphasizing the need for love, care, and continuous improvement to achieve quality.

**Teaching requires love, care, and continuous improvement.**

Participants valued personal and social-emotional characteristics as the basis for providing quality ECE because these characteristics allow teachers to connect emotionally with children, a connection that they consider the basis for learning. These qualities include being loving and caring with children, having self-esteem and being assertive, developing a strong set of values, being responsible, but also having the disposition to continuously learn and improve one’s practice. As one participant expressed, ECE teachers need these qualities “to give the best to children so they have self-esteem necessary to face the world ahead.” She added that an ECE teacher needs to make continuous efforts to:

- improve herself personally, learning the values, enforcing her values, studying, that she never stays stuck, and is a person that says what she believes, [and] is capable of telling others what she thinks... in a subtle way not to offend others, ... and also ... follow the rules of her workplace and be respectful.

This statement reflects a balancing act between learning and following workplace values while gaining and applying new knowledge.

Teaching requires not only commitment to children but self-improvement and the development of a set of personal qualities that leads to excellence. Along the lines of
improving herself, this participant referred to being a reflective practitioner as “learning from life experience and the mistakes that one makes” and added that it also entailed “listening to advice, accepting criticism.” In addition to the list of attitudes and skills that need to be constantly reflected upon, revised and improved, this participant emphasized the development of communication skills.

While these ideas regarding the characteristics of good teachers seem influenced by ECE practice and PD, another participant also referenced model teachers they had as children, stating that she had very good, loving, sweet teachers in elementary education who might have influenced her personal development. As she put it, they influenced her “desire to help others, to always be mindful especially when I’m with them; that when they are with me, they are happy.” This statement suggests the depth of how teaching identities and perspectives about quality ECE teachers are developed. The development of a teaching identity and the pursuit of excellence are also permeated by the context in which teachers enact their practice. As participants reflected on their professional identity, they started by discussing personal and professional assets they bring to their practice.

**Personal and Professional Assets**

Through exploration of their evolving identities as ECE teachers, personal and professional journeys as immigrants, and explicit perspectives about quality teaching and PD, which they shared through the “River of Life” protocol (see Appendix H) participants identified the qualities, knowledge, skills and dispositions that they bring to their ECE practice in Miami. Regardless of what brought them to ECE, participants valued their cultures, language, life and professional experience as sources of important knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to be a quality teacher in Miami.
Shared Culture, Language and Experience With Children and Families

As participants shared their individual stories, they reflected how life experience as immigrants enabled cultural, linguistic, ethnic, and demographic identification with children and families in Miami. Participants shared that personal experience as immigrant parents and grandparents of young children in Miami provided insights into what other parents go through, including the struggle of leaving one’s children in the care of strangers and the change in child rearing practices. One participant discussed how her experience with her grandson having spina bifida influenced her outlook. This participant also shared how hard it was to leave her own child when he was three years old, since he had been:

raised in our countries, my aunt’s style, ... completely dedicated to him, with a lot of children around him, with the family environment that one has in Latin culture. Compared to here, where I was going to have to leave him at 7 and pick him up at 6. It was a different world... It cost me a lot, I suffered because the director would tell me that at 3:30 the child would start to cry for his mom. I would try to get there as soon as I could.

In addition to relating to parenting experience, participants valued their Spanish proficiency as useful to engage many families. Referencing her own experience as a mother, one participant said members of families who, “like her,” don’t speak English, feel that “Wow! I got to a place where they speak my language, I can ask, whenever I want in my language, because I’m being understood by the person who spends the whole day with my child.” Participants also valued their Spanish proficiency as an asset because in Miami “almost all of us are Latino” and at home the basic language is Spanish. With a sense of pride one participant stated: “Spanish is very rich and beautiful,” and valued the ability to enrich Spanish for children whose home language is Spanish. Other participants also valued their ability to support those children and
families who had recently arrived from Spanish-speaking countries. In addition, and related to the value placed on bilingualism as an asset for the future, they saw an opportunity to teach Spanish as a second language and support the bilingualism of children who spoke English or other languages at home. One participant said: “Spanish, in the classroom, I can give it to them as a second language for them and since Spanish is my first language, I speak it fluently, naturally, I can read, I feel super comfortable doing it.” These participants saw Spanish speaking as an asset for working with Latino children and families, but also with other children. Participants were cognizant of the value of combining assets that they had garnered through life with their formal education, work experience, continuous learning, and ongoing observation to meet the needs of young children.

**Pedagogy and observation skills: essential for supporting children.**

Participants valued knowing what to do, being prepared, and being backed by research and professional literature. Participants with teaching degrees expressed that their knowledge about pedagogy, educational philosophy and methodology acquired through teaching preparation and experience in their countries of origin served as the foundation to support children. For example, one participant expressed that her pedagogical background guided her work and allowed her to externalize her contributions to ECE in Miami by demonstrating “to the community the skills that we can develop in children if we [ECE teachers] have the proper training to do so.” She considered the knowledge and expertise acquired through her educational career as instrumental to her ECE practice.

Emphasizing the need to continually update this professional knowledge, another participant mentioned her constant search for new strategies and resources:
I go to sleep very late looking in the Internet ...looking for strategies, for what to do tomorrow, sometimes I have a lesson plan for an activity, but I think this might be boring, let me see something more active… so I’m always looking, looking, you have to, because if not you stay behind and that’s the real problem with this type of work, you have to look, look and document yourself.

In addition, participants expressed that they continuously learn new skills and knowledge about ECE with and from the children they work with. One participant reflected that teachers are always learning with the children, stating: “One teaches them, but one learns more from them...from their sincerity, from all those things that they do spontaneously, [one learns] to become more human.” This participant described how her first year as a full time VPK teacher, her 20 children taught her “how to set up a routine, how to be more patient, how to learn to understand them” and suggested that “by talking they were giving me what it was that they felt, what it was that they liked.” This example showcases this participant’s ability to be in tune with children and get feedback from her constant reflection on practice.

Another participant considered learning from children as an evolving skill, necessary for responsive care. This participant mentioned how after five years, her ability had improved and described how when “a new child comes...the first few days I don’t know him, but as he behaves I know how he could be...then within a few days [I know] how he reacts to some situation.” She added that this skill involved “being aware, at all times…of everything that is happening around the children.”

Professional identity: “A Teacher, That’s Who I Am.”

Most participants appeared to possess deeply embedded though evolving identities as ECE teachers. While some saw ECE as an extension of their teaching identity, others had more recently developed this identity. Nevertheless, participants
saw teaching not just as a job, but as part of who they are. The strongest portrayal of this teacher identity came from one participant while sharing her “River of Life” in the focus group. She described her drawing (Figure 4-1): “Look, this is a classroom, this is the board, the teacher and the children. I cannot conceive of myself without this,” and concluded: “I want to continue until it’s time to retire, this is the only thing I know how to do. This is me!” During her interview she expanded upon this idea, stating that she was fortunate to study what really made her happy and satisfied. She concluded: “Not everybody has that fortune…I studied to be a teacher, I studied pedagogy and it is in reality the work that makes me feel satisfied, in which I feel realized.” Participants saw teaching as part of their personal identity, not only as a job. This identity seems to be the source of both frustration and resilience as these teachers practice in Miami.

Those who earned teaching degrees in their countries had years of experience and knowledge about pedagogy, and initially saw ECE as a stop in their careers. For these teachers, ECE was considered a temporary step, while they gained the language skills and necessary credentials to resume teaching at higher levels. These participants referenced their fears, uncertainty, and disillusionment while portraying their resilience and ability to overcome the challenges to continue being an ECE teacher.

Participants faced dilemmas regarding the worth of their previous education and language barriers. One participant shared her fear as an immigrant teacher stating that she was “afraid of not finding work,” and that what she had studied and dedicated her life to was something that “would be seen as worthless.” Another participant described English as the primary barrier to her career in education. She recalled:

I presented my titles, my grades, all was very well. [They said] ‘we can validate your titles, but if you don’t have the language you cannot work in
education, because here, education is in English, so... you have to go and
study English and when you become fluent, you can work as a teacher’

The participant reflected: “I felt very bad, and said well, what am I going to do?
What am I going to do if I don’t know how to do anything else?” Similarly, another
participant expressed: “I never lost sight that maybe someday I would speak English
and would be able to work in an elementary school, but that was just a projection.”
These participants were frustrated by the idea that they would not be able to teach
because of their command of English. While ECE offered an alternative, it was not
without its own perils.

Formal teacher preparation: an asset with limited value in ECE.

While most participants entered the ECE field by chance, they differentiated
between those with and without university level teacher preparation from their countries.
Depending on their prior education, participants experienced ECE teaching
requirements as barriers or as opportunities. Those who had teaching degrees and
experience from their countries had to fulfill the same ECE requirements as those who
didn’t. The educational degree they considered a professional asset seemed to have no
practical value to becoming an ECE teacher in the US. Even though they valued the
knowledge that their degree provided to their practice, it was not recognized by ECE
teaching requirements in Miami.

With tears in her eyes, one participant described her journey as a teacher and the
challenges that brought her to ECE as well as additional challenges she faced to enter
ECE. She narrated:

I graduated in 1990 in Cuba of “Licenciatura” in Education (equivalent to BS
degree), but I specialized in Biology, and when I arrived here with that
“Licenciatura” I couldn’t work in early education. [I had] to get the CDA,
validate my title and then, well I did everything that I had to do, validated, passed the CDA, got my national CDA as well.

This participant concluded that despite all the work “definitely a teacher has to be completely trained to be able to work with children, because if you are trained, if you have knowledge, you know how to face any child of any diversity that shows up.” Similarly, another participant shared that when she had to restart her career as she arrived in Miami, she decided to participate in basic ECE PD, even though she might have been able to validate some of her degrees. She mentioned that she “started again with all the levels...40 hours...education professional certificate...because...[ECE] was a different level.” Despite initial disillusionment and frustration, these participants saw the long-term value of specialized training in ECE.

In contrast, those who previously occupied professions unrelated to education started teaching in ECE because it was a job option that required minimal preparation. One participant described how a friend suggested ECE and how she started by visiting her classroom. She mentioned:

It was fortuitous, a friend took me and inducted me, and as I saw how she read a story and how she played with them, and how they participated, I started to find out more and more about that and then when I started to take the CDA, the classes at the University, which I loved, to learn how through reading you are teaching them and to ask questions...

Even though a background in education from other countries is often not recognized by DCF nor considered a minimum requirement to work with young children in many private ECE settings, participants acknowledged the importance of knowledge and expertise in pedagogy, and early education in general. Those who held teaching degrees considered them an asset.
Perceptions Regarding Professional Learning Opportunities

All participants engaged in numerous ECE PD opportunities that they saw as essential to improving their practice working with children in Miami. Participants used multiple Spanish words to explain their perspectives about what constitutes ECE PD, including: “formación”, “superación”, “entrenamiento”, and “profesionalización.” Nuanced meanings of these words pose a challenge for precise English translation. It is also difficult to determine if the choice of words was intentional or based on the terminology used in their countries of origin used to refer to teacher PD. Regardless of the terms used, however, the combined perspectives regarding ECE PD portrays a complex picture of the types of professional learning experiences in ECE PD that are needed to support quality ECE in Miami.

In general, participants saw continuous professional preparation in ECE as necessary for quality practice, but they differed in their specific perspectives. Some focused on remedial approaches due to the low requirements for working in ECE in Miami, while others emphasized the need to continually update and adapt knowledge and skills due to the particularities of the population of children and their evolving nature, including the cultural, linguistic, social and economic aspects as well as special needs. As participants described their perspectives regarding ECE PD, they offered opinions regarding the rationale for ECE PD, PD requirements, teacher dispositions necessary for effectiveness, links with career advancement and compensation, dosage, forms of PD delivery, content, and English language instruction.

ECE PD Is Necessary: You Can’t Give What You Don’t Have

Participants discussed how particularities of ECE in Miami dictate the need for special preparation. One participant focused on the multicultural aspects of Miami,
suggesting that this context requires developing a professional stance. To this participant, a professional stance includes high expectations, knowledge, love, and dedication, not just meeting PD requirements. According to this participant, a professional stance is particularly relevant in Miami due to what she called “a rejection attitude for the same community that we come from and where we are originally from.” This participant seemed to be referring to the pervasive discrimination she identified within and among the multiple groups that compose the ethnically diverse, predominantly Hispanic, immigrant, multi-national population of Miami and local ECE. In her view, a professional stance would promote more inclusive, non-discriminatory, multicultural attitudes and practices.

In addition, participants agreed that, regardless of their degrees in other levels of education, they needed to learn the specifics of ECE. As one participant reflected: “Early education…I learned here.” Another participant brought up that continuous learning was necessary because new research about young children and their education is constantly coming out and ECE teachers need to be updated. Participants provided additional rationale for PD, arguing that ECE teachers need a level of instruction and knowledge that allows them to plan for and meet standards and objectives, and to act as leaders in the education of the children in their care. Participants also suggested that cultural sensitivity and preparation in special needs were necessary to meet the needs of children in Miami.

**Quantity or Quality: ECE PD Requirements and Learning Needs of ECE Teachers**

Regardless of their educational level, participants expressed positive feelings towards increasing requirements and agreed that 30-45 hours of ECE PD is not enough initial preparation to work with young children. One participant criticized ECE PD that
consists of short, unarticulated trainings. Referring to the initial 45-hours requirement, she wondered: "What are 45 hours to work with children? I see it as very fleeting. That one learns things as if with pins." This participant suggested this ECE PD dosage was particularly un-fitting considering the heterogeneous multicultural and educational backgrounds of the people who work with children in Miami.

Another participant shared her initial shock upon learning about initial requirements for ECE teachers, including lack of recognition of prior education. Comparing educational requirements to her country of origin, she expressed that she:

could not conceive that there, in the third world, you had to be a certified teacher to work in preschool, and that here they asked for 30 hours and it didn’t matter what your prior activity was.

Participants regarded low requirements as a barrier to the profession itself and shared multiple perspectives regarding what they understand as a link between the degree of teachers’ vocation and their involvement in, and effectiveness of, ECE PD. In this regard, participants shared beliefs that there are many teachers in the system who have no calling, and affect the way that other teachers are treated, their compensation, and the available professional opportunities.

One participant suggested this represents a systemic problem in which a lot of people work in ECE because it is supposedly easy to take care of children. This participant shared that while her perceptions regarding existing ECE PD had positively changed recently, she still saw shortcomings. Contrasting ECE teachers who are committed to improvement with those who are not, she stated:

There are those that really go to [ECE PD opportunities to] learn and some that go just to fulfill a requirement, because there is a paper to turn in that the directors asks you for, and the director asks for it because [the Department of] Children and Family asks for it, or because the organization has a requirement.
One participant expressed that it was important to prioritize ECE PD opportunities for:

People who like their profession, [because] if they don’t have vocation, it’s a waste of money in someone who is going to leave [the profession] tomorrow, [but] if they have vocation they won’t leave, it will not be a waste of money, she [the ECE teacher] will use it.

This participant stated that uncommitted teachers take spots away from committed ones who really want to learn and affect the quality of ECE PD by insisting on lower learning expectations. She recounted how lower expectations sometimes result in the placement of unqualified ECE PD trainers “who don’t make the effort to teach, that all they do is share their personal life, [and] what you did in the weekend”, and the removal of additional PD opportunities. Referring to opportunities to learn English, this participant shared how some teachers have requested that English classes be removed, concluding: “It’s like we ourselves are sometimes removing the important things that we are offered, for not wanting to study, not wanting to advance.”

Another participant referred to ethical implications of having requirements for the sake of requirements without a real focus on teachers’ learning needs. She recounted that in order to meet required hours, teachers would call a person to conduct a Saturday training and when the person arrived she would say: “[The requirement] is ten hours, well, we’ll do six [hours of training] and I’ll give you the certificate for ten [hours].” She concluded: “This left a lot to be desired.” Suggesting a need for PD to strive to authentically address teachers’ ongoing learning needs rather than meet minimal mandates, participants shared a general sentiment that even “when we have experience, [it’s] very hard to have it complete.” Instead, they suggested that becoming
a professional was a personal, ongoing, permanent journey, which requires constant updating of knowledge and skills.

**Positive Attitude For Continuing Education: “Knowledge And Experience Are Never Complete”**

Participants shared a positive attitude for ECE PD. One participant described her disposition and need to continue to develop professionally as she shared her “River” (Figure 5-2). She mentioned: “The river broadens because you have to continue to prepare, you can’t stop preparing. If you don’t prepare your river narrows, because you get a child with a situation that you don’t know how to face.” Similarly, another participant suggested that working with young children requires constant updating, persistence as well as new outlooks, and shared her pride and sense of accomplishment for continuing to study beyond the age of 60. In her drawing of the river she shared how “The waters became clearer (Figure 5-3), and I was able to do the courses that I have done...I’m open and I feel happy, happy and at ease, to adapt to situations.” A positive attitude towards the continuous professional learning needed to respond to children and a sense of accomplishment prevailed in these descriptions.

Participants shared this positive attitude and intrinsic motivation towards ECE PD as a way to continue to improve their practice, regardless of their initial level of education. While some valued their education background as an essential theoretical foundation, all participants shared the need to constantly learn new strategies and innovate to be able to work with young children. This motivation appeared to be guided by an interest to serve the children with whom they work. As one participant put it: “I have always tried to bring children the best, and I’m very demanding with myself. I always like to be self-improving and trying to learn new things for how to do it with
Participants valued ECE PD that supported the development of skills and strategies to work with all types children, including those with disabilities, making the participants feel effective and accomplished.

Participants saw their disposition to learn as fundamental, but also valued local funding that allowed them to complete their education. Several participants specifically referenced the financial support provided by QC and expressed that this was the only way they could access ECE PD. One participant referenced her personal investment, adding that “my only cost is my time, but I’m willing to [invest it] as long as...I’m going to be improving myself” and added her appreciation for the organizations that help ECE teachers prepare.

**Teachers Need Clarity, Options, and Opportunities for Career Advancement**

Participants regarded ECE PD needs as individual, suggesting that “it’s very personal...to investigate and look for what they really should be prepared to be able to do, and to move forward in a profession of excellence.” The individual nature of teachers’ professional learning needs suggest that ECE PD should provide clearly differentiated options that consider training and experience. Participants pointed out the fact that misinformation and confusion regarding changing requirements is prevalent in Miami and teachers are often confused regarding which courses are mandatory and which ones are optional to get an ECE teaching job. One participant pointed out how this created conflict between teachers and directors and burdened teachers. As she described her experience as a center director through a simulated conversation with an ECE teacher who has completed 45 hours of PD at the College, she explained:

Some people arrive with humility and tell you, Uy! I still have a long way, but others tell you: You’re trying to say that in the College they have not prepared me?, and I say: Bring the list to [the Department] of Children and
Families so they tell you if you can [teach] or not, because now, ... the minimum is to have your CDA.

Another participant shared how misinformation regarding requirements affected her.

She recounted:

Sometimes due to misinformation you don’t go to the places that you really need to go to,... I went to Miami-Dade and they [mis]guided me [and] when I went it was 45 hours, not 40. They had added the 5 hours of literature and then I had to complete the 45 hours, which... became 72, because when I saw that they had school age, preschool age, children with special needs, and I told the girl, I want all of them, ... I did 72 not 45... and when I went... to look for work... I got to the schools and found... that 45 hours was no longer enough, even though I had 72 and... a Licenciatura in Education, it was not enough, I had to get a CDA. So, [I asked] what is a CDA? [and was told] Well the CDA is like an Associate that will prepare you better to work with children, so I went in to see what the CDA was. It was the 160 hours that I did.

In addition to misinformation, participants described impositions and barriers to pursuing their own career interests and paths. Despite wanting ECE PD opportunities that support their practice and would allow them to advance professionally, they felt that the opportunities offered were sometimes meant to keep them in the same professional position. In this regard, one participant stated that preparing them to work with just one age was "ridiculous" because ECE teachers are often rotated to meet enrollment ratio.

Even though the idea of rotating teachers on a daily basis affects the continuity of care of children and should not be promoted, ECE teachers should be prepared to work with different age children from one year to the next in order to respond to fluctuations in the population and enrollment. Also, primary caregiving practices that promote attachment necessitate that teachers are knowledgeable about multiple age groups since teachers stay with children over multiple years. Having a well prepared, flexible workforce contrasts with what this participant characterized as “advisors that limit you, that if you are working with toddlers you cannot advance to anything else” and suggested that
“these advisors are blocking our ability to advance to other levels...to go to a different school to work with more advanced ages...to become the director...or have your own business.” As reflected in this quote, ECE teachers’ career interests are not necessarily taken into consideration when they are offered PD opportunities.

Another participant agreed, suggesting that ECE PD opportunities are primarily guided by compliance, rather than by an interest in improving practice or supporting the teacher’s career. This participant mentioned: “Sometimes...there are things in which one is weak and one would like to overcome that, but they tell you: ‘This is what you have to do’.” Referencing limited regard for teachers’ points of views, she wondered:

So, what I believe and what I understand, where does that stay? Let’s suppose, that I’m weak in this, I want to strengthen this, is there a course? No, but you have to spend 30 hours to comply with this.

This participant described withholding of information from teachers, stating that “It’s good that there is a regulation, and that this has to be done, that they have to comply, but...if there is this option...then give it to her, and give her the opportunity to choose between this and that.” This participant expressed sensibility towards requirements, accompanied by a desire to own her career. In addition to promoting increased access to information and decision-making about PD opportunities, participants offered suggestions regarding the content and delivery of ECE PD in Miami.

**Teachers Value Many Forms of PD and Applicable Content Met With Adequate Compensation**

Several participants positively addressed having access to ECE PD about different topics and through different delivery methods because it allowed them to continuously engage in ECE PD and improve themselves. While one participant described how access to both in-depth and short courses, face-to-face and online, fits well with the
needs of the teachers in her center who hold university degrees from their countries, another participant valued that opportunities were available regardless of levels of PD attainment. This participant also valued that ECE PD courses were offered multiple times and that many were available in Spanish, which she stated “has helped us a lot.”

In addition to valuing existing ECE PD, participants conveyed multiple ideas about content that best meets their professional and practical needs. In general, participants’ considerations regarding the content of PD relate to practical knowledge and skills that support daily practice. As one participant expressed, ECE PD should focus “on the teacher as such, the classroom, the preparation, how to help that teacher.” Another participant posed that essential content such as responsive planning and individualized instruction should be provided up front, to help teachers become aware of their responsibilities and work effectively with children. She added that this would also help teachers decide if they were “right” for the profession. Understanding the learning process and the role of the teacher in supporting this process were considered valuable content for ECE PD.

In this sense, different participants pointed to varied content depending on the starting point of each teacher. Expanding on the importance of knowing about how children develop and learn and how teachers support this process, and reflecting on her own experience of empowerment, one participant reflected:

Once I learned that this is done like this, there was no other person that could impose. Because this I learned from a book, an expert told me, I learned it in class, or I applied it in my classroom and it gave me [positive] results, so I was speaking with a foundation and I was doing.

This statement points to the multiple ways in which ECE teachers learn and become empowered about their practice.
Participants expressed challenges to the effectiveness of ECE PD and posed that mandating requirements without considering motivation and compensation was problematic. While participants understood increased requirements for ECE teachers, they expressed discontent because additional requirements were not met with increased compensation. Reflecting on the historical perspective, one participant expressed that

there was a stage that things sort of changed. They analyzed what preschool education should be, that it’s an investment, and then they asked for new requirements, in accordance with Children and Families (DCF), so then you had to get your CDA, that was already a growth stage, then these requirements demanded becoming prepared even though it didn’t mean a change in your salary scale.

Another participant suggested a need for balance between what is demanded from ECE teachers and what is provided to them in return. In terms of ECE PD, suggested balance included having clear course requirements and matching ECE PD requirements with compensation. This participant suggested that this “balance” would serve as encouragement for teachers who currently “don’t give 100% to support the children,” suggesting that the lack of balance serves to demotivate teachers.

Referencing Miami’s cultural and linguistic diversity, other participants suggested cultural sensitivity and bilingualism as important content to be addressed in ECE PD. One participant pointed that it was important for teachers “to be bilingual” and know how to work with children “who arrive from different countries that don’t speak English” a situation which is common in Miami and reflects a particular need of ECE teachers in the Miami context regarding dual language learning. In addition to providing suggestions regarding ECE PD that meet ECE teachers learning and professional needs,
participants reflected on language barriers, expanding particularly on those related to English.

**English: A Barrier for Accessing ECE PD, Teaching Children, and Career Advancement**

Participants identified English as the biggest professional barrier they faced. According to participants, this barrier was evident in interactions with children, families and access to ECE PD and career advancement. Participants stressed their challenges and interest in learning English and taking courses in English, and elaborated on their limitations.

In relation to the provision of ECE PD, participants argued that their ability to comprehend improved when the ECE PD was in Spanish, making learning more motivating and engaging. As one participant shared: “As I understand, I feel I will achieve the content and that you will be able to ask more of me and I will give my all in Spanish.” This participant added that PD in English exerted an additional level of difficulty and diminished her learning and retention and reflected how in a previous course, she had “learned the content, passed, but didn’t feel it stayed. No, and I’m not satisfied that I passed.” It seems that despite meeting the requirements, she was not able to meet her learning needs. Other participants expressed their desire to become proficient in English because inadequate pronunciation and limited vocabulary negatively impacted children’s outcomes, especially in VPK. Language related issues are not simply resolved by providing training in Spanish, as one participant expressed in her interview:

> to learn from what you study, sometimes it’s a little complicated because here [at the training] you speak a lot of Spanish and in the school they require a lot of English, and that...doesn’t help you improve, it creates obstacles to continue in
education and also for the children, because since they speak more Spanish than English, when they enter school it’s going to be a little more complicated.

Participants shared a common goal of learning English, but mentioned the difficulty of learning English as an adult, the time and effort required to learn proficiently, and the inadequacy of accessible scholarships and English classes. Participants also suggested the need for a novel outlook regarding dual language learning and an increased ability to support a multilingual community. Overall, participants expressed that both their disposition to truly understand and apply ECE PD through learning content in Spanish and their disposition to learn English were inadequately supported.

**Teachers Need Respect and Administrative Support**

While language issues reflect specific tensions particularly relevant in Miami, lack of respect seemed to pervade professional expectations, recognition, and relationship dynamics in ECE. One participant expressed contradictions between the kind of respect that ECE teachers are expected to model and lack of professional regard for ECE teachers. This participant contrasted the expectation of teaching good manners and respect with being disrespected by management, saying: “We have to teach them good manners, good words, but children are observing when it’s different from what we live, top to bottom.” She suggested that children perceive this contradiction and would say: “Adults are asking for respect, that we respect them, but they disrespect each other.”

Referring to higher levels of education, but even more pervasive in ECE, Nieto (2015) discusses lack of respect as an intangible, but very real culprit for teacher attrition, an exertion of disaffection with the job. Lack of respect from a teacher’s perspective might include not only foul language directed at them (as suggested by the participant above), but also “limited administrative support, lack of influence over school
Conclusion

In this chapter, I explored the perspectives of ECE practitioners in Miami regarding their beliefs, experience, and PD needs. Participants in my study had recently concluded a one-year bilingual PD program in which I teach, and shared the personal and professional assets they bring to their practice, their beliefs about young children, their ability as ECE practitioners in Miami, and their perspectives on PD needs and experiences. To explore these topics, I conducted focus groups and individual semi-structured interviews.

My findings point to essential elements of ECE practice in Miami which merit consideration for the design and implementation of PD opportunities. These elements include participants' beliefs about: the purpose of ECE, how children develop and learn, key elements of ECE practice, PD opportunities and the local context. As participants engaged in PD and applied newly acquired knowledge and skills into their everyday practice, dilemmas of practice and programmatic inconsistencies affected their enactment of quality in a diverse and evolving context such as Miami.

Participants in my study recognized the impact of early experiences as the “base and pillar” of future generations and emphasized the individual and social benefits of quality ECE. Participants considered early childhood a definite stage of human development with particular characteristics and emphasized the need for love and relationships as foundational for development and learning. Participants also described joyous and successful experiences as precursors to learning and development and viewed supportive interactions as the primary means for teaching. These ideas were
constantly permeated by complex values for both the principle of equality and each child’s individuality. Even though participants acknowledged that all children share common characteristics and are equal in principle, they also emphasized each child is unique and requires individualized attention. While participants agreed in general terms, they expressed contrasting views regarding specific approaches to teaching and learning, ranging from more child-centered and directed approaches to more teacher directed methodologies. Participants also emphasized teacher-family interactions and insisted on the importance of providing continuity for children.

Ideal ECE teachers as portrayed by participants understand teaching as a vocation and see love, care, and observation as the basis of teaching. Participants considered the viewing of ECE teaching as a vocation a key element of quality practice, and expressed that not having ECE teachers with this view affected ECE PD in Miami. Implicitly and explicitly, participants expressed a disposition that reflected the complexity of serving children, which in Miami requires considering standards and age expectations, migration, language differences, and working with families to help individual children succeed. Participants valued their personal knowledge about children, their cultures, and their life experiences, and considered that they possessed cultural, ethnic, and demographic identification with children and families in Miami. Participants were cognizant of the value of combining formal education, experience, continuous learning, and observation to meet the needs of young children. Participants also recognized the tensions and dilemmas of their ECE practice in Miami and shared the role of context in shaping their teaching identity and their pursuit of excellence. While participants suggested becoming a professional was a personal, ongoing,
permanent journey, and appreciated the financial support for ECE PD and the current offerings, they also recommended changes to the content and delivery of ECE PD in Miami and emphasized the need for respectful ECE organizational culture. One particular area of consensus involved needed support in English, as language currently poses what participants see as the greatest professional barrier to excellence and career advancement.

The discussion, implications, and applications point to the need to intentionally design PD experiences that take into account participants' beliefs and lived experiences and use culturally responsive approaches to PD in order to support local construction of shared meanings in ECE in an evolving multicultural context such as Miami. The implications also bring up relevant issues that merit broader ECE structural and policy considerations.
Experiencia

1990 - Gradué en Cuba en Licenciatura en Educación
2008 - Comenzé a trabajar en educación temprana
- CDA nacional, 18 créditos en early childhood

Diversidad - Netamente familiar - latinos.

Interés en continuar en la profes

Seguir hasta que por edad tenga que jubilarme
5-3 LR River of Life artifact
CHAPTER 6
POINTS OF CONFLUENCE

We conclude this section considering areas of overlap between our individual findings, including shared themes and tensions. Shared themes across our findings include: the centrality of teachers in enacting quality ECE; a prevailing view of quality as rooted in social responsibility and vocation; love as a precursor to nurturing relationships, which form the foundations of learning; and, quality as an intentional, ongoing, dynamic process, the challenging pursuit of which is supported by reflection and professional learning. We also note the particular relevance of language considerations to the quality of ECE and PD in Miami, Florida.

Quality: Rooted in Social Responsibility

While uncertainties emerged around the role of formal education in teacher quality, recognized as central to quality ECE, participants across studies emphasized reasons for teaching, agreeing that quality ECE teachers need to be in ECE for the “outcome not the income.” Participants seemed to relate teacher commitment to continuously enacting quality ECE to a social purpose rooted in love and caring, and social responsibility for the future of society. Participants across groups seemed to commonly understand quality teaching as the resulting interaction between their passion and vocation to help each child, and professional preparation and experience. In their view, these interactions allow teachers to intentionally enact responsive learning experiences that support both immediate individual needs and collective construction of society based on humanistic and democratic values. While the CFE supports commitment to quality through organizational culture, structures, and conditions, participants in Ana’s study faced differing levels of support depending on the ECE centers where they work.
Participants suggested that some centers may discourage teachers’ motivation to pursue quality, a situation that is likely sustained by pervasive low wages and low recognition of ECE providers as professionals.

**Love: Precursor to Nurturing Relationships, the Foundations of Ongoing Learning**

In both studies, participants understood love as the foundation for authentic, supportive relationships, which are the basis for learning. Participants commonly described emotionally supportive social relationships as underlying quality. Perhaps symbolizing values for intimate, present relationships, both studies’ participants emphasized the value of physical proximity, or closeness, between adults and children. Images of quality frequently featured adult and child at each other’s level and participants commonly promoted being with children closely and directly, “at their level.” In addition, participants implied connections between teachers’ love, awareness and responsiveness to others, and ability to effectively promote learning.

A social purpose deeply rooted in love seems to serve as the primary motivation for pursuing quality as an ongoing learning process, which often requires going above and beyond schedules, and requires constant self-improvement and continuing education. Loving relationships seem to fuel the challenging work of intentionally and continuously reinventing quality.

**The Challenge of Balance in the Dynamic Pursuit of Quality**

The continuous nature of quality links with dispositions to pursue ongoing improvement. Quality in ECE and teaching similarly involve responsiveness to dynamics of children, families, and communities and therefore necessitate continuous learning. In both studies, the dynamics of relationships parallel those of both quality and
professional learning as ongoing processes that require personal commitment and self-reflection. Quality appears at the intersections of caring, learning, and reflective practice. These shared ideas across studies also relate to a concept of quality that is responsive to, and dependent upon, the particularities of the children and families served, requiring continuous negotiation within personal views and knowledge gained through PD and among different points of view of stakeholders.

Participants identified several areas in which ECE teachers face complicated and challenging balancing acts in the process of enacting quality, particularly in Miami. For example, teachers must balance consistency of practice versus ongoing learning. While participants in both studies expressed the importance of consistency, they also recognized particular struggles faced within a multicultural, multilingual context. The issue of consistency points to the relevance of intentionally addressing diversity in terms of language, immigration experience, and formal education in daily practice, professional learning, and in communication with families. Negotiating challenges such as practicing consistently while responding to the changing dynamics of context suggest the need for ongoing PD that considers these types of issues, not just decontextualized knowledge or skills intended to fulfill dominant, technically oriented standards of quality in teaching and learning.

Related to the challenges of applying ongoing learning to evolving contexts, participants in both studies saw ECE as a profession that requires commitment and hard work. For example, participants in Ana’s study compared the work of ECE to that of medical doctors, requiring flexibility in schedules and constant updating of practice to adapt to changes in knowledge about children and learning, and educational
approaches. This shared belief in the need for continual learning relates to participant agreement that ECE is demanding work, and that when it comes to the educational requirements for ECE teachers to enact quality ECE, the minimum hours required by DCF are not enough.

**Locally Important: Language, Understanding, and Learning**

Locally relevant links between language, understanding, and learning appeared in both studies. Language was an important and relevant topic to participants and included considerations of various forms of Spanish in addition to English. Within the dual language CFE setting, the most significant conversation about language involved variations of Spanish and raised questions about tendencies to equate standard, “neutral” language with professionalism in ECE. On the other hand, within the context of Ana’s study, participants’ comments about language tended to focus on their ability to understand and speak English and Spanish. In both cases, participants passionately discussed language in connection with understanding and learning, raising dilemmas about whose language should prevail when developing understandings of, and enacting, quality in ECE.

Related points of confluence included the need for ECE PD to be offered in a language in which the teachers are proficient. This need reflects tensions created by the provision of PD only in English, without first supporting teachers’ proficiency in English to a degree that they can access technical language and English literature about ECE and in which they can sustain dialogue. In the multilingual context of Miami, this tension is not simply resolved by providing the training in Spanish. Participants across studies seemed to agree that language is an extremely relevant issue for quality ECE and
quality PD in Miami. We will further explore English language supports in the following section, which discusses implications and applications of our findings.

**Conclusion**

In this section, we shared our research findings regarding CFE professional’s points of view on quality and the perspectives of ECE teachers working in Miami ECE centers regarding themselves, children, and PD. We explored ideas about what constitutes quality ECE in general and in the particular case of the CFE. We also presented what ECE teachers believe about themselves as ECE teachers in Miami, the professional, cultural, linguistic and ethnic assets that they bring to their practice, and their related ideas about strengths and ways to improve ECE PD in Miami. In this chapter, we considered points of confluence between our findings. We discussed participants’ common views including the centrality of teachers in quality, the necessity of loving relationships in learning, and social commitment as a key motivator in the challenging and ongoing pursuit of quality. Next, we explore the intersection of quality ECE and ECE PD by addressing our shared research questions, as well as the implications of this intersection for our practice, local policy and programs, and future research.
SECTION 3

In the previous section, we presented our methodologies and findings with a focus on our individual research questions. Miriam discussed themes in meanings of quality ECE for individuals working at the CFE and explored differences and tensions regarding the concept of quality. Ana shared multiple perspectives of ECE teachers in Miami regarding the personal and professional assets they bring to their work, their views of children, and their PD needs and experiences. We also considered areas of overlap between our individual findings, including shared themes and tensions.

In this final section, we discuss how our combined findings inform our collaborative research questions, explore implications for policy, practice, and research, and conclude by describing specific applications we have pursued and plan to pursue in our local Miami ECE context. Our discussion, implications, and applications revolve around our shared questions: a) What are meanings of quality in ECE and in what ways can local construction of shared meaning around quality support culturally responsive PD?; and b) How can PD support the construction of shared understandings of quality and practices that are culturally responsive to the local context?
CHAPTER 7
DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In this chapter, we discuss how our findings inform our common research questions and consider implications. We begin by exploring interrelationships between locally constructed meanings of quality in ECE and culturally responsive approaches to PD for ECE practitioners. Then, we discuss current challenges to enacting locally relevant and shared understandings of quality. We consider forms of professional learning that can support ongoing construction of quality in light of such contextual complexities and conclude by considering areas for future research.

**Local Constructions of Meanings of Quality ECE and Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning**

Common themes emerging from the quality focus groups suggest areas of shared meanings about quality. Participants considered definitions and meanings of quality ECE dynamic and connected to particular contexts, unique children, and diverse families. Participants also regarded relationships within an interconnected, caring community of children, teachers, and families as the foundations of quality and learning. Participants agreed that implementing quality ECE requires dedicating time for teachers to know children and families, acknowledge curiosities, promote explorations, engage in shared moments of presence and connection, and consistently implement practice connected to ongoing learning. One could arguably apply the themes emerging from the quality ECE focus groups to culturally responsive professional learning. This outlook has implications for the way culturally responsive ECE practices, including professional learning, are designed, implemented, and supported. According to Gay (2010), CRP requires that we:
Gay’s emphases on caring, treatment of diversity as strength, and engagement of families and communities as active participants in culturally responsive teaching and learning seem consistent with understandings of quality as dynamically constructed and context-dependent. Assuming that definitions and meanings of quality in ECE are dynamic and connected to particular contexts, unique children, and diverse families, local construction of shared meaning around quality must be an ongoing, continuous learning process. Ongoing construction of meaning around quality as a dynamic concept connected to particular and evolving contexts suggests that culturally responsive PD should also evolve according to changes within the local context. Content and standards must be negotiated and adapted to account for and respond to local realities including the characteristics of children and adults involved. Just as quality ECE is connected to teachers’ openness to ongoing change, quality PD is connected to supporting learners’ disposition and openness to change, through critical reflection, modeling, and scaffolding. In both cases, teachers and students engage in parallel learning processes.

While participants across studies shared essential values for love and close, nurturing relationships as foundations for learning, the importance of loving relationships is rarely explicit in dominant ECE discourse. Even tools like the CLASS, which place a strong focus on interactions, tend to do so with a focus on linguistic and cognitive development. Whereas, teachers consider loving relationships as the precursor of
learning, dominant conversations tend to overlook these meaningful relationships in favor of more instrumental views of teachers as cognitive and language models. One may argue that focus on narrowly defined school readiness skills promulgated in dominant quality discourse and assessment practices similarly overshadows explicit consideration of the role of love and caring in enacting quality.

Although shared meanings of quality suggest implications for PD, areas of difference and tension could also influence culturally responsive PD. While the CFE intentionally represents quality as an irreproducible, context-dependent concept, it is worth considering how unique aspects of the CFE can and do adapt to other contexts. The CFE model of meaningfully connecting professional learning and practice through support structures like master teachers and policies that protect time seems especially relevant to our common questions.

Awareness of multiple tensions related to balancing priorities associated with standardization and cultural relevance within the diverse, local ECE context could also offer opportunities to build connections with adult learners. Our findings suggest effective professional learning provides teachers support as they adapt and respond to situations at the crossroads of passion, practice, and learning. At these crossroads within our local context, teachers must face dilemmas as they engage in the challenging balancing act of pursuing quality. After highlighting some dilemmas, we discuss how PD can offer a space where ECE practitioners can benefit from each other’s support and experience as they negotiate dilemmas of practice together.

**Dilemmas Affecting ECE in Miami**

Philosophical tensions and dilemmas of practice emerged as participants considered the concept of quality and shared their assets and perspectives about their
ECE practice in Miami. These tensions relate to dissonance and contradictions between dominant discourse, constructivist ideas, CRP, and prevailing ECE practices.

**Double Bind**

ECE practitioners in Miami face multiple dilemmas that often place them in a double bind. In the literature review, we discussed how, as practitioners attempt to accommodate mandates and standards while serving and responding to individual children, families and local realities, they experience what Achinstein and Ogawa (2012) describe as a “double bind.” We noted that, in the process of complying with systemic demands, teachers attempting to enact culturally responsive practice may encounter important tensions. We found that participants expressed multiple tensions representing their experience of a double bind, including between: their own beliefs versus dominant discourse and research; individual, local, and cultural relevance versus decontextualized standards; and, responding to strengths and needs of particular children and families versus meeting compliance-oriented requirements.

Some participants described dilemmas associated with dissonance between their professional identities and expectations exerted by others, like stakeholders tasked with quality improvement. For example, a participant in Ana’s study discussed the dilemma of only being supported in preparing to work with one specific age compared to her professional desire to learn more, along with the practical reality that ECE teachers must be prepared to adapt to different developmental levels. Related to these tensions, practitioners face challenges when it comes to practically applying what is learned in PD to current and evolving ECE contexts. Prevailing organizational culture and systemic barriers to quality and professionalism may exacerbate these dilemmas.
Dilemmas About Language

Values related to language reflect tensions. Regarding the issue of English language acquisition and bilingualism, participants expressed views supporting dual or multiple language learning, which contrast existing practices in many ECE centers. State level English-only assessments likely influence the prioritization of English instruction in local ECE settings, exemplifying how dominant structures exacerbate the local double bind. On one hand, participants valued Spanish speaking ECE teachers’ ability to communicate with Spanish speaking families, promote the home language of Spanish speaking children, and build the foundation for bilingualism for children who speak English at home. But, on the other hand, ECE teachers were offered limited professional learning experiences in Spanish yet they were expected to become proficient in English.

Despite a tacit expectation that ECE teachers should become proficient in English, supports are limited to basic levels of English. This implies a need to carefully design PD that addresses teachers’ desires to gain English proficiency, as part of their continuing education. Even though participants recognized their own limitations in English proficiency, they lamented the lost potential of bilingualism for children. Participants valued the potential of multilingualism and felt that Miami possesses the resources to develop this asset in children, but that current policies limit the possibility. Yet, teachers’ multilingual and multicultural knowledge and experience seem to be minimized as assets in dominant ECE discourse and policies. This dilemma also implies carefully developing supports that address a multicultural, multilingual approach, that leverages existing community knowledge and resources.
Addressing Dilemmas in the Struggle for Quality

We conclude this chapter by discussing implications for addressing the challenges of continuously improving and enacting quality. We consider how to foster culturally responsive learning communities with a focus on teachers and characteristics of effective professional learning. We conclude by proposing future areas for study.

Fostering Caring Teaching and Learning Communities

While acknowledging teaching and learning by teachers and students as interrelated, we organize our discussion of fostering teaching and learning communities by first focusing on ECE teachers and how CRP may address and affirm their professional learning needs and aspirations. As suggested by CRP, education is validating and affirming when it acknowledges and legitimizes diverse cultural heritages and recognizes ethnicity and heritage as both legacies affecting students’ dispositions, attitudes, and approaches to learning and as worthy curriculum content (Gay, 2010).

Relevant to the worth and role of ethnic and cultural diversity and heritage in curriculum and learning, Gay (2010) suggests CRP relates academic abstractions to actual social and cultural realities. Gay (2010) also suggests that culturally responsive teaching and learning meaningfully bridges home and school experiences. This culturally responsive approach guides our suggestions for ECE PD, requiring not only the addition of a few trainings here and there, but developing coherent, validating, and affirming supports for building teachers’ knowledge, skills and dispositions to meaningfully enact quality ECE.

ECE practitioners have deep and complex ideas about their practice and how to improve it, but oftentimes inadequate policies and programmatic support hinder their ability to improve practices. While the centrality of teachers in enacting quality is generally agreed upon, dominant discourse about quality seems to place undue blame
on ECE teachers, exerting pressure for issues that are out of their realm of control. As we saw in both studies, ECE professionals have clear ideas about how to enact quality in the context of Miami. Consistent with CRP, their ideas involve considering the uniqueness of the Miami context, as well as the uniqueness of what practitioners bring to their practice as building blocks to quality that is culturally relevant.

Similarly aligned with our findings, Nieto (2013) discusses what it takes to teach students of diverse backgrounds, emphasizing teaching as an act of love and an ethical endeavor that involves honoring student’s identities, believing in their futures, challenging the status quo, and advocacy. While our participants prioritized the centrality of love in learning, dominant approaches to quality minimize the role of love, which contrasts what Gay (2010) calls a “functional profile of culturally responsive caring-in-action” (p.51-52). This profile is closely aligned with our findings.

Considerations from CRP (Gay, 2010) seem like lofty but relevant goals for the Miami community and include: equal regard for human worth; acknowledgement of social, cultural, ethnic, racial, linguistic, and individual differences as assets instead of deficits; promotion of community and cultural integrity and solidarity among different ethnic and cultural groups; direct address of structural inequities manifesting the unequal distribution of power and privilege among diverse groups; and, intellectual challenge and personal relevance for socially, ethnically, racially, and culturally diverse learners.

Culturally responsive caring-in-action (Gay, 2010) also implies practical applications for culturally responsive teaching in ECE and PD, and should be considered by ECE quality improvement stakeholders. According to Gay (2010), in CRP, teachers and schools promote spaces and relationships in which culturally,
ethnically, and racially diverse students feel recognized, respected, valued, seen, and heard. Within the context of these spaces and relationships, teachers cultivate a kindred sense of reciprocal responsibility among learners and encourage characteristics like confidence, competence, capability, courage, courtesy, and compassion among diverse students. CRP may offer personal support and encouragement while simultaneously creating habits of inquiry and critical thought. In CRP, a teacher enacts care for others by facilitating learners’ understandings and actions as they relate to a balance of immediate social realities and transformative possibilities. These roles of CRP teachers seem fitting for PD facilitators, particularly those who work with ECE teachers of diverse backgrounds, and in diverse contexts like Miami.

We have discussed goals and applications associated with fostering caring, culturally responsive teaching and learning communities. To achieve these goals and practically support ECE teachers in developing, applying, and refining culturally responsive practices, it is necessary to offer ECE professional learning experiences that are themselves culturally responsive. Related to the complexities of teaching diverse students, while our participants valued ongoing learning and suggested that compliance around PD does not always support learning, Nieto (2015) highlights how teachers thrive when they keep learning. Next, we consider professional learning that adequately understands and addresses the immediate experiences, assets, learning needs, and transformative possibilities for practitioners in Miami while leveraging existing knowledge and resources. We begin by considering how the shared experience and understanding of diverse learners may support CRP.
Sharing common experiences with, listening to, knowing, and understanding diverse learners.

Related to the value of shared experience and understanding in the learning process, Tobin (2005) argued that decontextualized ECE quality ideas may threaten well-adapted local approaches. An implication is that ECE practitioners should play key roles in determining locally meaningful constructions of quality, including reasonably questioning decontextualized knowledge imparted by outside experts. Utilizing and developing local capacity of professional learning facilitators who have experience as ECE teachers could practically situate ideas about quality within immediate classroom contexts. An implication is that ECE teachers should be identified and supported as leaders who have current knowledge and experience gained from the trenches. These teacher leaders could support multiple pursuits related to the enactment and improvement of ECE quality. While such local capacity can be informed by national and international developments and research, it could potentially respond to particular, unique realities of Miami and promote the types of conversations necessary to deal with local dilemmas of practice with specific focus on CRP and multi-lingual learning.

Valuing what learners bring to the table.

Both quality ECE and PD involve recognizing and valuing cultural and linguistic assets though CRP, which leverages the “the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students” (Gay, 2010). Quality ECE and quality PD both recognize, value, and build upon what teachers bring to their practice. These individual and collective qualities need to be acknowledged and leveraged through PD and complemented with professional “knowledge for practice”
Both content and approaches to PD need to acknowledge and build upon these cultural and linguistic assets.

**Supports for Continuous Connections of Knowledge and Practice**

Participants across studies associated ongoing learning with quality ECE and teaching and valued opportunities to learn and improve their practice. While the CFE structurally supported time for planning and continuous professional learning, participants in Ana’s study referenced having to use their own time for planning and taking courses, making learning more of a personal investment and sacrifice than a supported commitment within the profession. An implication is that adequate time needs to be provided for teachers to participate in continuous PD, and teachers’ efforts to learn and improve practice need adequate support, recognition, and compensation. These implications underscore the need for integration of structural supports into quality improvement and teacher preparation efforts such a matching PD requirements with compensation.

**Knowledge for, in, and of practice.**

Participants identified varied ways that teachers learn and improve their practice. In addition to valuing pre-service teacher preparation, participants appreciated job-embedded opportunities. Overall, participant ideas about knowledge, learning, and practice align with what Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999, 2001) describe as “knowledge-for-practice” (theory as foundation), “knowledge-in-practice” (shadowing good, experienced teachers) and “knowledge-of-practice” (in collaboration with other teachers and from trial and error, with and from children, in their daily work). Participants in both studies showed that they value structures that promote collaboration and allow them to share their practice, including job embedded opportunities to learn from peers, such as
master teachers, in communities of practice, or in cohort-based learning instead of disconnected trainings.

**Supporting comprehension and responsive practices through language learners understand.**

A concrete implication of our findings is that, in order to support meaning and influence practice, PD should be facilitated in a language potential learners understand to a degree that allows them to engage in dialogue. Participation in mandated trainings in languages learners do not understand represents both loss of meaning and wasted resources. PD programs that are only offered in English in Miami arguably tacitly protect the opinions and values of dominant groups, without regard to the understanding and opinions of English language learners, failing to respond to the needs of local ECE practitioners, children, and families. Moreover, some PD policies assume that teachers are passive recipients of prefabricated knowledge, an idea inconsistent with constructivist educational approaches, and in stark opposition to CRP. Addressing the need to learn English first requires identifying actual language needs of ECE teachers in Miami and designing courses with practical uses and applications that could directly benefit the teachers, children, and their families. As suggested by participants, English classes could also be improved if offered exclusively for adults and in smaller groups, in order to allow for the kind of time and listening that could address adult learning needs.

Looking through a CRP lens requires that all content is viewed through its relevancy in Miami, but also the development of specific skills and knowledge that should be considered essential in this diverse multicultural context through continuous and targeted PD opportunities that address: understanding diversity and multiculturalism, English for ECE teachers; supporting dual language learners and
second language acquisition; management and human relations among multicultural groups; and, leveraging a diverse multicultural workforce.

**Future Research**

Our complementary, collaborative research studies highlight prevailing themes and tensions regarding quality ECE and PD in Miami. As we consider our findings and their implications for our practice and context, additional observations and questions suggest areas for further research. We now discuss how a critical justice lens suggests the need for feminist and Lat Crit interpretation of our data and collaborative work, as well as additional study to highlight particular themes that relate to gender, ethnicity, and language which affect both ECE practitioners and children.

Given the predominantly female composition of ECE professionals in general, and specifically that every participant in our studies was female, we consider a feminist interpretation of our findings and the subject of quality improvement in ECE to be a necessary area for future study. While not originally foreseeing feminist interpretation of our collaborative work, our participants and findings point to its relevance. Participants across studies implicitly and explicitly related to and promoted traditionally feminine roles and values in enacting quality. Participants valued loving, caring, emotionally-connected relationships, even playing a motherly role, while dominant quality and quality improvement discourse and tools tend to downplay such values.

The values, dispositions, and sensitivities that participants viewed as foundations of quality in teaching and learning seem subjugated in dominant discourse in favor of technically oriented traits. Along with the rising recognition of the significance of ECE to the growing child and society, the profession seems increasingly controlled by reductionistic values for efficiency, investment, and measurable outcomes which may
have detrimental effects for the quality of learning experienced by teachers and children within the context of ECE. As Wheatley (2002) suggests, our willingness to be disturbed, curious, and uncertain about how to interpret and solve the problems about quality and ECE we care about can function as a source of hope and change, which relies on listening for and engaging different points of view. Additional feminist analysis and study could bring light to issues related to the intersection of gender, standards, and ECE and illuminate power struggles and multiple levels of oppression that ECE practitioners are subjected to within the context of a primarily female profession.

Like gender, language emerged as an important area where additional research is needed. Research could potentially focus on dual language learning in early childhood, evidence-based practices for supporting English language learning of adult immigrant teachers, and cultural and professional uses and variations of Spanish in the context of Miami. Investigation of these language related topics could not only inform educational practice in Miami, but could help identify and bridge diverse cultural and linguistic assets and meaning at a national level.

Additional LatCrit analysis and study could focus on the intersection of language, ethnicity, power, and ECE to bring light to issues affecting populations of diverse backgrounds, particularly the quickly increasing number of Latino children and practitioners participating in ECE across the US. This type of analysis could also highlight who is most affected by dominantly conceived and implemented structural configurations and quality supports that may actually function as hindrances to effective practices in language and learning. Additional research could critically explore how PD and assessments may tacitly or explicitly promote expectations and preferences for
teaching in English only and therefore minimize teachers’ linguistic assets and children’s possibilities to become multilingual. This research could also suggest ways for teachers and communities to leverage linguistic assets to support children’s emergent language and literacy development, which is particularly relevant for the increasingly multilingual population of children, teachers, and families in the US.

Conclusion

We have discussed our confluence of findings and their implications for our shared context of ECE in Miami. We looked at local constructions of meanings of quality ECE and culturally responsive PD, and argued that the context of Miami requires culturally responsive teaching and learning. We also highlighted dilemmas affecting ECE in Miami, elaborating on teachers’ experiences of a double bind as they attempt to enact quality. We proposed ways to address associated dilemmas by: fostering caring teaching and learning communities; sharing common experiences with, listening to, knowing, and understanding, diverse learners; valuing what learners bring to the table; supporting continuous connections of knowledge and practice; supporting understandings and responsive practices through language learners understand; and, looking at PD competencies, skills and content through a CRP lens. Lastly, we suggested how feminist and LatCrit interpretation of our data and collaborative work, as well as additional research could supplement our findings and shed light on important issues that may be influencing current, dominant conceptualizations of quality and approaches to quality improvement in ECE. We emphasized the relevance of language to learning by ECE professionals and children and approaches to language and literacy teaching and learning in Miami and across the US. Next, we describe practical
applications that reflect an ongoing collaborative push to intentionally build professional practice in a way that encourages meaningful dialogue among diverse individuals.
CHAPTER 8
PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

Through this collaborative study we have explored and shared local perspectives about quality and PD in early childhood education. As we critically reflected on our own evolving understandings and perspectives about quality, which relate to the points of confluence we have shared, we applied new insights to multiple areas of our work. This reflective element affected our professional practice by translating into the way we influence quality in the Miami ECE community and professional learning efforts. We have used our evolving understandings of quality to enact CRP and have gained competence and confidence while articulating and representing perspectives on quality and CRP. Through our collaboration, and because of the different initiatives that we interact with, our results can more broadly support the way that quality and PD efforts are conceived and implemented throughout Miami, calling attention to the relevance of local understandings and cultural practices.

Next, in the spirit of affecting professional practice through ongoing application of continuous learning, we discuss ways we have applied and plan to apply and share our collaborative work and findings. We discuss how we have applied learning during our time as colleagues on this collaborative dissertation and consider how we will continue to apply our learning. We describe broad implications for designing and facilitating PD and highlight how we specifically applied our learning through PD with the United Way Center for Excellence in Early Education. We conclude by discussing how we have shared and plan to share our findings.
Implications for Designing and Facilitating PD

Our findings suggest that participants’ ideas about the importance of loving relationships, supportive, dynamic interactions, joy and success, and the complementarity of teachers, children, and families can be leveraged to develop practices that are deeply embedded in commitment to children and humanity rather than superficial application of teaching techniques. Leveraging these foundational ideas has implications for the way that PD is designed and facilitated, suggesting the need for exploring and sharing these beliefs and how they are enacted and encouraged with children as well as with professional peers.

One such implication is to include opportunities that allow PD participants to make these ideas explicit through dialogue and build on them by providing opportunities to experience the types of learning that they value. Intentionally integrating individual and group reflections on participants’ experiences and contexts can become an ongoing process for building the trusting relationships that ECE practitioners consider worthy. Moreover, while building on relationships, reflective opportunities open the possibility for critical dialogue about what deeply matters to participants, creating a space for discovering common views and approaches as well as alternative considerations in their pursuits of quality.

Ana’s study confirmed the importance of continuing to dig deeper into participants’ beliefs and life experiences in her continued practice. Even though she was already using methodologies that elicit reflection, Ana now plans more intentionally for critical reflection on individual and collective practice. She encourages open reflection about life experience to surface differences and commonalities among participants who tend to be mostly women of diverse educational, racial, cultural and linguistic backgrounds.
The relevance of reflecting on and sharing experiences is based on the idea that “our pedagogical practices largely emerge from our ideas about teaching and the assumptions that we have for our students and their families/communities” (Kagan, 1992; McKown & Weinstein, 2008; Monzo & Rueda, 2001; Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007 as cited in Powell, 2011, p. 2). Learning about participants and acknowledging their realities, experiences, practices and interests allows Ana to resist the prevailing deficit thinking that might otherwise influence her perspective (Powell, 2011). More importantly, learning about participants helps contextualize learning and develop culturally responsive opportunities that focus on their assets as resources that can be leveraged. In addition, exploring participants' lived experiences models CRP and can potentially influence the way PD participants in turn perceive their students. Providing moments for PD participants to reflect and share what matters to them builds trust within the group, a sense of belonging among participants and engagement in discussions of practice consistent with Cochran-Smith and Lytle’s (1999, 2001) “knowledge-of-practice”.

Recognizing participants’ value as individuals and as members of a larger community while building on the commitment to children and ECE can be accomplished by using interactive facilitation methodologies such as VIPP. As Powell (2011) suggests, a culturally responsive environment “affirms students’ cultural identities and nurtures a climate of collaboration and mutual respect” (p. 5). As we discussed, VIPP is particularly useful with multicultural and multilingual groups because it promotes self-reflection, visualization, and sharing of individual ideas through engagement in dialogue in a manner that recognizes the individual voice and experiences while supporting
shared commitments and collaboration. While contextualized learning is important for anyone, this type of CRP is particularly relevant for ECE practitioners of diverse backgrounds, whose race, language, immigration status and gender have not generally been considered strengths. Acknowledging that lived experiences may in fact represent strengths and points of connections with peers, and with the children and families they serve has great empowering potential.

Moreover, a focus on participants’ strengths and collaborative nature of learning can leverage individual success through supportive relationships among practitioners, contributing to the joy of learning together and sharing success with each other, another important aspect of “knowledge-of-practice” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, 2001). Promoting the emergence of these dialogical relationships through PD is particularly relevant for ECE practitioners as they navigate multiple cultural and professional contexts, beliefs systems, and realities.

**Applying VIPP at the United Way Center for Excellence in Early Education**

Miriam and Ana concretely applied these implications for designing and facilitating PD to their overlapping professional work at the UWMD CFE. Miriam and Ana each played a role in introducing VIPP to professional learning facilitators and coordinators at the UWMD CFE. Miriam wrote VIPP into a community wide training grant over three years ago. Since then, Ana started conducting VIPP trainings at the CFE for PD facilitators. The response was enthusiastic and facilitators embraced VIPP as an approach that directly addresses participation of diverse learners and cultural sensitivity. Use of VIPP techniques, and recognition of their use as a way to value and engage people’s perspectives, spread.
Now, facilitators of different grants that Miriam was involved with have participated in VIPP training. VIPP as a facilitation approach directly addresses participation and cultural sensitivity as essential to democracy and justice. Community grants at the CFE, which have professional learning and quality improvement components, now have VIPP trained facilitators and managers. In addition, CFE Demonstration School leaders participated in VIPP. CFE colleagues who participated in both the VIPP facilitators training and a focus group facilitated by Miriam as part of this research later approached her, making connections between their participation in the focus group and Ana’s VIPP professional learning experience. These focus group participants commented that they gained a deeper understanding of how to use VIPP to promote dialogue after participating in the focus group.

Miriam also extended learning and engaged varied voices by co-facilitating additional community focus groups in which she applied knowledge gained through putting VIPP to practice in her quality study. In these meetings, Miriam facilitated dialogue around the concept of quality among representatives of ECE-interested community organizations like UWMD, TCT, Children’s Forum, and ELCMDM. These meetings all related to her work with quality improvement grants focused on professional learning for local ECE practitioners. Figure 8-1 shows an artifact created during a meeting of the QC central PD network, which she wrote and which was granted to UWMD CFE in 2015. During an orientation meeting, participants used the VIPP Topsy Turvy exercise to structure dialogue among diverse participants and organizations regarding their perspectives about what quality improvement is and is not. This artifact of the exercise remained prominently displayed on the wall of the CFE QC.
office for over six months after the meeting occurred. Similarities appeared between ideas the QC group shared regarding meanings of quality improvement and the CFE quality focus group participants’ meanings of quality. For example, participants across quality and quality improvement dialogues viewed both as ongoing and challenging processes that require consistent, continuous, reflective, and collaborative learning and work.

**Sharing Findings**

Several weeks after completing data collection, Ana and Miriam co-presented their initial collaborative work and preliminary findings at the 2015 National Association of Multicultural Education conference. In that session, Miriam and Ana shared their results using a seven-minute, structured PowerPoint presentation, popularly known as a “Pecha Kucha.” The brevity of the presentation allowed time for engagement with VIPP activities, which related their collaborative work to multicultural education.

As they continue to apply and share their learning, Miriam and Ana are interested in continuing to create spaces in which ECE practitioners can engage in dialogue with each other and those who make decisions that affect them. They plan to share their findings, including themes, tensions, and practical implications with their participants and community. While Miriam and Ana will share this dissertation document with any interested party, they will also share condensed findings by creating and distributing a booklet featuring participant selected and drawn images and written and spoken words as illustrations of themes and tensions.

Miriam and Ana will also co-facilitate an interactive exhibit for the community in fall, 2016 that will include visual representations of their findings and interactive VIPP activities to engage visitors in dialogue regarding their questions and findings,
particularly at the intersection of their studies. Miriam and Ana will share key aspects of their studies through a presentation that captures the essence of their research in a visual and narrated manner. This exhibit will encourage exploration of perspectives about quality and challenges and opportunities in professional learning. Potential themes include: personal and professional journeys of ECE practitioners, meanings of quality ECE, and existing pathways and roadblocks to the practice of CRP in ECE. The exhibit will occur at the CFE, which is an ideal venue not only since it was Miriam’s context of study, but because it may broaden our audience by attracting diverse community stakeholders, including teachers, PD facilitators, and families.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, we discussed practical implications for our collaborative work. We emphasized designing and facilitating collaborative professional learning experiences that focus on participants’ strengths and leverage individual success through supportive relationships among practitioners. We also elaborated on how we modeled and encouraged dialogue about quality and PD through the use of VIPP as a facilitation approach that directly addresses participation and cultural sensitivity. Finally, we shared our plan to present our findings and collaborative work to our participants and to the wider ECE community in an attempt to continue to inform programs and policies to enact the kind of quality that is locally relevant and that the children, families, and teachers in Miami deserve. We hope that documenting and sharing perspectives expressed by our participants contributes to dialogue about quality and professional learning in ECE which considers alternative priorities, approaches, and points of view.
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8-1 “Quality Improvement is/is not” artifact.
APPENDIX A
VISUALIZED PRESENTATION IN PLENARY VIPP PROTOCOL

(15 minutes) This VIPP method can be used at the beginning of group events to stimulate participant engagement in the upcoming process. Miriam and Ana both used visualized presentations and follow steps outlined by Salas et al. (2007), which are summarized below. Miriam used this method to introduce the idea and process of the focus group/quality forum. Ana used it to present her research goals and data collection process.

1. Facilitator(s) present planned visual representations (on cards) of main points, which will include guiding questions.

2. Co-facilitator places cards on wall/large board in a step-by-step, logical manner while other facilitator speaks.

3. Facilitator elicits questions and inputs from participants once presentation is complete.

4. During interactions, comments can be written down and collected on cards or chart paper.
(10 minutes) This VIPP method is intended to mobilize participant energy and prepare for upcoming activities and can be used to creatively establish mutually agreed upon ground rules. Miriam followed steps outlined by Salas et al. (2007) which are summarized below:

1. Facilitator references upcoming focus group/quality forum and asks participants “What can we do that will make this focus group not go well?”
2. Facilitator invites participants to express ideas on how to ruin the event and records responses.
3. Facilitator then turns responses “topsy turvy” by formulating opposites of previous responses.
4. Participants establish consensus by voting on feasible responses.
APPENDIX C
GALLERY WALK

(30 minutes) This method is consistent with VIPP because of its emphasis on visualization and dialogue. Miriam used the gallery walk as a way for participants to exchange non-verbal perceptions and expressions of quality (that they selected before the focus group) in a shared space and followed the steps below:

1. Participants post the photograph they selected as representing quality on wall.
2. Participants walk around, silently viewing each other’s selected photos.
3. Each participant briefly discusses the contents and reasons for choosing the photo.
4. Time for open dialogue after all participants have had opportunity to speak.
APPENDIX D
CARD COLLECTION AND CLUSTERING VIPP PROTOCOL

(40 minutes): This VIPP method is intended to promote idea generation and processing. Miriam and Ana both used card collection and clustering and followed steps outlined by Salas et al. (2007), which are summarized below:

1. Facilitator poses guiding questions in sentence strips:

   Miriam’s questions are:
   
   o What does the concept of quality ECE mean to you?
   
   o From your perspective, what are some ways the CFE represents quality in ECE?
   
   o What are some ideas about quality that you have in common with others?
   
   o What are some ideas about quality that you have that are different from others?

   Ana’s questions are:
   
   o What assets do you bring to your practice as an ECE teacher?
   
   o What barriers do you confront in your work as an ECE teacher?

2. Facilitator distributes different color cards to each participant. Each question will be represented by a different color.

3. Participants silently contemplate and write responses.

4. Once participants have completed writing, facilitator collects cards, separates into stacks of the same color, shuffles, and places cards face down in color-coded piles.

5. Facilitator holds up each card, making visible to participants, and reads contents out loud. Any necessary clarifications are to arise from group discussion, not by asking who wrote the card.
6. Facilitator places cards on board visible to all, one category/guiding question at a time. Cards are first placed a distance apart then participants are engaged in deciding which cards represent associated ideas and should therefore be visually clustered together.

7. Duplicate ideas will be acknowledged and represented visually.

8. Once all cards are on board, participants review and revise clusters. Facilitator neatens and titles final arrangement accordingly, with group consensus about each cluster title.
APPENDIX E
DEVELOPMENT MEANS TO ME VIPP PROTOCOL

(40 minutes) This VIPP method is intended to help participants explore issues and particularly orient to ethnocentric concepts. Miriam adapted steps outlined by Salas et al. (2007), which are summarized below:

1. Participants individually draw, without words, their understanding of the concept of quality.
2. In the group, participants explain the meaning of their drawings.
3. Creations are exhibited on the wall.
4. Facilitator guides discussion regarding the diverse understandings of quality.
5. Facilitator leads reflection on different perspectives, including cultural values.
(15 minutes) This VIPP method is intended to collect and exchange ideas from participants. Miriam used this as a concluding activity and followed steps outlined by Salas et al. (2007), which are summarized below:

1. In the middle of a large flip chart paper, facilitator will write “Quality ECE is...”

2. Facilitator requests participants to spontaneously respond and records suggestions as legs extending from the central “Quality ECE is...” prompt.

3. Facilitator reviews list and elicits additional suggestions.

4. Facilitator guides participants through discussion of recorded ideas.

Miriam then repeated this method using “Quality ECE is not...” as the central prompt.
APPENDIX G
WALKING BILLBOARD VIPP PROTOCOL

(30 minutes) This VIPP method is intended to encourage participants to mingle and share personal information with each other. Ana used this as a beginning activity and followed steps outlined by Salas et al. (2007), which are summarized below:

1. Explain to participants that they can design their own introductions and propose questions about what they want to know about others. Provide some examples like favorite foods, movies, places, etc.

2. Ask for a show of hands to select the two most useful questions. Select the three questions that received more votes.

3. Give each participant a piece of chart paper and marker, and ask them to write their name at the top, the questions on the left and the answers on the right.

4. With the chart paper taped to their shoulders, participants walk around the room and discuss their favorite things with other participants for 10 minutes.
APPENDIX H
RIVER OF LIFE VIPP PROTOCOL

(30 minutes) This VIPP method is intended to enhance the process of getting to know each other and surface aspects of each person’s lives. Ana used this process to further explore aspects of individual experiences while also promoting a sense of belonging and mutual understanding. Ana followed the steps outlined by Salas et al. (2007), which are summarized below:

1. Each participant is given a piece of chart paper, and asked to draw their “river of life”, imagining their life like a river, that evolves as it flows. Guiding questions are provided including: What have you encountered in your journey? How were the waters, boats, landscapes? Are there rocks, bridges?

2. After drawing, participants present and explain their drawing to the others for one or two minutes.

3. The activity is debriefed and the drawings are hung in the wall.
APPENDIX I
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Part I. Beliefs and FoK

- What do you believe are the most important characteristics of an ECE teacher?
- How would you describe your ability to work with young children in Miami?
- What assets (professional, cultural, ethnic or linguistic) do you bring to being a teacher?
- Which of these do you think is most important to the children you work with and why?
- What are the greatest barriers that you confront?
- In what ways have your life experiences influenced your professional identity, classroom practice and commitment to children?

Part II. PD Experiences and Learning Needs

- How did you learn what you know about teaching?
- How do you think teachers become good teachers?
- What are your perceptions regarding existing professional learning opportunities for ECE teachers in Miami?
- In what ways do these opportunities build on your assets and respond to your learning needs?
- What is the most important thing to consider when preparing ECE in Miami?
### Summary Table: Protocols and Uses

#### Miriam’s data collection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• What are meanings of quality ECE for individuals working within the CFE?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What themes are shared?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• In what ways do perspectives differ?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of protocol</th>
<th>Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visualized Presentation in Plenary VIPP protocol</td>
<td>To introduce the idea and process of the focus group/quality forum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topsy Turvy VIPP protocol</td>
<td>To prepare participants for upcoming activities and establish mutually agreed upon ground rules.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gallery Walk</td>
<td>To exchange non-verbal perceptions and expressions of quality that participants have selected before the focus group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Card Collection and Clustering VIPP protocol</td>
<td>To promote idea generation and processing about guiding questions:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What does the concept of quality ECE mean to you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• From your perspective, what are some ways the</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CFE represents quality in ECE?
- What are some ideas about quality that you have in common with others?
- What are some ideas about quality that you have that are different from others?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Development Means to Me</th>
<th>To nonverbally represent quality and particularly orient to ethnocentric concepts.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mind Map</td>
<td>To collect and exchange ideas from participants.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Ana’s data collection**

**Research questions**
- What are ECE teachers’ beliefs about themselves as teachers and their ability to work with young children in Miami?
- What professional, cultural and ethnic assets do ECE teachers in Miami bring to their practice?
- What are ECE teachers’ perceptions regarding existing professional learning opportunities and how these opportunities build on their assets and respond to their learning needs?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of protocol</th>
<th>Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visualized Presentation in Plenary</td>
<td>To present her research goals and data collection process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walking Billboard VIPP Protocol</td>
<td>To encourage participants to mingle and share personal information with each other.</td>
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<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>River of Life</td>
<td>To surface aspects of each person’s lives and further explore aspects of individual experiences while also promoting a sense of belonging and mutual understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Card Collection and Clustering</td>
<td>To promote idea generation and processing about What assets do you bring to your practice as an ECE teacher? What barriers do you confront in your work as an ECE teacher?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-structured Interview</td>
<td>Part I. Beliefs and FoK Part II. PD experiences and learning needs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

REFERENCE LIST


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Miriam Altman has held a range of professional positions related to early care and education, beginning before she was a full time professional. As Miriam studied psychology and fine arts at New College of the University of South Florida (USF), she also worked at an early intervention program (part C) for children with disabilities from age zero to three. It was in this position that Miriam developed a love for the joy, laughter, creativity, and play that occurs in ECE and a particular affection for being with children with special needs.

After graduating, Miriam spent a brief time teaching a three-year-old class in a local, private, NAEYC accredited preschool. Then, she studied for her Master’s Degree in Special Education at USF. Miriam concurrently worked as a graduate research assistant with two special education professors and enjoyed helping them research topics including teachers’ beliefs and the role of caring in education. After receiving her Master’s degree, Miriam taught pre-kindergarten ESE in Manatee County Public Schools and Alachua County Public Schools. Those years were full of joy, exhaustion, and disappointments that were mostly overcome by a sense of meaningful purpose. One activity Miriam engaged in that would foreshadow a later position is grant writing: she wrote two mini-grants to obtain materials needed to implement special projects, like a classroom center with speech therapy activities.

Miriam then moved to Miami and began attempting to help early childhood teachers. Miriam first worked at the Early Learning Coalition of Miami-Dade/Monroe (ELCMDM) as an inclusion specialist serving private programs throughout Miami-Dade. Miriam also worked as a Recognition and Response consultant, which involved consulting on a research project, informally known as response to intervention goes to
pre-k, conducted by Frank Porter Graham at University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. After working for three years at ELCMDM, Miriam joined United Way of Miami-Dade (UWMD) as an early literacy specialist on a United States Department of Education Early Reading First (ERF) grant.

As a literacy coach, Miriam worked with public school pre-kindergarten teachers and participated in a three-year long, comprehensive, collaborative, and meaningful professional learning experience guided by Dr. Elena Bodrova, a Vygotskian scholar. The PD, including ongoing training and dynamic coaching, focused on integrating literacy in meaningful contexts, promoting mature play, and self-regulation. During this time, Miriam also facilitated face-to-face PD focused on promoting successful social and emotional development in preschoolers for the Miami-Dade early childhood community.

When the ERF grant came to an end, Miriam continued working with UWMD Center for Excellence (CFE) as a grant writer, manager, and director. In this role, Miriam’s primary responsibilities centered on writing and managing grants. All of the grants Miriam wrote and worked with related to the mission of the CFE, which is to “elevate the quality of early care and education in Miami-Dade and beyond.” Each project focused on advancing this mission through professional learning for local ECE practitioners.

Miriam chose to pursue her Doctor of Education degree in Curriculum, Teaching and Teacher Education because she hoped to explore the possibilities which may exist when given time, reflection, awareness of context within the field of research, and interaction with a community of thinkers. Miriam found the job-embedded professional practice doctorate program particularly appealing because of its focus on equity and
social justice and its design for working professionals. The program also seemed consistent with her desire to make more meaningful connections between research, reflection, and practice. Miriam received her Doctor of Education Degree from the University of Florida in the spring of 2016.
Ana Pizano came to the United States to study education right after high school because she wanted to transform the Dominican Republic’s educational system and expand ECE to all children in her country of origin. While completing her Bachelor of Science in Early Childhood and Elementary Education at New York University, she worked in early childhood centers and public schools in New York. After her bachelor’s degree, Ana went on to complete her Master of Education in Administration, Planning and Social Policy at Harvard University. Ana then returned to the Dominican Republic at a time of national school reform and spent several years working as a consultant for the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in the Ministry of Education (the National Department of Education) implementing and monitoring large international loans and grants. Later on, Ana worked at the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF)-Santo Domingo office as Project Officer for Child Development, Education and Women’s Rights, supporting national counterparts in implementing projects that promoted and were consistent with children’s and women’s rights.

Ana’s engagement in these institutions greatly shaped her career and the way she views and experiences leadership and educational change. Her work experience helps her understand the challenges of designing and funding policies and large-scale reform as well as the practical limitations to positively affecting classroom practice from the top. Her years at UNICEF-Santo Domingo were particularly transformational as Ana experienced shared commitment, vision and hope but also witnessed disconnect between policy and practice, national laws and people’s realization of their basic rights.

Twelve years ago, Ana moved to South Florida and spent almost a decade working at the ELCMDM, first as Director of Assessment, and lastly as Director of
Curriculum. After more than 25 years as a professional, Ana has become increasingly committed to professional learning of teachers and aspires for an early learning system that values its practitioners and properly supports them so they and the children they serve can excel. Ana lives in South Florida with her husband and children and received her Doctor of Education from the University of Florida in the spring of 2016.