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# An Ecofeminist Perspective on the Influences that Promote and Restrict Three Early Childhood Educators' Inclusion of Open-ended Outdoor Learning

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AN ECOFEMINIST PERSPECTIVE ON THE INFLUENCES THAT PROMOTE AND  
RESTRICT THREE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS' INCLUSION  
OF OPEN-ENDED OUTDOOR LEARNING

by

Anne K. Mackiewicz

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree

of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

Education  
(Curriculum and Instruction)

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UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY  
Logan, Utah

2013

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**ABSTRACT**

An Ecofeminist Perspective on the Influences That Promote and Restrict Three Early  
Childhood Educators' Inclusion of Open-Ended Outdoor Learning

by

Anne K. Mackiewicz, Doctor of Philosophy

Utah State University, 2013

Major Professor: Martha L. Whitaker, Ph.D.  
Department: Teacher Education and Leadership

The purpose of this qualitative, purposeful, bounded case study was to explore the influences that promoted and restricted three women early childhood educators' inclusion of open-ended outdoor learning in a Head Start center. A continued degradation of nature, along with the predominance of women working in the early childhood workforce, led me to the use of the ecofeminist theory for this study.

Research methodology included participant interviews, observations, and a study of the site's documents. In the analysis of the data, four themes were identified as promoting or restricting open-ended outdoor learning. These themes included: (a) participant's attitudes, (b) Head Start program requirements, (c) classroom and playground context, and (d) student behavior. Each of the themes included codes that were categorized as promoting or restricting open-ended outdoor learning. Some fell into both categories.

Through the use of the ecofeminist lens, a view of the dualistic relationships between (a) teachers and the Head Start program and (b) teachers and their students were identified. These dualisms were found to support the “logic of domination” in which social structures were created to justify the domination of one group over another. These structures have historically been identified as patriarchal and were present at the research site. Children’s culture and nature’s intrinsic values were considered less valuable than adults’ expectations for school readiness.

This study provides a view of an ecofeminist early childhood analysis in which limited research is currently available. Further work in this field would aid in the understanding of the dualistic model and its presence in early childhood outdoor learning environments.

(138 pages)

## **PUBLIC ABSTRACT**

### **An Ecofeminist Perspective on the Influences That Promote and Restrict Three Early Childhood Educators' Inclusion of Open-Ended Outdoor Learning**

by

Anne K. Mackiewicz, Doctor of Philosophy

Utah State University, 2013

The purpose of this study was to explore the influences that promoted and restricted three women early childhood educators' inclusion of open-ended outdoor learning in a Head Start center. With the recorded history of human's impact on nature, along with the majority of women in the early childhood workforce, I chose a theory, ecofeminism, that looked at both the domination of women and nature in the early childhood setting.

The methods included participant interviews, observations, and a study of the site's documents. Four themes were identified as promoting or restricting open-ended outdoor learning. These themes included: (a) participant's attitudes, (b) Head Start program requirements, (c) classroom and playground context, and (d) student behavior. Numerous codes were also identified within each theme.

Through the use of the ecofeminist lens, a view of the power relationships were identified between (a) teachers and the Head Start program and (b) teachers and their students. These relationships were found to support the "logic of domination," which described the justification of power of one group over another. These structures have historically been identified as patriarchal, ruled by men, and were present at the research site. Children's culture and nature's intrinsic values were considered less valuable than adults' expectations for school readiness.

This research provides a view of an ecofeminist perspective, which has limited data from previous studies. Further work in this field would aid in the understanding of the power structures in early childhood and its impact on outdoor learning environments.

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Thank you to those who were willing to serve on my committee and provide their expertise and time, Dr. Martha Dever, Dr. James Barta, Dr. Sylvia Read, and Dr. Lisa Boyce. Special appreciation and thanks to the chair of my committee, Dr. Martha Whitaker, who consistently provided a warm, positive, caring environment in which to discuss my challenges and uncertainties. Her unwavering support and belief in the process of gaining new knowledge provided the courage and direction to move forward.

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Anne K. Mackiewicz

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

News on the front page of the statewide newspaper reported: “Young people not so ‘green’ after all” (Irvine, 2012, p. A7). This article was based on a recent study by Twenge, Campbell, and Freeman (2012) that focused on “changes in community feelings” (p. 2) towards care of their natural environment. Researchers analyzed two questionnaire sets administered from 1976-2008, “Monitoring the Future,” completed by 463,753 high school seniors, and “American Freshman,” completed by 8.7 million college freshman. They also included a survey given to 182 college students in a 2010 introduction to psychology course. The participants were divided into three categories: “Boomer” born between 1943-1961, “Generational” born between 1961-1981, and “Millennial” born between 1982-1999. The findings revealed a shift in environmental concern between the Boomer and Millennial generations. “Three times as many Millennials (15%) than Boomers (5%) said they made no personal effort at all to help the environment, and only 40% as many Millennials (9%) as Boomers (15%) said they made quite a bit of effort” (Twenge et al., 2012, p. 12). As an early childhood educator committed to the importance and appreciation of, along with concern for, the environment, I wanted to understand why our educational efforts to increase these inclinations in children appeared to be less effective than desired.

My interest in gaining a deeper understanding of this problem led me to consider what we already know about environmental stewardship and oppression, early childhood experiences, and the teachers who spend their days in environments where these

dynamics could be brought together in meaningful ways. What I learned led me to choose an ecofeminist lens to guide this study.

### **Environmental Stewardship and Early Childhood Experiences**

Beginning in the 1980s, evidence was found that early childhood experiences in the outdoors shape adult behavior toward the environment. Studies were conducted that aimed to identify what influenced those identified as stewards, or environmentalists, to become involved in this culture of concern for the earth. Tanner (1980) was the first to ask the question. He was followed by numerous others in the pursuit of an answer. Repeatedly, two factors were identified that fostered stewardship: (a) open-ended and structured childhood experiences in nature, and (b) adult/child interactions in outdoor experiences (Arnold, Cohen, & Warner, 2009; Bixler, Floyd, & Hammitt, 2002; Chawla, 1999; Ewert, Place, & Sibthorp, 2005; Palmer, 1993; Palmer, 1998a, 1998b; Palmer & Suggate, 1996; Palmer, Suggate, Robottom, & Hart, 1999; Sivek & Hungerford, 1989-1990; Wells & Lekies, 2006). The predominant response by participants dealt with “unstructured and habitual contact with nature through play” (Arnold et al., 2009, p. 32), also known as “open-ended.” This data, along with Head Start’s school readiness standards, which will be discussed later, influenced the focus of my study on “open-ended” rather than “structured” experiences.

If open-ended childhood experiences in nature and adult/child interactions in outdoor experiences are, as these studies confirm, influential in the development of stewardship of the earth, understanding what dynamics foster or impede such experiences

in early childhood education settings has merit. An awareness of recent efforts to infuse environmental education into an early childhood program informs my study. One substantial effort to expand the influence of early childhood education is the Head Start program.

In 1965, a small rural community was one of the three original Utah locations receiving funding for a new government program identified as Head Start. This program was part of a nationwide effort to address the inequalities that young children raised in poverty were facing. A few of the identified inequalities included; lack of health care, inadequate nutrition, and unmet language and social development skills. The original program provided services to children from 3-5 years old in an 8-week summer session. An unspoken goal of the federal program was to raise intelligence scores by providing social and academic experiences in a short time span. The publicized goal of Head Start was to adopt a community based comprehensive child development program to address the needs of underprivileged children during the preschool years. Head Start leaders soon recognized the short six week time period was inadequate, and expanded the program to follow the traditional school year calendar. In 1999, the addition of Early Head Start to the Head Start program created a “whole child” approach for children ages birth to 5 (Zigler & Styfco, 2010).

Throughout the history of Head Start, changes have been made to the structure, focus, and curriculum. Important to this study was the initiation of the “Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework” (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [U.S. DHHS], 2010). A curriculum was created by the Council for

Environmental Education to provide an environmental education module that addressed the expectation of the “Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework.” This module contains activities for indoor and outdoor nature experiences for young children with the intent to foster “stewardship” of the earth (Project Wild, 2010).

### **Human Choices and the Oppression of the Environment**

At the turn of the millennium, the rising interest in environmental stewardship was grounded in increased understanding of the past and present human impact on the earth. As well, there was a growing perception that the individual choices of the earth’s inhabitants were central to efforts to address these concerns. A national Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) report (2005) announced that “environmental degradation or improvement, whether it first appears to be caused by ‘major’ or ‘minor’ sources, is ultimately the product of many everyday choices” (EPA, 2005, p. 4). Previous studies and essays on the degradation of the earth identified both minor and major sources that influenced the loss and alterations to the environment (Carson, 1962; Garte, 2008; Redman, James, Fish, & Rogers, 2004; Schipper, Vissers, van der Linden, 2008; Weart, 2011; Williams, 2006). Impacts to the environment include pesticide and chemical use (Carson, 1962; Jurewicz & Hanke, 2008; Schipper et al., 2008), rising carbon dioxide levels (Garte, 2008; Weart, 2011), deforestation (Garte, 2008; Williams, 2006), and humans’ attempt to increase both personal and governmental financial success (Williams, 2006).

This expanded awareness led to education program recommendations to be implemented in early childhood settings, specifically Head Start. Early childhood educators, embedded within these larger social systems, would be vital to bringing the recommendations and children together.

### **Female Early Childhood Educators' Role in a Patriarchal Social Structure**

Early childhood educators were central to the implementation of curricular requirements and activities aimed at increasing students' understanding of and concern for the environment. The fact that nationally, women comprised 97% of the early childhood workforce (DellaMattera, 2009) was important to note because ecofeminist theorists have developed an extensive critique of the oppression of the environment and women. The ecofeminist lens has been used to interpret how the privilege of some rests on the exploitation of others (including women) and the environment. It "is a perspective which challenges the domination and hierarchical systems of oppression that underlie the patriarchal structures and philosophies of the dominant culture" (Houde & Bullis, 1999, p. 150). Ecofeminist theorists suggest that our culture is a male dominated culture in which humans "evolve from a sense of self as separate, existing within a society of individuals who must be protected from each other in competing for scarce resources" (Gaard, 1993, p. 2). Such a view does not place value on collaborating to protect the environment or on the women who work with the youngest and least powerful in our society—our children.

## **Ecofeminism as a Theoretical Lens**

I wanted to understand how the implementation of recommended environmental education curricula is impeded or supported in educational contexts where women were overrepresented. Do social forces that perpetuate the global and local oppression of women and nature come together in important ways in early childhood settings? The use of the ecofeminist lens guided and helped clarify the findings from my study of the outdoor education intentions and practices of three female early childhood educators.

### **Summary**

The steady and negative alteration of the natural environment, the need for stewards to care for the earth, the importance of supporting the formation of such commitments during childhood, and the predominance of women in the early childhood education workforce, led me to ask what influences shape early childhood educators' choices regarding open-ended outdoor curriculum. My intent was to understand these influences in an early childhood setting in the fall of 2012. The purpose for this study was to investigate, through an ecofeminist lens, what promoted or restricted three early childhood educators' inclusion of open-ended outdoor learning time for their students.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

My study of the literature was conducted using the EbscoHost, Education Full Text, and Environment and Ecology databases along with U.S. government websites. I utilized texts covering Head Start, early childhood, environmental education and stewardship, environmental activists, environmental degradation, global warming, deforestation, and ecofeminist theory. A discussion of the literature follows.

#### **Definition of Terms**

“Open-ended time” may be interpreted in numerous ways. My use of the term corresponds with Merriam Webster’s definition, “Not rigorously fixed: adaptable to the developing needs of a situation: permitting or designed to permit spontaneous and unguided responses.” The use of “early childhood” refers to children ages 0 to 8 as defined by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). For my study, preschoolers were between the ages of three and five. The term “stewardship” was used in reference to “the careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one's care; stewardship of natural resources.”

#### **Environmental Stewardship and Early Childhood Experiences**

##### **Environmental Stewards**

Twenge and colleagues’ (2012) study, noted above, identified generational differences in attitudes towards caring for and taking action on behalf of the natural

environment. In order to better understand what influenced a person to develop a caring, action-based behavior towards the environment. I reviewed existing literature that identified the factors that led to the development of environmental stewardship.

The quest for what influenced citizens to become advocates of the natural environment was first undertaken by Thomas Tanner. Tanner (1980) conducted a study with 45 participants who had chosen a career in, and were dedicated to, environmental work. He asked them their reasons for being involved in stewardship efforts, the people who influenced their decision, and in what environmental causes they were involved. He utilized autobiographical data that was coded and tallied. Forty-four of the 45 participants noted that childhood engagement with the outdoors in “pristine environments” (p. 23) (e.g., forests, undeveloped neighborhood areas) impacted their decision. They also reported family, teachers, books, others, the loss of “beloved open spaces” (Tanner, 1980, p. 22), and the sense of solitude contributed to their decision. (Teacher engagement was identified as informal conversations and modeling rather than formal lessons.) Tanner noted that this was only the beginning of the research and that further study should be done.

Researchers took Tanner’s (1980) recommendation to heart. Further studies were undertaken to test the validity of Tanner’s work and to address concerns about his study. These concerns included the small sample size, selection of only environmentally engaged participants, and the limitation of including only U.S. citizens (Arnold et al., 2009; Bixler et al., 2002; Chawla, 1999; Ewert et al., 2005; Palmer, 1993; Palmer, 1998a, 1998b; Palmer & Suggate, 1996; Palmer et al., 1999; Sivek & Hungerford, 1989-1990;

Wells & Lekies, 2006). The findings from these later studies reinforced Tanner's (1980) research that childhood experiences influenced participants' involvement in and concern for the natural outdoor environment.

Palmer (1993) replicated Tanner's (1980) study but expanded it to include 232 participants with 225 respondents coming from the United Kingdom and the remaining seven from Germany (one), Greece (three), Japan (one), Mexico (one), and the U.S. (one). She found that participants who had open-ended or structured outdoor experiences and interactions with nature described an understanding of the structure, inter-connectedness, and aesthetic qualities of the world. Participants' responses also matched Tanner's findings of family and others influencing their levels of activity in the environment. She agreed with Tanner's statement that "childhood experience in the outdoors is the single most important factor in developing personal concern for the environment" (Palmer, 1993, p. 29).

Joy Palmer continued her work on influential factors that impacted people's decision to care for the earth with fellow researcher Jennifer Suggate. The motivation for their continued research in this area included the belief that in order for children to learn to care for their world, their teachers needed to know effective methods to do so (Palmer & Suggate, 1996). In their 1996 work they included 233 participants from the United Kingdom and provided a more detailed analysis of the data, including participant age group differences. Although they found childhood experiences were still the leading influence, and family, teachers, and personal loss of environment were also contributing factors, what was new in the data was the inclusion of media sources (e.g., National

Geographic) as factors that played a role for the younger age groups.

In 1998, Palmer had published two additional articles furthering the study of influences on people's decision to enter the environmental education field. This time she further broadened the participants to include 12 countries within six continents (Palmer, 1998a, 1998b). Her 1998b participants included 82 from Australia, 48 from Canada, 97 from Greece, 131 from Hong Kong, 245 from Slovenia, 92 from South Africa, 203 from Sri Lanka, 128 from Uganda, and 233 from the United Kingdom. She again utilized similar methods to Tanner's (1980) study. In the analysis of the major influences she determined that "clearly the most important single factor by far was childhood experiences of nature. Other influences given by over 20% of the respondents were close family, tertiary education, pollution and adult experiences of nature" (Palmer, 1998b, para. 4).

In a 1999 study, Palmer and colleagues compared the United Kingdom's results to those of Australia and Canada, again asking the same questions as in her previous studies. The results indicated childhood experiences as the most influential reason for engaging in environmental issues. Cultural influences were isolated from the general data and attributed to the experiences of the national origin of the participants.

As Tanner's (1980) study continued to attract attention and replication, Sward's (1999) El Salvadoran research looked at "environmental sensitivity," an emotional caring for the environment, rather than the "environmental action" of Tanner's (1980) work. Environmental sensitivity was found to lead to environmental behavior (Sivek & Hungerford, 1989-1990). Participants included 17 professionals engaged in

environmental work. Data included demographic information that incorporated when a participant made a connection with nature. Questions on environmental sensitivity and the reasons for that sensitivity were also asked. Data were analyzed and coded for similarities. The results showed that 88% of the participants were sensitized to the environment by childhood outdoor experiences that occurred by the age of 11.3 years. The remaining findings were similar to those of the studies listed above.

Chawla (1999) extended Tanner's (1980) research by comparing Norway's environmentalists' backgrounds with those of the U.S. She included not only environmental educators, but also those working in related fields (e.g., city planners). Her work noted studies that reported autobiographical knowledge as a reliable data source (Neisser, 1981; Wagenaar, 1986). Chawla found that participants' childhood experiences were the pathway to future connections to environmental actions and interests.

Bixler and colleagues (2002) engaged in two studies that analyzed the amount of childhood play experiences in different environments. They asked participants to designate their preferences when shown pictures of outdoor environments for work and leisure time along with what they termed "disgust-evoking natural phenomena" (p. 805; e.g., stepping on a bug, having an insect land on them unexpectedly). They used similar research methods in both studies, which included a questionnaire with photos administered to middle and high-school students. The groups were comprised of 1,337 students in Study 1 and 450 in Study 2. Researchers concluded that early play experiences in nature do impact interest and choices in environmental locations for work and leisure. There was no data attained that directly linked childhood play with

environmental course selection at school.

Ewert and colleagues (2005) selected 533 college students from 21 varying college courses. These participants were not assumed to be engaged in environmental activities. Questions on ecocentric and anthropocentric attitudes were included in the questionnaire. The ecocentric questions referred to protecting nature for its intrinsic values (Catton & Dunlap, 1978) and the anthropocentrism questions, implied protecting nature for its value to human consumption and wellbeing (Milbrath, 1984). Questions pertaining to the previous findings from Tanner (1980) and Palmer and Suggate (1996) were included in the survey. These dealt with childhood outdoor experiences, education, personal experience with loss of a loved environment (e.g., natural outdoor area in which they played as a child), media, and outdoor organizations (e.g., summer camps.) The study's results indicated that early life experiences, along with the previously identified influences, led to a more ecocentric view of nature when participants reached adulthood.

A different approach to the study of environmental stewardship was undertaken by Wells and Lekies (2006). Their work addressed the long-term viability of childhood nature experiences on adults' actions using a representative population sample rather than drawing from the environmentalists' population. Their participants included 2,004 randomly selected individuals throughout the U.S. Each participant responded to questions through a phone survey. The questions distinguished "wild nature" (e.g., experiences in forests, deserts, natural environments) from "domesticated nature" (e.g., planting flowers, working in gardens.) Adults who had engaged in either type of nature experiences were found to have stronger connections to environmental behaviors, "with

‘wild’ nature before 11...a particularly potent pathway toward...environmental attitudes and behaviors in adulthood” (Wells & Lekies, 2006, p. 13). Another finding from the study, that was counter to previous work (Ewert et al., 2005; Palmer & Suggate, 1996; Tanner, 1980) showed engagement with programs such as scouting, or community environmental programs, was not a predictor of later environmental behavior or attitudes.

The studies above all utilized quantitative methods of data gathering and analysis. Arnold and colleagues (2009) completed a qualitative study of 12 Canadian youth environmental leaders ages 16-19. Rather than asking what influenced their stewardship, they asked how and why they were “transformed” in relationship to “influential people” and “influential experiences” in reference to environmental actions. In regard to “influential people” most of the participants noted parents being present in their lives and having an influence, which was noted as not always the case for this age group (Arnold et al., 2009). Other influencing events included role modeling, providing information and encouragement, raising awareness of environmental issues, and mentoring. These actions were provided by parents, friends, role models, and teachers.

Arnold and colleagues (2009) reported that transforming factors in relationship to “influential activities” included “unstructured...contact with nature through play beginning early in childhood” (p. 32) or at a later age in structured programs. Participants also noted they were provided opportunities in school through outdoor programs outside of the classroom. Three of the participants noted that their school environments “stifle[d] creativity and limit[ed] learning” (Arnold et al., 2009, p. 32). Participation in environmental conferences and organizations were noted as aiding in the participants’

transformation. Finally, although not described as a primary influence, three people included reading books and watching or listening to nature related media programs as reinforcement for their current beliefs.

Open-ended childhood experience in the outdoors was repeatedly identified as an influence of adult stewardship behavior (Arnold et al., 2009; Bixler et al., 2002; Chawla, 1998; Ewert et al., 2005; Palmer, 1993, 1998a, 1998b; Palmer & Suggate, 1996; Palmer et al., 1999). Evidence that childhood experiences shaped adult environmental behavior led me to investigate what might influence the provision of outdoor experiences for children in an early childhood environment.

### **Head Start**

One nationally recognized early childhood organization whose goal is to educate the whole child is the Head Start Program (Zigler & Styfco, 2010). This program began in 1965 to address the needs of young children living in poverty (Administration for Children and Families [ACF], 2011; Zigler & Styfco, 2010). The program's current purpose is to promote "school readiness by enhancing the social and cognitive development of children through the provision of educational, health, nutritional, social and other services to enrolled children and families" (Indiana Family and Social Services Administration, n.d.). In 2003, a document titled "Head Start Child Outcomes" was developed by the Office of Head Start to assess how well students were being prepared to enter the public school sector (David, 2003; U.S. DHHS, 2010). The intent of this document was to "move Head Start into increased accountability in concert with sound

child development principles” (David, 2003, p. 4).

Four years later the creation of “Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007” (hereafter referred to as Act 2007) was enacted (U.S. DHHS, 2007). Act 2007 included language for the reauthorization and funding of the national Head Start program. Sections within this document identified expectations of services for English language learners, changes in staff requirements, and the use of age, language, and culturally appropriate learning assessments, along with various other components concerning expectations and procedures. In 2010, 3 years after the enactment of Act 2007, Head Start redesigned the Head Start Child Outcomes and created the “Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework” (hereafter called Framework; U.S. DHHS, 2010). The Framework addressed the need to meet school readiness standards in collaboration with state and local structures. The Framework is comprised of 11 domains with 37 elements identified as essential for school readiness (U.S. DHHS, 2010).

Incorporated in the Framework domains was the field of science knowledge and skills. Although the elements of the “scientific skills and methods” section remained consistent between the 2003 and 2010 versions, changes in the “scientific knowledge” elements occurred with the addition of “social studies knowledge and skills” and “logic and reasoning” sections. The “knowledge of and respect for the environment” and “cause-effect relationships” elements were moved out of their previous section of “scientific knowledge” and into the new divisions of “social studies knowledge and skills” and “logic and reasoning” (U.S. DHHS, 2003, 2010). The current science knowledge and skills Framework identified the need for children “to be curious, explore,

ask questions, and develop their own theories about how the world works” (U.S. DHHS, 2010, p. 18).

One method of accountability used to ensure the Framework’s expectations were implemented was found in the “Head Start Performance Standards and Other Regulations” document (U.S. DHHS, 2006). Within this document were the expectations that Head Start staff would meet the needs of the children, families, and communities within their realm of influence as outlined in Act 2007. “Head Start Performance Standards and Other Regulations” specifically mentioned the inclusion of outdoor time for preschool age children, but only in relationship to the physical development of the child (U.S. DHHS, 2006, § 1304.21, (a5i)).

In December of 2010, \$120,995 was awarded to the Council for Environmental Education (CEE) by the EPA to support the movement of connecting children to nature, specifically in Head Start programs. The CEE’s program adopted for use with Head Start is *Growing Up Wild: Exploring Nature with Young Children* (GUW). Joretta Hawthorne, the executive director of CEE, noted, “Providing opportunities for young children to explore, play and learn in nature was vital for their development and for encouraging their future as environmental stewards” (as cited in Project Wild, 2010).

In Sec. 640, “Allotment of Funds; Limitations on Assistance” [42 U.S.C. 9835] of Act 2007, expectations were explicit for Head Start programs that

...all curricula funded under this subchapter shall be based on scientifically valid research, and be age and developmentally appropriate. The curricula shall reflect all areas of child development and learning and be aligned with the Head Start Child Outcomes Framework .... (U.S. Department, 2007, p. 23)

GUW was the first to nationally integrate early childhood curriculum with environmental

education; it also correlated its curriculum with the Head Start Framework (Project Wild, 2010). Within the G UW teaching guide was the suggestion for indoor and outdoor activities with instruction by the educator. An awareness of recent efforts to infuse environmental education into Head Start programs informed my study and led me to seek an increased understanding of the effects of individuals' choices on the environment.

Locally, the Head Start site where this study was conducted created a document distributed to parents, teachers, and staff identifying goals and sub-goals for children, family, and professional development. The goals included school readiness topics covering the four domains of child development: physical, social, emotional, and cognitive. Also included in the document were expectations of lifelong learning characteristics (such as interaction with peers and mentors, and development of learning interests through education) of parents and staff. The document does not mention either anthropocentric or ecocentric environmental stewardship.

### **Human Choices and the Oppression of the Environment**

Experiences in childhood had been shown to influence later environmental stewardship (Arnold et al., 2009; Bixler et al., 2002; Chawla, 1999; Ewert et al., 2005; Palmer, 1993, 1998a, 1998b; Palmer & Suggate, 1996; Palmer et al., 1999; Sivek & Hungerford, 1989-1990; Tanner, 1980; Wells & Lekies, 2006). The inclusion of the G UW curriculum in Head Start led me to consider the reasons for the recent emphasis on open-ended outdoor experiences for young children and to examine the literature regarding the need for stewardship of the earth. Environmentalists have worked on issues

to counteract, prevent, and “fix” humans’ altering impacts to the earth.

Those identified as environmentalists are part of the environmental movement which addresses concerns of harmful effects on the environment and works to find solutions. The online *Encyclopedia of American Environmental History* defined “Mainstream environmentalism [as]... an umbrella term that refers to environmental action by groups and individuals that focuses on enacting environmentally positive change within the political, economic, and cultural constructs of human society.” Human changes to the environment have a history, beginning with human’s presence on the earth.

Human civilizations’ environmental impacts to the earth started with the Holocene era (period of human occupation on the earth). A group of archeological researchers studied core samples, stratified deposits, pollen spectras, historical journals, and radiocarbon dated artifacts to determine the interaction of humans and the environment in which they lived (Redman et al., 2004). They studied areas in Central Mexico, France, Western North America, Southwestern U.S., Iran, the area between Israel and Jordan, Western Europe, and the islands of Rapanui (Easter), Mangaia (Cook), and Hawaii. These studies included civilizations from 20,000 BP (before present; the time period of uncalibrated radiocarbon dating) to 1803, with the Lewis and Clark Corps of Discovery.

What the researchers identified through an analysis of previous and current research were various human impacts to the natural environment. These included the following.

- Soil depletion, desertification, and salinization of soils (Fall, Falconer, Lines, & Metzger, 2004; Gunn, Crumley, Jones, & Young, 2004; James, 2004; Miller, 2004; O'Hara & Metcalfe, 2004; Redman, 2004; Van der Leeuw, Favory, & Girardot, 2004)
- Extinction of fauna and fish populations as a result of overhunting and introduction of domesticated animals (e.g., goat, sheep; James, 2004; Kirch, 2004; Martin & Szuter, 2004; Miller, 2004)
- Removal and extinction of native vegetation through consumption, use as fuel, building sources, and introduction of invasive species, agriculture, and “cash crops” (e.g., olives, grapes; James, 2004; Miller, 2004; O'Hara & Metcalfe, 2004; Redman, 2004; Van der Leeuw et al., 2004)
- Alteration and elimination of natural water sources (Gunn et al., 2004; Kohler, 2004; Miller, 2004; Redman, 2004)

(These researchers took into account local and worldwide climate changes in the analysis of the data.) Watson (2004) concluded, “We have never been... apart from nature; we have always been biological entities who are inescapably a part of nature... There is no place on earth where our kind has set collective feet that is free of human alteration” (p. 286).

To document the impetus for increasing attention to human caused environmental impacts, I chose to focus on three: use of pesticides, global warming, and deforestation. My selection of these three does not in any way indicate a hierarchy of the various environmental impacts the earth experiences as Rogers (2004) summarized:

Humans are now transforming their planet at an unprecedented rate and scale.... Lands that once supported large agricultural populations are now desert, the biological wealth of rainforests is disappearing at an alarming rate.... The planetary changes taking place have caused the greatest number of animal and plant life extinctions this world has ever known. (p. 271)

Through the study of ancient civilizations researchers identified evidence of environmental alterations. The continued study of human impacts to earth was apparent during the U.S. “modern environmental movement” (1960s) through the release of Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*. Carson (1962) reported on the use of chemical pesticides throughout the world (e.g., dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane—DDT.) She noted the impacts these chemicals had, not only on the intended target, but on surrounding forms of life as well. These impacts included pollution of water sources, sterilization of soils, death to humans, animals, birds, fish, and beneficial insect life, along with contamination of plant and cell life (Carson, 1962). Carson’s view of human’s perspective of the environment was stated in the following quote.

Our attitude towards plants is a singularly narrow one. If we see any immediate utility in a plant we foster it. If for any reason we find its presence undesirable or merely a matter of indifference, we may condemn it to destruction forthwith. (1962, p. 63)

As a result of Carson’s (1962) publication, changes were made in the use of pesticides, yet these chemicals were found to be impacting the health of both humans and the environment today. In my search for current research on pesticides in the *Environmental Sciences and Pollution Management* database (2006-2012) over 17,500 peer reviewed sources were identified. Titles of articles dealt with issues ranging from dangerous chemical levels in water (Schipper et al., 2008) to pesticides impacts on unborn children within their mother’s womb (Jurewicz & Hanke, 2008).

While Carson (1962) focused on chemical pesticides' impacts to the earth as a result of humans' actions, Weart (2011) studied the history of "global warming." Garte (2008) preferred the term "climate change" as "we are already feeling the climate change, even if the warming itself is still hard to detect for the average person" (p. 77). Weart's studies included the research of early scientists who believed carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) was impacting the temperature of the earth (Callendar, 1940, 1949, 1958, 1961; Plass, 1956a, 1956b, 1956c, 1956d, 1956e, 1959; Revelle & Fairbridge, 1957; Revelle & Suess; 1957). When Callendar (1940), one of the early researchers, reported his findings on the impact of increased CO<sub>2</sub> levels, his work was mostly ignored by fellow scientific researchers (Weart, 2011). Methods for measuring CO<sub>2</sub> improved in due course. Weart studied the findings of later scientists and found the range of climate changes over time. He concluded that CO<sub>2</sub> was being released at greater quantities than in the past in relation to humans' industrial production. CO<sub>2</sub> molecules could no longer be absorbed by the ocean as in previous eras (Weart, 2011). This increase in CO<sub>2</sub> levels was predicted to have an impact on the warming of the earth which had been associated with drought cycles, negative impacts on food production, change in worldwide weather patterns, death through extreme heat, rising sea levels, and extinction of species (Weart, 2011).

The increase of CO<sub>2</sub> levels has a relationship with deforestation, the removal of trees for other land uses. Trees, especially rainforests, absorb CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere. The combined loss of trees along with the increase of CO<sub>2</sub> levels has led to desertification such as what was occurring in the Amazonian rainforest of Brazil (Garte, 2008; Williams, 2006). Amazonian rainforests, especially in the past 60 years, had experienced changes

unseen in its history. In the mid-1960s “Operation Amazonia” was developed. The purpose of this government designed plan was to expand the capital production of Brazil’s resources. “The impetus for Brazil’s post-World War II accelerated deforestation was its obsession with economic development. The aim was to stimulate capital accumulation and industrialization through aggressive central planning in order to achieve a high rate of economic growth” (Williams, 2006, p. 439).

Roads were built into the Amazon and land cleared for the production of beef. Brazilians were offered tax breaks and land incentives to move from the coastal regions into the interior of the forests. They were encouraged and supported in clearing the land for cattle grazing. Tree-less land was considered “improved” by the government and their investors, and would bring higher prices when sold (Williams, 2006). Brazilian leaders also encouraged the removal of trees for hydroelectric power, which due to the topography of the land was unsuccessful. Rubber tree plantations were encouraged along with the introduction of imported wood fiber sources. Most of these projects did not meet the expectations of their creators, except to increase the profits of businesses at the expense of the poor (Williams, 2006). Since the inception of the “operation,” tracks of forest have been eliminated; with well “over 24,000 km<sup>2</sup> a year between 2002 and 2004” (Williams, 2006, p. 456). This amount of deforestation was comparable to the daily elimination of trees from an area the size of New York’s Central Park (Williams, 2006).

Throughout human history deforestation has been evident (Williams, 2006). Williams’ study of this history identified three features in the “ecological transformation” of wooded areas; fire, agriculture, and animal husbandry. These three methods of

deforestation were used to clear space for agriculture, ranching, travel, and the colonization of people. Humans gathered local and imported wood for shelter, furniture, fuel sources, weapons, tools, transportation, and cultivation. Williams commented that since the Holocene era “Across the globe, the first halting steps toward deforestation were under way. In the space of 10,000 years...humans were going to have an effect on global vegetation only slightly less dramatic and widespread than that of the Ice Age in the 100,000 years before” (p. 11).

Over time, human choices, as identified in the literature above, shaped the environment we live in. Human choice has been further characterized as a dominance of nature (Warren, 1996). Another characteristic has involved the use of nature for the betterment of man’s financial gain (Williams, 2006). Both characteristics have been associated with not only nature, but with the social structures of women and men (Gaard, 1993). Teachers of young children work at the intersection of children’s experiences and the environment. How do the social structures examined by Warren, Williams, and Gaard shape these early childhood educators’ decisions?

### **Ecofeminism**

The teaching force in early childhood education settings in the U.S. is comprised of 97 per cent women (DellaMattera, 2009). Within this educational structure women had been asked to adopt an environment of seeming impartiality while sustaining a hegemonic social structure (Grumet, 1988). Part of this structure was viewed as a system that would “deny attachment” (Grumet, 1988, p. 181) to one’s students, forwarding the

notion of rugged independence rather than interdependence and caring. Griffin (1997) and Grumet described women educators as historically having their choices constrained by a larger patriarchal social system that impinged on their curricular choices. Within this system, the female gendered perspective had been viewed as suppressed in both the nurturing of children and caring for the environment (Grumet, 1988; Macris, 2011; Tamir, 2011).

This denial of caring was witnessed in “Operation Amazonia” where the quest for material gain by those in power left alterations to the natural resources (Williams, 2006). Nature was used as a means of increasing personal wealth and in the process was altered. The degradation of nature, along with the predominance of women working in the early childhood workforce to instill in children a caring attitude toward nature (GUW), led me to the use of the ecofeminist theory for this study. “Ecofeminists seek nondominating relationships among all living things. Nature exists not as an abstract concept but rather in the everyday lived experiences of every human” (Dobscha & Ozanne, 2001, p. 203).

Tenets of the ecofeminist movement were first set forth by Francoise d’Eaubonne in 1974 at a national women’s conference. “Ecofeminism’s basic premise is that the ideology which authorizes oppressions such as those based on race, class, gender, sexuality, physical abilities and species is the same ideology which sanctions the oppression of nature” (Gaard, 1993, p. 1). Oppression, from an ecofeminist perspective, created a dualistic society in which those with power were considered “on top” and those without were beneath, including nature (Warren, 1996, 2000).

Since its inception, ecofeminism diversified into four philosophical categories

with varying positions. These philosophies included nature, radical-cultural, spiritual, and social-constructionist, which contained the transformative and global perspectives (Tong, 2009). I chose the social-constructionist philosophy for my work which presented the female/male culture as socially constructed. This belief professed that women and men must join culture and nature together and avoid “war” with one another (Tong, 2009). Those who followed this philosophy sought to create an environment of care, free of “-isms.”

Tenets of the ecofeminist theory were that all of life would be respected and all forms of oppression would end, and there existed in the world an interconnectedness of all things (Gaard, 1993; Warren, 1996). This lens was used to interpret how the privilege of some rested on the exploitation of others and the environment. It “is a perspective which challenges the domination and hierarchical systems of oppression that underlie the patriarchal structures and philosophies of the dominant culture” (Houde & Bullis, 1999, p. 150).

Although I chose to use the social-constructionist ecofeminist lens for this study, I recognize that there are men who support environmental causes, women’s issues, and live a non-consuming lifestyle, alongside women who do not. I also understand that I brought my own familiarity with a rich, “wild,” open-ended, outdoor childhood to my work, not only as a child, but as an educator and mother.

The existence of environmental degradation has been established in the literature. As well, the hierarchical social structures that perpetuate human dominance of the earth and anthropocentric ideals are also well documented. Women’s location, particularly the

location of women teachers, within these power structures has been widely critiqued. Little has been done to examine the way that environment related choices of early childhood teachers are shaped within these larger social forces.

### **Purpose, Objectives, and Research Questions**

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to document and examine the influences that promoted or restricted three early childhood educators' inclusion of open-ended outdoor learning time for their students. Outdoor experiences in childhood was the number one influence identified by participants in studies of environmentalists' decisions to work for environmental causes (Arnold et al., 2009; Bixler et al., 2002; Chawla, 1999; Ewert et al., 2005; Palmer, 1993, 1998a, 1998b; Palmer & Suggate, 1996; Palmer et al., 1999; Sivek & Hungerford, 1989-1990; Tanner, 1980; Wells & Lekies, 2006). Additionally, this study connected the dynamics observed and information gathered from interviews and document analysis to the tenets of social constructionist ecofeminism. In particular, I examined the way gendered, hierarchical social structures influenced the dynamics of curricular choices for early childhood educators.

#### **Objectives**

1. To identify what influences promote or restrict three early childhood educators' inclusion of open-ended outdoor learning time for their students
2. To identify how three early childhood educators respond to influences that promoted or restricted their inclusion of open-ended outdoor learning time for their

students

3. To develop an understanding of the connections between the tenets of social constructionist ecofeminism and early childhood educators' decisions to provide open-ended outdoor experiences to their students

### **Research Questions**

The main research questions for this study were as follows.

1. What influences promote or restrict three early childhood educators' inclusion of open-ended outdoor learning time for their students?

2. How did three early childhood educators respond to influences that promoted or restricted their inclusion of open-ended outdoor learning time for their students?

3. Were the dynamics surrounding decisions of early childhood educators regarding the provision of open-ended outdoor experiences connected to the tenets of social constructionist ecofeminism? If so, in what ways?

The intended outcome of this study was to provide further understanding to the knowledge base of influences that promoted or restricted early childhood educators' inclusion of open-ended outdoor learning time for their students. Information was also added to the field of ecofeminist theory in the early childhood arena. (This theory has rarely been used in connection to early childhood education in which women were the key stakeholders.)

### **CHAPTER III**

#### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

In order to explore the research questions, I employed a qualitative, purposeful, 3 month, bounded case study (Creswell, 1998; Stake, 2005). This method provided the opportunity to hear the stories from a small sample of a targeted population and to gain an “understanding [of] the meanings people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (Merriam, 1998, p. 6). The intended audience for this study included my doctoral committee, early childhood and other educators, ecofeminist theorists, and environmentalist populations. Permission to conduct this study was granted by the Utah State University Institutional Review Board (IRB). Throughout this study there was the recognition that the direction could change as new insights were discovered and stories shared.

This chapter includes a description of the research design utilized to gain a deeper understanding of the participants’ experiences. The participant population is introduced and followed by an explanation of the design which includes multiple data sources including: information meeting, interviews, observations, photo documentation of the outdoor environment, examination of schedules, and curricular plans, along with member checking and analysis. Also incorporated are the theoretical framework, data collection, limitations, delimitations, and researcher positionality statement (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Collected data was triangulated through the use of multiple data sources: interviews, observations, teacher and director provided artifacts, and observations.

## **Population and Participant Sample**

For this qualitative, purposeful, bounded case study, situated in a rural study site, teachers were selected to ensure the opportunity to collect varied sources of data from the intended target population. The participants were chosen using a criterion sampling (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007) based on the participants' position as early childhood educators in a preschool (3- to 5-year-olds) setting situated in a rural community. In this preschool setting, three teachers shared the role as lead teacher, rotating from week to week. The teachers who were interviewed and observed were at one time or another considered the lead teacher within the two classrooms at this location and made curriculum choices for their students. Therefore, all three teachers were included in the study. The research location consisted of two classrooms and a communal outdoor learning environment. Both classrooms employed a similar daily schedule for indoor and outdoor activities. As a result, both classrooms shared the outdoor learning space at the same time.

The educators' practices at this location included daily experiences for children in the outdoors. Over the past 13 years, I have had a professional relationship with the teachers and staff at the study site, a local Head Start center. In communication with the center's curriculum director, I became aware that they had not been trained on the G UW curriculum, nor were they aware of its existence (personal communication, March 15, 2012). I wondered how this unawareness and other factors might be influencing the outdoor experiences these teachers were providing for their students. As noted previously, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO,

2008), along with findings from previous studies (Arnold et al., 2009; Bixler et al., 2002; Chawla, 1999; Ewert et al., 2005; Palmer, 1993, 1998a, 1998b; Palmer & Suggate, 1996; Palmer et al., 1999; Sivek & Hungerford, 1989-1990; Wells & Lekies, 2006), concluded that early childhood was a time when relationships with the outdoor natural environment were being formed.

### **Information Meeting**

The study began in the spring of 2012, with a one hour information meeting for the participants at the Head Start Center, the location of the research. At this meeting I explained the purpose of the study, the methods to be utilized, and the analyses to be conducted. I answered any questions or concerns participants had and shared with them the contact information for myself and the principal investigator, Dr. Martha Whitaker. They were informed that their participation was purely voluntary and their continuation in the study could be self-terminated at any point. Informed consent documents were provided to the participants. These were explained to the participants, signed, dated and returned to me, where they were secured in my locked office.

### **Participants**

The participants for this study reside in a rural community whose county's population is 10,000 members. The community has a culture of families remaining in the area after high school graduation and raising their own families. There is a predominant religion in the area that influences many of the social and political norms of the region.

Multiple generations have been employed in jobs related to energy production. Recreational activities include four wheeling, camping, hunting, baseball, and dirt biking. There is a yearly tradition during schools' spring break to head to the desert to camp with family and friends, and explore the area on motorized vehicles of various sizes and types. The surrounding federal lands are seen as land available for their recreational use. Any discussion of closing roads or limiting access to the land is passionately rejected by the citizenry.

For this study, participants were provided an opportunity to self-select a pseudonym; they all granted me permission to assign one for them. The identifiers I assigned were: Teacher 1 (T1), Teacher 2 (T2), Teacher 3 (T3), Teacher 4 (T4), and Administrator (Adm). After the study had begun, T1 had selected to work in another environment and a new teacher, T4, was hired. All participants were Caucasian women ranging in age from their early 30s to mid-60s.

T1 began her career at Head Start after receiving her associate's degree and following the birth of her last child. She grew up in the area, married, raised her children, and helps with her grandchildren. When asked about her decision to go into education she said, "I knew I wanted to do something with kids, but not sure what. My mom was a teacher so that kind of lead that pathway." Financial aid was provided by Head Start for her to complete her Bachelor's degree in Education. She has been at this location for fourteen years. Over the summer she self-selected not to return for the following year. I have included her interview in the analysis of the data, but had no observations to triangulate her responses. As the study progressed, an additional teacher participant T4

was added to replace T1.

T2 moved to the area in order to have the support of her mother when her youngest child became ill. She enrolled two of her four children in the local Head Start center and began volunteer work there. Part of her volunteer work included membership on the Head Start policy council. When her youngest two children “were old enough” she began work at the center as a teaching aide. During her 8-year employment she received her associate’s degree and is currently finishing her bachelor’s degree. “I’ll be doing my senior project and taking one of my required classes and statistics next semester. I’m excited. I keep telling everybody I’m going to have my life back.” Her Associate’s degree qualified her to move into the teaching role. When sharing what happens on the playground she noted, “You kind of get to know what kids like to do what. You get a kid playing baseball and then pretty soon you have twelve of them over there.

T3 has been working with Head Start for the past 6 years after completing her bachelor’s degree in early childhood development. She described her work with children as, “They’re fun! It’s so neat to see them grow and learn and accomplish things and I really enjoy it.” She shared a story about her wonder of children’s thinking.

I remember when my daughter was little I had a plant and she said, “Mom, its growing dead” because I hadn’t watered it. She said, “growing dead.” I didn’t really know; we better get it a drink. It just kind of floored me how she thought about death.

At the end of the interview T3 shared that she would soon be heading off for a week of river running in a wilderness area. She seemed excited, but a bit apprehensive at the same time, as she had never done this before.

T4 began her teaching career working for nine years in elementary and secondary

education. She “took a break for 3 years” and then heard about the Head Start position and applied. This is her first year at the center and she is continuing to learn the policies and requirements of the organization. During the interview she noted the expectations of the program, including the outdoor time. “We have a teacher team [when working on the playground] so we do rotate. Today I was lead teacher so I’m in here all day. Tomorrow I’ll be out in the morning, and I’ll be in in the afternoon.” When talking about the schedule she noted, “We try to have a set schedule; we don’t go out before 3:30 usually, because we have our daily routine that we’re following so much.” When asked about her preference for outdoor time she stated, “I would prefer only having like 15 minutes out on the playground. If I could go out at 3:30 and have like 15 minutes..., I would prefer that, sort of a lesson before you go; [more structured play for children].” When asked about the school’s policies and Head Start requirements for outdoor time she shared her uncertainties as to what they were. “I’m sure there probably is a policy, but like I said, I’m new so I’m trying to learn things. I don’t know [about the Head Start requirements].”

The Adm began her involvement with Head Start as a parent and classroom volunteer over 40 years ago. She first heard about Head Start in 1967, soon after its initial beginnings.

I was a parent who enrolled her child in Head Start and had this wonderful vision that he would go off to Head Start every day and I could mop the floor without little feet walking across it, and I’d sit down to a sewing machine and make a project uninterrupted. That was my naïve world.

She became involved in the Parent and Policy Committees, Policy Council, Community Action Program, and Board of Directors, where she chaired the board. She was employed as the health coordinator, director, and eventually the executive director of the region’s

Head Start. Her education came from hands-on experience and she holds no “formal” education degree. She currently directs the \$4,500,000 Head Start programs in eight counties with services to over 500 children.

As noted previously, T1 self-selected to take another position over the summer break after the interviews had been conducted. You will note the references to four teachers as well as the administrator in Chapter IV—Results (see Table 1 below). I choose to include T1’s comments in the data as they added to the participants’ story.

Table 1

*Participants, Positions, and Researcher Comments*

Participants	Position	Comments
T1	Teacher 1	Left over summer break. Interview included in data.
T2	Teacher 2	
T3	Teacher 3	
T4	Teacher 4	First year at Head start, filled T1’s position
Adm	Administrator	

## Data Collection

### Interviews

I utilized semi structured 1-hour interviews with each of the participants in what Fontana and Frey (2005) identified as an “empathetic” approach. In this approach “The interviewer becomes an advocate and partner in the study” (p. 696), emphasizing the people versus the issue. The location for the interviews was mutually decided upon to provide a level of comfort and ease for the participants. Interviews were scheduled with each of the individual participants. Two took place at the end of May, two at the

beginning of June, and one in November (this interview was with a new teacher who had replaced one of the original members of the study.) Three of the interviews were held at my office, and two at the Head Start center. This format provided an opportunity for the participant's voice to be heard and, at times, for them to lead the discussion (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Fontana & Frey, 2005). The intent of the interviews was to "add to our respondents first, to the study next, and to ourselves last" (Fontana & Frey, 2005, p. 716). Confidentiality of the participants was maintained by applying pseudonyms. There was no connotation of importance in the assigning of participant pseudonyms.

A semistructured interview was also conducted with the executive director of the Head Start Center. The selection of this participant provided an opportunity to gain an understanding of the intent of the institution, its continuing history, and her current leadership role in the classroom curriculum. This interview was scheduled for one hour and included similar processes as the teachers. A follow-up meeting was held with the executive director when questions on formal written playground rules and documentation arose.

At one point during my visits I stopped to visit with the center's curriculum director with a question concerning the curriculum. She handed me a copy of an evaluation tool used by the center, "CLASS" and noted it as an important component of their onsite evaluations. She also shared a listing of web sites used by the center for curricular decisions. These included the National Head Start and High Scope sites. High Scope is the adopted curriculum program of this Head Start. She commented that there was great emphasis on processes and readiness standards and noted, "We have to be

ready, ready, ready, ready,” as she smiled. These websites became data for part of my document analysis. In this way, informal interviews/conversations led to sources for document analysis.

The interviews included open-ended questions (see Appendix A) on the influences that promoted or restricted the teachers’ inclusion of open-ended learning time and how participants responded to those influences. I provided time for the participants to share the narrative of their journey to Head Start and their current position (Chase, 2005). The use of open-ended questions provided an opportunity for the participants to tell their story and encouraged a dialogue to occur eliminating a possible perceived power structure or imposed direction during the conversation (Chase, 2005; Fontana & Frey, 2005). This interview style was an occasion for “interviewer and interviewee... [to be] co-constructors of knowledge” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 18). The interview was audio recorded and later transcribed verbatim by me. Four follow-up informal teacher interviews took place during the research process to clarify participants meaning for open-ended and playground processes, such as their understanding of the outdoor rules and boundaries. This information was documented after the event, noting participant, date, time, and situation.

Transcribed interviews were e-mailed to the participants for feedback and input. Lincoln and Guba (1985) noted this as “the most critical technique for establishing credibility” (p. 314). Participants were provided the opportunity to clarify or expand on their responses during this process and ask follow up questions of their own. None of the participants responded with changes to the original transcripts after verification that they

had been received.

### **Observations**

Participant observations, or as Wolcott (2009) said, “experiencing” (p. 48) of the preschool setting occurred over a “bounded” (Creswell, 1998, p. 37) 3-month time period beginning in September of 2012 and concluding in November of 2012. The observations included the three teachers who rotated in the lead teacher position. Due to the shared outdoor learning time and space, all three were observed within the 50-minute time span of my outdoor observations. This time period included two visits in each of the indoor classrooms for observations. Through the observations I experienced the participants in their natural setting (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The data collected was seen as an opportunity to understand participants’ experiences shared in the interview and to add to their stories (Angrosino, 2005; Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2008). The observation protocol included written notes taken during and after sessions in the classroom and on the playground for future analysis. The observations focused on describing what promoted or restricted open-ended outdoor learning time provided to students and how the teacher navigated the challenges in providing open-ended outdoor time. The use of the tenets of the ecofeminist lens narrowed the field of data collected.

Teachers were asked if they preferred the observations to be scheduled for a specific time or date. They all replied that anytime would work and that no formal schedule was necessary. The preschool had two class sessions, one from 9-12:30 pm and the other from 12:30-4:00 pm. I observed twice during the morning session and three times during the afternoon. The observations included 20-30 minutes of indoor classroom

time before students were to go outdoors for the remaining 20 minutes of their school day. I took notes using a clipboard containing lined paper and a pencil as my writing tool. I positioned myself in the classroom on the periphery of student activities so as not to interfere with their routine. If the teacher was available I would take a few moments to ask about the daily schedule and activities they had planned. My intention was to not interfere with the teacher-student interaction.

While outdoors I would walk around the enclosed gravel play area on the concrete walkway documenting the teacher-student interactions along with children's behavior. At times students would head to the sandbox or grassy areas outside of the walkway and I would move in their direction without interfering in their play.

Occasionally, both indoors and out, students would initiate conversations and share items of their interest with me. During these times I would respond and interact until they were directed back to an activity by the teacher. My decision to be engaged in this interaction rested on Adler and Adler's (1994) concept of the observer as a borderline member of the environment in which they study. The child's initiation of engagement and my own early childhood educational background also played a part in this decision. Adler and Adler noted:

One of the hallmarks of observation has traditionally been its noninterventionism. Observers neither manipulate nor stimulate their subjects.... Qualitative observation is fundamentally naturalistic in essence: it occurs in the natural context of occurrence, among the actors who would naturally be participating in the interaction, and follows the natural stream of everyday life. (p. 378)

I remained on the playground until the students were on buses to be transported home. Once the buses left, the teachers and I would head indoors. If I had a question on

what I had observed, I would check with the teacher for clarification at this time.

Throughout the observation stage of my research, I recognized that what I was writing down and observing was done with a researcher bias. I maintained an awareness of postmodernists' suggestion "that because absolute truth is an impossibility, any effort to take action is bound to be compromised by the situational biases of researchers" (Angrosino & Rosenberg, 2011, p. 476). The awareness of my own biases and theoretical framework supported my efforts to keep unwarranted influences from being interjected into the process.

### **Photo Documentation of the Outdoor Environment**

On two occasions I took my camera to the observation site to photograph the outdoor play environment when the children were not present. I recognized this was a view I selected to be included in the picture frame and was filtered through my experiences of what was important to document (Harper, 2000). Use of the pictures provided added meaning to the analysis of data as "built spaces provide symbolic boundaries as well as physical boundaries" (Atkinson & Delamont, 2005, p. 827). My intent in using this as a data source was as a memory cue to the actual play environment I was observing and as a method of triangulation (see Appendix B for illustration of outdoor play environment.)

### **Library Research and Documents**

Head Start curriculum documents and websites were analyzed for records of previous use of open-ended outdoor learning time. I was granted access to the center's

collection of reference items that were available for teachers' use. These items included resources for in class activities such as indoor curriculum, science experiments, early literacy, holidays, and writing skills. Information pertaining to health issues included health guidelines, nutrition, and foods. The remaining items were a mix of fifteen-year-old college texts, information on setting up a classroom indoor environment, training ideas, and the Perry Preschool Project. One piece of data that incorporated outdoor activities was a book on parachute play.

The daily plan was printed out and posted in each of the classrooms. This plan included the "Theme of the Month" along with a table segmented into time frames with specific activities clearly delineated. Open-ended time was not mentioned on this schedule, but the words "work time" were included to indicate when time was designated for students to "explore." These were studied in the context of their use with the interviews and observations rather than in isolation. I noted the authors of the documents as a means to help me more fully understand what was considered important to record and from whose perspective.

I used university research databases and literature, along with appropriate government documents and websites, as new pathways or discoveries were revealed to further my understanding of influences that relate to the promotion or restriction of three early childhood educators' inclusion of open-ended outdoor learning time for their students.

## Analysis

Using the tenets of the ecofeminist lens, I reviewed and analyzed the transcribed data from interviews and observations in order to identify themes. This process included a rereading of the data, summarizing the findings, and utilizing open coding, identifying initial themes within the data sets. I followed with a focused coding looking within the identified open themes for themes related to the research questions and ecofeminist lens (Creswell, 1998; Emerson et al., 1995). This process involved identifying ideas, repeated words, and short phrases. The coding of observation and interviews was “a way to name, distinguish, and identify the conceptual import and significance of particular observations” (Emerson et al., 1995, p. 151).

The analysis of the collected observation and interview data was an ongoing process, which Creswell (1998) referred to as a “data analysis spiral” (p.142). As new ideas were identified, they were added to previous themes which then lead to new themes or a reframing of previous subject matter. My intent was to find “concern with the meaning of experience, voice, human qualities on personal or professional dimensions, and research as a story” (Cortazzi, 2008, p. 386).

Once the themes were identified and described the process of interpreting began (Creswell, 1998). The story of the participants was told including the common themes associated with each, using the ecofeminist lens to inform the development of a narrative that responded to the research questions. This lens narrowed the focus of the findings to themes relating to hegemonic expectations that nature and women will afford their resources for the good of a patriarchal structure (Gaard, 1993; Griffin, 1997; Grumet,

1988; Macris, 2011; Nhanenge, 2011; Warren, 1996, 2012).

Triangulation of data was accomplished through the use of multiple data sources, including interviews, observations, and review of organizational records and documents. Member checking for accuracy in transcriptions, summaries, and interpretation of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) provided assurance of the credibility of the data. Interview questions are supplied in an appendix at the end of the research documentation to provide the reader with a more complete understanding of the interview process (see Appendix A.)

### **Limitations**

The selection of the Head Start preschool educators provided a research site that uses a nationally recognized program with delineated standards not universally available at primary grade levels. A limitation of the study was the self-reporting nature of the interviews. Additionally, while providing a deep and nuanced exploration of the study's research questions, the data gathered is specific to these educators at this site. It did not and will not provide a definite conclusion to the discussion of these issues. Data from this study will be used to add to the understanding of influences that promote or restrict early childhood educators' inclusion of open-ended outdoor learning time for their students and to broaden the knowledge base of connections between early childhood educators' experiences and an ecofeminist perspective.

### **Researcher Positionality**

I recognize that "objective reality can never be captured" (Denzin & Lincoln,

2005, p. 5) and that my interpretation of the phenomenon is shaped by my own understandings and experiences. I brought my own experiences of life into my work as “a socially situated researcher” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 22) with over 20 years of experience in the early childhood field. The school environment was somewhat familiar to me, as I have worked in a professional relationship with staff at Head Start on and off for over thirteen years. This insider familiarity was both an advantage and a reason for the study. I consciously monitored my own behaviors, interpretations, and possible impacts these may have had on the participants, data, and analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Olesen, 2005). Recognizing my experiences may have impacted the interpretation of what I discovered, I maintained a reflective journal of my experiences, processes, thoughts, reactions, methods, reasoning, further questions, and emerging ideas to the process and findings of the study along with the use of member checking during data analysis.

### **Delimitations**

The intent of this study was not to evaluate teaching methods, but to identify influences that promoted or restricted early childhood educators’ inclusion of open-ended outdoor learning time for their students, to examine the way they navigated those influences, and to connect those findings to larger social issues that are central to social constructionist ecofeminist theory. This study included a small intentional sampling of rural, early childhood educators’ perspectives which cannot be generalized to the larger population. The research question and theoretical lens guided and bounded the data collected. Due to the limited time period of the research, I realize that the picture I

observed was not necessarily all encompassing. I selected the early child age group because this has been identified as “a period when the foundations of thinking, being, knowing and acting are becoming ‘hard wired’ and relationships—with others and with the environment—are becoming established. It is also a time for providing significant groundings for adult activism around environmental issues” (UNESCO, 2008).

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

My purpose for this study was to investigate what promotes or restricts three early childhood educators' inclusion of open-ended outdoor learning time for their students. The utilization of an ecofeminist lens guided my findings. Ecofeminism promotes the concept of equality for all living and non-living things, the elimination of a system of dualisms, while maintaining "an ethic of care" (Gilligan, 1982; Grumet, 1988; Nhanenge, 2011; Noddings, 2003, 2005; Plumwood, 2006; Warren, 2012). In the findings below, I attempted to represent the voice of the participants throughout while recognizing my perspective impacted my analysis.

#### Identifying Themes

The documentation of the findings began with an analysis of the data focusing on preserving the voices of the participants. Transcriptions of the interviews were analyzed for word, phrases, and concept repetition and were labeled with emerging codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This process also took place for the documentation of the observations and the reading of the program's documents. In this process, I identified codes through reading and rereading of the interviews, observations, and documents. I noted repeated words and phrases, and in each subsequent review of the data I examined them for relevancy to the research questions. During the process of data analysis follow-up questions were addressed to the participants to clarify my understanding of the data. Peräklyä and Ruusuvoori (2011) described this process as "much closer to naturally

occurring” (p. 529).

After I had read the data numerous times, I narrowed the codes to eight within the interview data, eight additional codes in the observations, and one in the documents. In looking for commonalities across the data codes, I identified four themes using a process outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994). The themes (see Table 2) are: (a) participants’ attitudes, (b) Head Start program requirements, (c) classroom and playground context, and (d) student behavior. These, along with the codes, will be described in detail in the following pages.

Table 2

*Identified Themes That Promoted and Restricted Open-Ended Outdoor Learning Time*

Theme	Codes	Promoted	Restricted
Participants’ attitudes	Anthropocentrism		✓
	Absence of appreciation of natural objects	✓	✓
	Decontextualization of living and natural objects	✓	✓
Head Start Program requirements	Safety regulation		✓
	Schedule	✓	✓
	Core curriculum	✓	✓
	Records		✓
	Child’s development		✓
	Absence of Project Wild data		✓
Classroom and playground context	Formal activity		✓
	Structure		✓
	Control and order		✓
	Equipment	✓	✓
	Teacher engagement	✓	✓
Student behavior	Children’s energy	✓	
	Self-discovery	✓	✓
	Secrecy	✓	✓

✓ Designates theme found in promotion and/or restriction categories.

Classroom teaching and management by women has been seen as a socially constructed reproduction of a hegemonic system of order and adherence to rules

generated by a patriarchal structure (Grumet, 1988; Nhanenge, 2011). Some women, unknowingly, continue this system of power and privilege in regard to their student interactions within the classroom structure by means of dualisms.

Dualism is more than difference and hierarchies. It is a logical structure where the values associated with the other systematically and pervasively are constructed as being inferior. The domination process includes construction of concepts, qualities, and identities, which the inferior must internalize. (Nhanenge, 2011, p. 112)

This practice has been viewed as a result of training and continuation of long held educational patriarchal practices. “Education was the way in which the community life, values, norms, and economic advantages of the powerful were to be protected” (Apple & Franklin, 2004, p. 63). Warren (2012) presented this concept as an “oppressive conceptual framework” (p. 590), which is based on a logical structure and value system (Nhanenge, 2011). Within this conceptual framework are three components: (a) value-hierarchical thinking that places the dominant one in an “up” position over the other; they hold the power, while the other is considered in a “down” position in need of direction; (b) value dualisms, in which certain characteristics are more valued than others (e.g., teacher characteristics are valued over childhood characteristics); and (c) logic of domination which is based on the supposition that one group possesses a characteristic that is granted a perceived superior value (e.g., humans’ intelligence over nature). The perceived value then justifies the group’s dominance over another person or thing based on a logic created by those in power (Warren, 2012).

The “oppressive conceptual framework,” a component of ecofeminist theory, became useful in my collection and analysis of the data. Warren’s (2012) conceptions of

the “logic of domination” were as compelling as a mathematical argument at my research site. When applied to the results of my study in the Head Start environment the following scenario becomes clear: (a) teachers possess more knowledge and as a result more power than children. Because of this socially accepted view they are acknowledged as being in control of classroom settings and (b) children do not possess the knowledge to avoid dangerous situations and are in need of protection (they are seen as less able). Adults (teachers) possess knowledge of safety (a higher value); therefore, (c) teachers are superior to children and are justified in exerting their dominance over them to maintain their safety and well-being. Teachers were given the “up” position in the dualism and the students were allotted the “down.” This positioning was “necessary to turn difference into domination and to justify it” (Nhanenge, 2011, p. 107).

This dualism was also present in relationship to the participants of this study and Head Start requirements, which contained elements modeled on a patriarchal structure of education (Zigler & Styfco, 2010). The logic of domination scenario for teachers and Head Start requirements would resemble the following argument: (a) teachers’ knowledge base of what young children need is incomplete (less value), and those who develop the guidelines for the organization know what is needed (more value) and are therefore in control; (b) Head Start’s rules, regulations, and requirements will provide what young children need to be ready for school (a greater value); (c) therefore, Head Start’s expectations are superior to teachers’ knowledge and must be adhered to in teachers’ decisions about how to manage the children, what content to teach, etc.

Part (a) in both scenarios was a premise, a view, determined by society to be

accurate in a classroom environment; someone had to control the children, and someone had to tell teachers what to do. This was consistent with Warren's (2012) view; to perpetuate domination one must be using the logic of domination. In education this logic may happen unconsciously (i.e., the teacher may be unaware of promoting and continuing the patriarchal dominance; Grumet, 1988). Educators were acting as a bridge into this way of thinking, a bridge into the logic of patriarchy. Grumet proposed that teachers are immersed in the practice, so it seems natural. It would take effort and thought to facilitate a new way of being. In the small population of my study, surrounded by a much larger world, this logic of domination and the practice of dualism were evident. Through the use of the ecofeminist lens the following themes emerged.

## **Findings**

### **Participants' Attitudes**

In studying the inclusion of open-ended outdoor activities the theme of *participants' attitudes* was identified. Within this theme the codes of *anthropocentrism*, *absence of appreciation of natural objects*, and *decontextualization of living and natural objects* were recognized. These three data codes suggested the presence of dynamics that both promoted (two of the three codes) and restricted (all three codes) students' open-ended outdoor learning time. Below are the findings, categorized and explained, beginning with those that restricted, and followed by those that promoted open-ended outdoor learning time.

**Restricted.** All three codes of "participants' attitudes" were found to restrict

children's experiences with open-ended outdoor learning time, beginning with anthropocentrism.

*Anthropocentrism.* "In anthropocentric culture, attributions tend to overemphasize the human and underemphasize or deny the agency of nature" (Plumwood, 2006, p. 131). This perspective was present at the site throughout my observations and interviews. The environment was viewed and used as a tool to meet the participants' school needs. One way this occurred was through the teaching and tracking of developmental data of students. T2 shared how the outdoors was used to complete these data checklists.

We take the kids out and bounce the ball, see if they can dribble it, if they can hit the ball, if they're riding a bike, if they're walking up and down the stairs. I like to count everything when we're outside, steps, and objects, there's so much to count. You can do colors. You can pretty much do everything outside.

During a visit in October, I observed a variety of pumpkins on a classroom table. Children had put various noses, eyes, mouths from a Mr. Potato Head game into the pumpkins to form faces. A while later when the children were outdoors, they were provided an opportunity to try out pumpkin seeds as a snack. T4 led them to a circle and handed out one or two commercially packaged pumpkin seeds to each interested child. As she handed out the seeds she explained: "You don't want to eat the seeds right out of a pumpkin. You can eat these because I bought them at the store."

All participants expressed similar views on the use of the outdoors as a means to meet their curricular needs when asked what the outdoor environment was like. This anthropocentric view centered on a common response from participants that described the outdoors as a platform for manufactured equipment. "We have two slides...two merry go

rounds...the little bouncy horses...a climbing thing and a slide down the other side...a little house...bikes, balls, a little basketball hoop...a sand box, a bike track, and the playground has gravel.” T2 commented on teachers having to raise their own funds in order to purchase new equipment to put on the playground. “It’s a constant struggle to get new playground equipment.”

*Absence of appreciation of natural objects.* When children took their yearly fall walk through the nearby neighborhood, they collected leaves and various items. T3 commented on the process that occurs when they return to the classroom.

I’m not sure what kind of trees they are for sure but the kids always make a pile and jump in them. They’ll take some back to school and we’ll make a wreath, or let them, if they don’t have the skills to make the wreath...we’ll let them glue them on paper.

I inquired about the resource items available to teachers and was directed to the teachers’ work room and a shelf containing various books. When searching the documents none of the available resources were related to nature’s intrinsic value, nor was there any mention of developing stewardship values in children.

During interviews, participants shared that the outdoors was used as an opportunity for children to engage in structured games and develop gross motor skills with the use of manufactured items. When asked what the outdoor time was like for children T1 explained:

They’re free to choose whatever they wanted to do like play on the playground, ride the bicycles, play with the balls, hula hoops, jump ropes...we have pvc pipes with funnels and stuff that they could build- snap together to build different things to dump the sand, dirt, gravel in. And then we had a bigger kind of like an aquarium that they would put the bugs in so they could watch them. We have sidewalk chalk out and they were even coloring the bark of the trees with the chalk.

The presence of trees or grass was not mentioned in any of the descriptions even though they were in close proximity. The one exception was when the nearby hills were described as a location to roll Easter eggs and run sack races.

*Decontextualization of living and natural objects.* Natural items were used in ways that took them out of their natural setting. T1 noted “we try to get their large muscle skills because that’s a good time to develop them outside.” She continued:

We’ll count to the playground so they get their counting in. We’ll ask them how many steps do you think it is going to take to get to the playground. So just little stuff like that they’re learning.... Just throw it in there.

During circle time pictures were used for each letter of the alphabet as the children recited the sounds made by the letter. The pictures showed animals isolated from their natural environment (e.g., lion and monkey riding a bicycle). The animals were presented in cartoon drawings and were one method of teaching counting and letter sounds. Animals were used in various methods within the classroom. They were depicted wearing human clothing, as play tokens for counting, and displayed numerous anthropomorphic behaviors in children’s stories.

Rather than allowing children to observe insects in their natural environment, they would be captured and placed in viewing bottles or large observation structures inside the classroom. When children find bugs “We have little containers they can put them in and they bring them into the classroom” (T3). During autumn, beehives were found on the playground. T4 explained how they were handled, “We brought them in and we talked about, what we have...we used them like, you know, like a mini-lesson.”

**Promoted.** Identified in the theme of participants’ attitudes were two codes that

promoted as well as restricted open-ended outdoor learning time. These two codes were *absence of appreciation of natural objects* and *decontextualization of living and natural objects*. While such attitudes seem counter to the encouragement of open-ended outdoor learning experiences, activities that were shaped by these disconnections from natural objects inadvertently created opportunities, however brief, for students to explore and experience nature.

*Absence of appreciation of natural objects.* Although participants were not observed encouraging open-ended engagement with the natural environment during my visits, children at times discovered insect life while on the playground. Even though these insects were eventually imprisoned and taken in for observation under the microscope, children were engaging in open-ended activities during the search. They had the opportunity to explore and find living creatures under rocks, along the edges, on the two trees, under leaves, and in the crevices present throughout the expanse of the play area. I did not have an opportunity to witness this behavior, but participants shared stories of these child experiences during the interviews. “They had the little bug catchers and the nets, tweezers. . . They would just go around and look under the rocks and leaves, piles of leaves, and stuff like that, and find bugs and put them in there. We had kind of like an aquarium that they would put the bugs in so they could watch them” (T1).

*Decontextualization of living and natural objects.* Activities that focused on *decontextualizing of living and natural objects* could also provide an open-ended opportunity for children. One teacher brought a home grown sunflower to school for the children. She described what happened to the blossom when it arrived at the center.

“[They] pick out the seeds and then I get a magnifying glass and look on the science table [at the seeds]” (T3). Despite the decontextualizing of the sunflower, children were provided an opportunity to delve into the components of the sunflower head with a degree of freedom. They determined the most efficient manner to remove the seeds and self-selected an area of interest about these kernels of life.

*Participants attitudes’ summary.* Participants’ attitudes acted as a driving force behind the *decontextualization of living and natural objects* and *the absence of appreciation for natural objects* which restricted children’s engagement in open-ended outdoor learning. Identified within this participant attitude, however, were small windows of opportunity presented for children to experience open-ended outdoor activities indirectly through *absence of appreciation of natural objects* and the *decontextualization of living and natural objects*.

### **Head Start Program Requirements**

The second identified theme was *Head Start requirements*. This theme contained six codes that included: *safety regulations, schedule, core curriculum, records, child’s development, and the absence of Project Wild data*. Below are the findings categorized and explained with those that restricted (all six) identified first, followed by those that promoted (two of the codes).

**Restricted.** All of the codes within this section suggested restrictions to open-ended outdoor activities as expressed below.

**Safety regulations.** Safety regulations were identified as a code in the Head Start Program requirements’ section. It will also be discussed in the classroom *and playground*

*context* theme. When discussing the outdoor environment with the program Adm, she shared her hopes for the outdoor area that were limited by the lack of funding and the fact that the federal requirements were “huge on health and safety the last couple of reviews.”

I wish that probably we had better environments for one thing. It seems that we end up with these fenced off spaced areas that um, maybe the children don't feel as confined, but I always feel like they're way too confined. I know they have to be safe, but I wish that there was more, that there could be more areas for them to explore safely and that you could build more of those activities.... I wish there were more ways to explore.

Every 3 to 5 years the program was reviewed by a federal team of reviewers comprised of Head Start employees, university faculty, and other professionals considered qualified by the Head Start office. The administrator shared what happens during the reviews.

They go through all of the records and they observe classrooms and they observe playgrounds, and go through the children's files and planning records and all the financials. Pretty well shake the whole program down. The last, I'd say six years [has] been a tremendous emphasis on safety and health...we were written up because we had a tree that had thorns on it back behind the building.... Do you have enough playground surface under the equipment? They measure fall zones, all of those things...the inside things also where if you have a little crack on a window you get written up...a lot of it has been outdoors. Those kinds of things that I guess is a good thing to keep the kids safe you know.

When reviewing Head Start documents teachers were expected to stay up to date on playground safety standards and were referred to the *Consumer Product Safety Commission* website (<http://www.cpsc.gov/>) for current information. A specific set of playground guidelines and equipment expectations (see Appendices C and D) were given to each teacher, aide, and volunteer with a list of and reasons for rules (e.g., “No picking plants-it makes our plants die”). Listed in the center's “Child Development School Readiness Goals” poster under “child” Goal 5.B was the expectation that the

“environment and activities are safe.” Participants’ awareness of these rules and procedures were observed at each of my visits as noted throughout my findings.

Under the premise of “safety” children’s’ engagement in open-ended activities was found to be restricted. As a group of children were running from the gravel to the grassy area they were told, “Careful, we don’t want to fall down!” Another child was climbing up a 3-foot moveable slide from the bottom. She was told, “Let’s move that. That is dangerous.” The child wandered away from the slide. Five children gathered together on a slide creating a train by connecting their feet to the person in front of them. As they got ready to head down the slide, a volunteer saw them and yelled, “One at a time!” Two children rolled together on the grass laughing. As they did so, T4 came over quickly and said, “Hey, hey, hey! We don’t want to do that, we don’t want to hurt somebody!”

The Adm and I discussed the makeup of the outdoor environment; she commented, “We usually don’t have a lot of trees and that’s probably mostly because of obstacles where children are running and playing. I’m not a big fan of trees or swings, safety concerns.” T4 expressed her understanding for not allowing the children on the west side grass area. “We don’t like them to come past like the sandbox area because that way we can keep an eye on them. That way we have good vision of what’s going on.”

***Schedule.*** Outdoor time was required as part of the daily plan by Head Start and varied between 15-20 minutes a session; teachers determined what would happen during that time period. When talking to the participants about whom or what determined the time their students spent outdoors the unanimous answer was that they did. A teacher led

game started the experience in each of my observations.

The Adm presented a less determined time expectation than the teachers did about the outdoor period requirement. “Head Start has performance standards, which are very extensive, but it talks about the need for children to have a balance of activities, indoors and out, but it doesn’t specify “x” number of minutes type of indoor or outdoor kind of things.”

A few years ago the Early Reading First (ERF) grant was present at the center. During the time of this grant, the schedule had been extended to full day. Participants commented on the benefits this provided and the time used for meals did not seem so overwhelming. With the shorter day schedule and the loss of the grant, participants found it challenging to fit all the requirements in. “We have to feed two meals a day so when you eat breakfast and lunch and try to fit in the other stuff outdoors, usually the one [outdoors] gets cut short” (T1). T2 also expressed her views on the subject. “Well, three and a half hours and you’re eating twice in three and a half hours, it’s hard to get what you need to teach and what, and you know what I mean, in, in that time.”

I talked with the Adm about the time frame and school year schedules. She noted that Head Start has various models available depending on funding and the director’s choice and said that “you have to fit in with those program options.” Included in this conversation were expectations the administration had for families. When talking about the difficulty of running a summer or full year program the Adm mentioned attendance patterns.

I pulled the reports for this year and looking at attendance and this is ridiculous. Kids can’t learn if they’re not here.... I’m saying this is not acceptable! We’re

expected to prepare them for school but if they're not there we can't prepare them.

She expressed her frustration with inconsistencies in attendance by students and described a plan she would share with parents.

If you're not going to send your children regularly then we'll give you an improvement plan, and if you still don't, then we're going to drop you and pick up a child who wouldn't normally have the opportunity. And it's time we think we need to get tougher on it, and you know we're expected to prepare them for school.

This expectation of families fits with what Grumet (1988) described as “the gender contradictions [which serve] to estrange teachers of children from the mothers of those children. Instead of being allies, mothers and teachers distrust each other” (p. 56). The Adm went on to describe the process involved in a schedule change. “We have to justify it in our community assessment and in our grant when we change options.”

***Core curriculum.*** Numerous Head Start centers have adopted the High Scope curriculum program, including the site of my study. The philosophy of this curriculum model was described as: “Anything in High Scope is child directed, so whatever the children initiate we pretty much go along with, or whatever their interest is” (T1). “We just kind of let them play when they're on the playground on their own” (T4). Again, during my limited observations this concept was not visible; rather I saw numerous instances of teacher direction during the children's play and a contradiction in the understanding of High Scope's expectations of child directed and teacher facilitated interactions. T4 noted “We have set things [in the curriculum] that therefore we're required to follow throughout the day.” In regards to the nature aspect of the curriculum T3 explained, “There's recognizing things in the environment and I know there's quite a

few.... You could say find three rocks, or find four bugs.”

Published resources were mentioned as a curriculum support by both the administrator and teachers. These were kept in an office area next to one of the classrooms. When looking through these documents and resources, titles included: *Mudpies to Magnets*, *Head Start Step-by-Step Lesson Plans for the First 30 Days*, *The Mailbox* (an activity magazine), *Giant Encyclopedia*, *Water Wonders*, *Theme-a-saurus*, *Parachute Play*, *Early Literacy*, *Training Ideas*, *Health Guidelines*, and *Handbook for Public Playground Safety*. Also present were college texts with pre-1990 copyright dates, literature on nutrition, foods, holidays, and writing skills. I found no mention of support for open-ended outdoor activities. The activities described in the documents included interaction and leadership by the teacher, rather than the child.

Participants shared that large motor development was on the list of items they needed to track for a child’s development. “There’s quite a few questions on movement and gross motor and if they can catch the ball, if they can toss, if they can tiptoe, things like that. National determines the core” (T3). This tracking impacted participant choices for outdoor activities such as: playing with a ball, kicking, catching, skipping, hopping, dribbling, climbing stairs, and running. On occasion this would be a part of the teacher directed formal game that began the classes’ outdoor time, or it would be child directed with the teacher recording the behavior on a checklist. T3 expressed the difficulty of meeting some of these expectations.

Like some of the things are kind of difficult. There’s one about nature and it’s recognizing alive and dead, and it’s been one that I struggle with trying to come up with things to see if the kids know the difference, I’m still always trying.

**Records.** Data tracking of students' development was described as a major area of focus for the teachers and staff. T2 explained the various skills they were required to document for each child and the manner in which it was accomplished.

All the areas, gross, fine motor, language, math, science, all the basic areas. It's a big process to get that all in the computer. There's like (sigh), it goes from "A" all the way to the end of the alphabet and then starts AA to FF that you do on every child. We observe and we put that in after. We don't do that while the children are there. There may be a teacher doing it, because there are three of us [outside]...when we get out of the classroom we'll hurry and go put it in the computer, write it down. Or we do activities too...like there's patterning, so we'll do an activity and we'll have a list and we'll just mark who could do that.

**Child's development.** The participants at the Head Start Center were mandated by Federal law to fulfill the expectations described in the Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework (U.S. DHHS, 2010). The Framework "focused Head Start grantees on key elements of school readiness" (U.S. DHHS, 2010, Letter of introduction, para. 2). Within this document was the domain of physical development which included both large and small motor skills. The domain did not specifically list the inclusion of the outdoors in its expectation, but did provide a picture of a child running outside. When asked how the outdoors was incorporated into the curriculum T1 explained, "It doesn't tell you what to do, so a lot of it we incorporate, try to get their large muscles' skills because that's a good time to develop them outside."

This tracking of "school readiness" and the child's development mandated the attention of teachers' time and energies as noted under "records" above. With the focus on these school readiness concepts, open-ended opportunities for children were not found to be of the same importance as there was no "check list" to complete.

**Absence of Project Wild data.** As mentioned in Chapter II, the *Growing Up Wild:*

*Exploring Nature with Young Children* (GUW) was made available to Head Start through funding from the EPA (Project Wild, 2010). This program was created to provide opportunities for young children to “explore, play and learn in nature...and for encouraging their future as environmental stewards” (as cited in Project Wild, 2010). The money for this project was designated to specifically supplement Head Start’s curriculum. Throughout my study there was no direct mention or witnessing of this program by the participants. When teachers and the administrator were asked about the program they did not recognize the name, nor did they acknowledge existence of the curriculum. In my review of teacher resource documents, there was no information pertaining to GUW.

When interviewing the Adm of the program, she mentioned the education specialists’ recent attendance at a conference. While there the specialist participated in a session on the outdoor environment. In the Adm’s description she stated, “It was natural; doing natural kind of things on playgrounds and um, developing things for playgrounds that are kind of found in your environment...but I’m not sure if it’s actually resource books for the playground or not.” She continued on when I asked about the possibility of the session being connected to GUW. “It could be; it might have been. I know one of them talked about using tires to put dirt in and plant flowers and hang them on fences and some of those kinds of things.”

During my time observing students and teachers on the playground, I did not find support for children’s exploration or appreciation of the components of the natural elements of the outdoor space as intended by GUW. The Project Wild website included

contact information for training on the program for all 50 states. When I called the Utah state contact they had no record of the research site requesting information or training. The lack of data on the use of the GUW program at this location would need further study before an explanation could be provided as to why it was not in use.

**Promoted.** Two of the codes identified as promoting open-ended learning opportunities included the *schedule* and *core curriculum*. Both of these areas were requirements of Head Start. Teachers used this time to meet the requirements and indirectly provided opportunities to children.

**Schedule.** A few years ago when the Head Start Center was part of the ERF, participation in the program provided full day funding. T1 and T2 both expressed the opportunity this provided for more open-ended outdoor time for their students. “We were able to do so much more outside when we had them for that time period” (T1).

We planted stuff outside for them, plants growing...let them watch it grow...they really got to when they had the ERF and they went all day; that makes a big difference too! And [in] my opinion, if you could have one classroom for six hours they learn so much more and I’ve been in both. (T2)

Teachers expressed a wish to have this time back for the variety and richness of opportunities that could be supported in the outdoors (see Appendix E for copy of schedule.)

**Core curriculum.** Within the center’s curriculum was the requirement for outdoor time. All teachers were aware of this expectation and both classes agreed to hold this period at the same time. This time consisted of the last 20 minutes of each class session. During these moments children began with the structured teacher led game and then transitioned to the less structured play time. When children were able to play in areas not

being supervised intensely, open-ended possibilities were available. Examples of this behavior can be found in the *student behavior* section under self-discovery.

**Head Start program requirements' summary.** I found this theme to clearly present the logic of domination. Head Start requirements were held in higher esteem than teachers' ability to educate children. The Head Start organization's set of expectations was considered the source of authority and knowledge. They knew how to keep children safe as evidenced by the strong focus during program reviews, referrals to the "experts'" safety website, and posted playground rules that every teacher was to review weekly. This domination directly impacted the children's inability to freely explore the natural environment. *Schedules, core curriculum, record keeping, and the child's development* also supported the dualistic atmosphere by directing what teachers were to accomplish during the school day. They were not able to freely choose how to structure the daily schedule. The absence of G UW could be classified as what Eisner (1985) called the "null" curriculum, that which is not taught. The impact of this is unknown and until it is instituted in the program cannot be evaluated.

The two areas that promoted open-ended learning, *schedule* and *core curriculum* provided the chance for students to be outdoors, and when possible, freely choose the activities they engaged in.

### **Classroom and Playground Context**

The third identified theme was *classroom and playground context*. This theme included the codes of *formal activity, structure, control and order, equipment, and teacher engagement*. These data codes suggested that both promotion and restriction

dynamics were present. Below are the findings categorized and explained in order of those that restricted, followed by those that promoted.

**Restricted.** All five of the codes were identified as restricting open-ended learning in the outdoors. Two of the codes were identified as promoting open-ended learning in the outdoors. This theme exposed the unique interplay of participants' attitudes and Head Start program requirements within the school setting.

*Formal activity.* Each day before the children were to go outside a ritual of lining up occurred within the classroom. During my visits, the ritual would be enacted in different manners. Sometimes children had to wait for others to get ready; other times they would be called one by one according to names, colors, gender, or readiness. Once they were satisfactorily lined up, they would be led outside to an area on the grass near their classroom. The teacher would then guide them in a structured game. The activity was closed-ended with the participant providing the structure.

“When we went outdoors at first we do an activity with them like “Duck, Duck, Goose”; play with a parachute; “Simon Says”; “Red Light, Green Light”; a group activity” (T1). “We all came up with the idea, doing the game first, doing a structured activity outside, and then doing the open-ended free play” (T3). All teachers described the same sequence of events after the game. The students would be led to the playground and allowed to engage in open-ended activities. Although this sentiment was repeated by each of the teachers, I found the comment inconsistent with what I observed as children consistently would be directed as to what they could or could not do once the game ended. One day as children were heading away from the organized game two children

had picked up sticks and were play fencing with each other, T4 approached them and said, “Give that to me!” Another time a young girl reached the gravel play area and headed to the jungle gym. She climbed up and swung herself on the bar so she was now hanging with her legs bent on the bar. T3 saw her do this, walked over, and said, “You can’t hang upside down, we’ve already told you that a couple of times.”

On one visit as students finished up their indoor activities, a few had lined up to go outside; they waited for approximately three minutes before everyone was ready. When all were in place they headed out to the grassy area on the east side of the classroom building and played a game of “Red Light, Green Light.” Children were asked what the colors of the game meant—red-stop, and green-go. As the children played the game they reminded each other to follow the rules. T4 instructed them, “You need to listen or we will not make it to the playground.”

When the game ended the teacher asked, “What are you going to go home and tell your parents we learned today?” All the children sang out together “red means stop, green means go.” When they finished chanting “red means stop, green means go” the students were permitted onto the gravel play area. A young girl headed straight to a pull up bar, pulled herself up, and hung on the bar with her legs. She was told by T4: “Remember we’re not hanging upside down anymore.”

*Structure.* When I arrived one day, students were engaged in the indoor “free play” portion of the schedule. As I watched the teacher and children interact, I sensed that structure had importance in the classroom environment. One child picked up a clipboard from the writing area and carried it to the large rug as she engaged in dramatic play by

herself. When the teacher spotted this, she told the child, “You can’t take the clipboard out of the writing area” (T4). The child returned the board to the writing area and walked away.

I moved into the second classroom and noted similar interactions among the teacher and students. As the teacher shared a book with the children on the rug, two boys stretched out on their stomachs with their heads propped on their bent arms listening to the story. T3 asked them, “Are you going to have to stay in today because you’re tired?”

At one point when discussing changes to the playground schedule, T3 commented about the change: “It seemed like it took the kids a long time to get settled down. So we changed outdoor time to right before they get on the bus to go home and that seems to work out a lot better. So, that was a big change I was excited about...that’s been a big help.” She expressed how this time change made the teachers’ job easier.

During my second observation the children were indoors finishing their snack when I arrived. As they finished they headed to a large central rug or to chairs near the rug area and began reading books. One girl, who had just finished her snack, stopped near where I was standing. Beside us was a collection of play costumes, hats, and masks. She quietly pointed to one of the masks and told me it was her favorite and explained why. One teacher passed by and said nothing. T4, who was across the room called the child’s name and said, “Is that where you’re supposed to be? Get over here!” The child looked down and headed in the teacher’s direction.

At the end of the second session’s play time, a routine had been devised to facilitate the loading of the buses to go home. The two classes lined up at different ends

of the play area. At one end the bus had already arrived, and students were ushered on for their ride home. The other class waited on the concrete ledge of the gravel play area for their bus to appear. T2 asked her students “Where’s our bus? Let’s count really loud. Maybe our class should run to that tree and back. Ready, set, go. Come back, hurry!” The teacher then directed the children to skip from one end of the grassy area to the other and back. The bus arrived as they finished their skipping. A young girl grabbed one last handful of gravel before joining the line, she threw it in the air, and watched as it scattered when it hit the ground. When the teacher saw her do this, she said: “Don’t do that. Students get on the bus.”

In another instance when the outdoor time was coming to an end, one of the two classes lined up and sat on the concrete lip of the playground waiting for their bus. Some children picked up leaves and rocks as they waited and were immediately told by T2, “Put the rocks and leaves down please!” Two girls were entertaining themselves with the gravel near the edge of the play area as they waited in line. One girl put gravel into another student’s shirt as they both laughed; T2 who was standing nearby and witnessed the act said, “That’s not how you act!”

Although teachers gave directions throughout the play time about where children could or could not be, the degree of their play efforts, or reminders of rules and expectations, the end of the day consistently presented one last opportunity for instruction. As the children gathered in line for the bus, two girls had hidden behind a tree trunk on the far western end of the playground. As the waiting students loaded on the bus, T3 noticed the two girls behind the tree trunk. She walked over and asked in a sing song

voice, “You didn’t see the bus? You didn’t hear the bell?” Before the girls could answer, they were directed to the bus line.

During the end of the day of my fourth observation, the children were again directed to line up for their buses. As the majority of the children were in line, one girl ran away from the bus line, across the playground, and straight to me. As she ran away from the line, T4 yelled to her, “You need to come back over now!” The young child ignored the direction until after she had quietly told me someone had poked her in the eye, she then slowly walked back to the line.

On another day the bus arrived early; T3 told a child to “get the bell.” As the bell was rung, some students lined up while others continued playing. The children were told, “There’s the bell, line up!” Three of the children kept playing in the sandbox near where they lined up; T3 walked over and reminded them to get in line. She turned to the students who were already in line playing with the nearby leaves and said, “Don’t pick up the leaves. They get over everywhere!” She repeated, “Please do not pick up the leaves! You don’t ever listen!”

T4 was new at the school, and so I asked her to share what she had been told about the playground as a new employee. Her response reflected her understanding of the established structure. “We always have to have two people out there at all times you know, keeping an eye on them, constantly watching where our kids are, counting them.”

***Control and order.*** Ever present in my observations and interview data was the prevalent matter of classroom and playground control and order. This code provided evidence of the logic of dominance in both the observations and interviews.

“Is that where you’re supposed to be? Get over here!”

“You need to use your inside voice or you cannot play here.”

“You are not supposed to do that! You will not be allowed to play outside tomorrow!”

“You should be on the rug and reading. I don’t know why you are wandering about.”

“I like how my boys are lying here. They want to go outside. Whoever is listening gets to go outside. Put hands by your sides like robots, like soldiers.”

Comments, directions, and orders were whispered, shouted, and presented in various facial and verbal formats to children during my observations, both in the classroom and on the playground. These methods presented an urgency for students to conform to the direction and needs of the teacher who placed herself in the “up” side of the dualistic relationship with the children. As these children transitioned from their private home lives into the preschool setting of education at the ages of three to five, they were unwittingly placed into a patriarchal dualistic society. Grumet (1988) described this scenario as the historical experience of women in education: “Women...were expected to be the medium through which the laws, rules, language, and order of the father, the principal, the employer were communicated to the child” (p. 84). Warren (1996) presented this view of women leading children into a historically patriarchal system of education where rules and order must be maintained to ensure the dominance of those in control.

**Equipment.** As mentioned earlier there was a plethora of outdoor equipment and materials for the children’s use. The presence of these items provided an opportunity for lessons from an adult’s perspective on their correct use. One day as children spread out

across the play area, some stopped to play on the slide. One child sat at the opening to the winding tunnel that would take him from the top of the slide to the gravel surface below. He appeared to be contemplating what his next move should be. He was told by a volunteer adult; “You need to stand up or get off the slide” as he sat at the opening of the tunnel slide and children began to line up behind him. Another child was told to “Go down the slide, not up it” as she tried to climb up from the bottom opening to the top, moving it as she did so. “Don’t climb up there you’ll get hurt. Just leave that there.”

*Teacher engagement.* During my first day of observing at the center, I headed into T4’s classroom and situated myself to the side of the children’s activities. As I watched, numerous children engaged in dramatic play experiences, a group began pretending they were animals making growling noises to each other. They were told, “Need to use inside voice or you cannot play here” (T4). Three children sat on the floor playing with a game composed of plastic pigs used for counting. They finished counting and began to invent scenarios for the pigs. As they did this the teacher approached and said, “You’re all done with your puzzle. Go put it away” (T4). The children then moved onto other areas to play. Directions continued to be given to the students as the teacher followed them around picking up their toys and putting them away. One girl headed back to find a toy she had set down a few moments before, but it had already been placed back on a shelf. These instances presented a clear set of dualisms between the teacher and her students.

During one interview T3 shared a perspective of her role on the playground. “If I see a child playing by himself, I’ll go over and talk to them and see if I can’t get him

involved with the other kids. We really have to watch...sometimes they use the equipment in ways it's not meant to be used." This perspective displayed the dualistic approach that the teacher knew what was best for the child. I wondered if being by yourself was not viewed as an acceptable state. I observed that being creative in your use of equipment was not tolerated by teachers, and the child would be corrected when discovered. T4 commented:

If they're doing something that they shouldn't we need to make sure that we're catching that so that they know that they can't get away with it. If we see that they're going to get hurt or something, we make sure that we stop that. Like I'll try to go around, like before they do it...we'll try to remind them, but they don't listen all the time.

**Promoted.** Two of the five codes within the *classroom and playground context* theme promoted open-ended outdoor learning. These two were *equipment* and *teacher engagement*.

**Equipment.** During the interviews the participants had described in detail the numerous types of play equipment and materials available to the children outdoors. These included items such as slides, bikes, climbing structures, wagons, buckets, shovels, and play houses. These items, when left to the child's devices, were used in open-ended outdoor learning. Examples of this play can be found in the *promoted* section of the *self-discovery* component of the *student behavior* theme.

**Teacher engagement.** T2 described the time on the playground as "mostly unstructured after the game. We have a tree there, and they like to play with leaves. They'll find water puddles everywhere (laughter) and the rocks and the bugs and grass, and they like to pick the dandelions."

In various instances, when the teachers on duty were not aware of the children's actions, the children initiated open-ended play opportunities. They exhibited what appeared to be a learned behavior that if the teacher on duty did not see them, they had more opportunities to engage in open-ended activities without being directed to stop.

During my last observation, I noticed fewer directions being given by the teachers. Although there were still reminders of "Don't throw rocks. Don't get hurt!" they did not match the rapid responses given to children during the previous observations. I am not sure if this was because the children had learned the playground expectations, the teachers were more relaxed than other days, or another possibility. What I did observe was more freedom to engage in open-ended activities on the part of the child.

**Summary of classroom and playground context.** Throughout the codes identified within this theme, students' knowledge and attempts to discover their surroundings were often thwarted. Teachers placed themselves in a position of power, knowing what the children needed, and deciding what was acceptable and what wasn't. *Formal activity, structure, control and order, use of equipment, and teacher engagement* all lead students to a position of needing guidance and direction from the teachers' perspective. The student's interests and sense of curiosity were seen as less valued, and the teachers' point of view was considered correct.

Two of the five codes promoted open-ended learning more by accident than intentionality. *Equipment*, along with teachers' lack of engagement, afforded opportunities to explore, dig, touch, and experiment with the surrounding outdoors.

## **Student Behavior**

The fourth and final identified theme was *student behavior*. This theme included the codes of *children's energy*, *self-discovery*, and *secrecy*. Within this theme was the largest amount of data connected to promoting open-ended outdoor experiences.

Incorporated in this theme of student behavior were two perspectives, one in which the teacher directed what children could or could not do, and the other where children made the choices. Below are the findings categorized and explained in order of those that were restricted, followed by those that promoted open-ended outdoor learning time.

Two of the three codes within this theme, *self-discovery* and *secrecy*, could be categorized as both restricting and promoting open-ended outdoor learning. I categorized data as restricting when the length of time the children engaged in the openness of their play was less than three minutes. Children would initiate an open-ended activity only to be discovered by the teacher on duty who would put a stop to their play. The code of *children's energy* was categorized only as promoting and will be explained in that section.

**Restricted.** The codes of *self-discovery* and *secrecy* sometimes exposed ways that students' outdoor experiences were restricted.

***Self-discovery.*** Each playground experience began with a teacher-directed game. One day after a rousing game of "Ring Around the Rosie" the children were directed to tiptoe to the play area. A child at the end of the line found a stick, picked it up and swung it overhead until the teacher saw him and took the stick away. T3 noted, "They like to get in the rocks even though they're told not to. They play on the slide a lot, climb, hang

upside down, and chase each other around.” She explained this as she was describing the constant supervision necessary to make sure children were following the expected behaviors and rules of the playground.

One day after the children were being lead to the playground from their structured game, the class reached the gravel play area. One group of children headed to a large bottomless barrel set against the east fence. As three children climbed in another child came by and tipped them over. They broke into laughter as they interacted with the force of gravity. As they were climbing out of the barrel they noticed a teacher heading their way, and they scattered to other parts of the play area.

*Secrecy.* Often, what began as an open-ended learning experience ended for a child when the teacher became involved. One young boy was exploring the pull of gravity as he put a shovel full of gravel down the slide. He went to the sand box and loaded a bucket with sand. He then went back to the gravel and added gravel to the bucket. He began to layer the sand and the gravel in the bucket, moving between the sand box and gravel play surface. As he sat on the border of the play area scooping up gravel the teacher approached and said: “You can’t take gravel from there!” The child went back to the sand box with sand and gravel and dumped it into the sand box as the teacher watched. The teacher then left. The child re-shoveled the sand and gravel pile he had just dumped back into the bucket and took it up the slide. He climbed the platform and scooped contents of the bucket onto the slide one shovel full at a time. T3 spotted him doing this and asked: “Where does the sand go?” implying the inappropriateness of his activity according to the teacher’s expectations. The boy headed back to the sand box

with his bucket and shovel as the teacher brushed the sand and gravel off the slide. He sat for a few minutes before wandering off across the gravel.

**Promoted.** Although I have placed all three codes within this section, I struggled with the engagement of the teachers in the students' activities. I choose to place them here as mentioned above, based on the amount of time children participated in the activity (more than 3 minutes).

*Children's energy.* One finding that promoted the participants' inclusion of children's open-ended activities was stated by the participants as the children's need to expend energy.

Some days they needed to be outdoors more so we went outside early. Some days we'd ring the bell to go in; they weren't ready to go in. If they were involved in an activity that they didn't want to stop, then we would let them stay out longer.  
(T1)

T2 commented:

They need time to be out and get some of that energy out and explore, they love to be outside. They get real rowdy or something. We'll take them out, do a game with them and then bring them back to the classroom.

T3's statement:

You have to follow their lead especially at the end of the year because they're getting tired of being cooped in all winter. They're little kids. We have to follow their lead or you'll be in big trouble (laughter). You'll have chaos.

"We have our outdoor time at the end of the day, and by that time they're ready to be outside and kind of let out some of that pent up energy" (T4).

At times, participants noted they would take into consideration needs of the child when making a decision about planned activities. This consideration provided an opportunity for children to be outdoors, although not always in open-ended behaviors as

noted in T2's comments above. Participants noted the children's need to expend energy as an influence for engaging in open-ended activities. I did not observe this behavior during my visits, nor did the documents I read include this as a suggestion.

*Self-discovery.* Two children were playing in the sand box on the grassy area pouring sand in and out of buckets. As they dug in the sand they looked around for something to put in the holes. One child went to the gravel area and brought back some rocks. He then placed them in the hole he had dug. The teachers on duty were not looking in the children's direction. I had previously noted that when children moved the sand to the rocks or vice versa they were directed to stop; they were not to mix the two materials. Children appeared to have more freedom and choice for open-ended activities if they isolated themselves from the major area of activity.

In another instance I observed children discovering a pile of leaves on the eastern grass area. They ran over and jumped in the pile that had been raked into place previously. One child got buried by the pile, climbed out, and jumped in again. He continued this behavior repeatedly. Two young girls ran over and jumped in the pile. The girls began jumping and kicking leaves. They were joined by two boys. Soon there were five and then six children. They noticed a tree branch near the pile and carried it away. They ran up to me and excitedly said, "We are playing in the leaf pile!" No adults were watching this event other than me, and the children eventually left after laughing and running back and forth numerous times from the leaf pile to me.

Two girls returned a short time later to the area and jumped into the leaf pile. They began to throw leaves into the air. It was a windless day so leaves rained back down

on top of them. The girls continued to play in the leaves until the bus bell rang. When they heard the bell, they moved behind a tree trunk near the leaves to hide. When the students were spotted by T3, she asked them “Where do we need to be? I’ll race you!”

At my final observation, I watched a child standing on top of the slide with a hula hoop. He looked around before placing the hoop over his head and went down the slide. He ran to the fort and put the hula hoop over a pole sticking up and watched as it went down. He grabbed the hula hoop off of the pole and ran across the playground unnoticed.

*Secrecy.* During the observations I noted numerous instances of children’s initiation of open-ended activities, conducted in what appeared to be secrecy. A young boy was playing near a playground fort with a tunnel slide attached. He quietly picked up a handful of gravel that was used as cushioning material and turned towards the teacher on duty to see if she was looking. When he realized she was not looking, a broad smile crossed his face. He took his handful of gravel and proceeded up the stairs of the fort to the top of the slide entrance. He dropped the gravel down the slide and laughed in amusement as the pebbles slid down the curved tunnel. He continued this action two more times before a teacher saw him and told him to stop.

During one observation a young boy quietly took a wagon from the north side of the play area to the sand box. By his movements and actions I perceived a sense of secrecy. He focused his eyes on the ground in front of him as if to make himself invisible to those around him. He proceeded on the perimeter of the play area towards the rectangular sand box. He traveled down the west side and across the south side of the large gravel area. He found a plastic container in the sand, which he used to slowly scoop

sand from the sandbox into the wagon. He looked around every once in awhile to see if he was being watched. When he had filled the wagon to his satisfaction, he proceeded to pull it back around the south side and up onto the gravel surface. His destination was the play house across the gravel surface. He struggled to pull his treasure up onto the gravel and across to the house. As he walked he kept his head down and went slowly so as not to draw attention to his actions. When he reached the playhouse he smiled to himself, looked around one more time, and began to unload the sand from the wagon into the house. I watched to see if any teachers were paying attention to his actions. They were not paying attention. He climbed in the house and soon another boy joined him. He remained playing in the house with the sand for approximately eight more minutes before being discovered by T3. When he was noticed by the teacher, he was told that he would not be able to have recess the next day for not following the rule of no mixing sand and gravel.

**Student behavior summary.** Although *self-discovery* and *children's energy* were codes that restricted open-ended learning, they were also found to be the most prevalent opportunity to engage in unstructured experiences side by side with *secrecy*. As described above in the *self-discovery* and *children's energy* codes, children were creating an understanding of their surroundings and the self-perceived value each item possessed without the immediate presence of a power source redirecting their actions.

### Summary of Themes

The identification of themes within the data presented a view of an oppressive

system of control. Children's ideas and activities were visibly considered less than the expectations and knowledge of their teachers. Logic of domination had been developed and all those connected to the "up" position ensured its continuation. Although there were brief moments when children seemed freed from the relationship, the data overwhelmingly revealed an oppressive well established system. All but one of the 17 identified codes within the four themes was found to only promote and not restrict open-ended learning in the outdoors. This code of *children's energy* was able to escape the dominance of those in charge.

My analysis of the data, guided by the ecofeminist lens, created a picture of a dualistic relationship between the children and the participants, and teachers and the patriarchal system of education. Children's ability to engage in open-ended outdoor activities was promoted and restricted by the four identified themes, which revealed an "oppressive conceptual framework" (Warren, 2000). Within this framework the logic of domination presented a view based "on grounds of some alleged characteristic which the dominant have and subordinate lack" (Warren, 1996, p. 21). Participants' behavior exhibited a positioning of their role in the Head Start classroom as having a higher order than that of their students. Conversely, the Head Start Program requirements were viewed as having more value than the participants as the teachers and administrator maintained and carried out the expectations. This behavior appeared ingrained in the system even though, at times, they expressed a wish for change.

The remaining chapter will provide a review of the research, the findings, and a discussion of the results gathered through the use of the ecofeminist lens. I will share my

interpretation of the data and discuss future work to be considered.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter begins with a review of the previous four chapters including answers to the research questions. It will be followed by a summary and discussion of what I learned, my interpretation of the findings, reflections on the research process, and the study's importance in the early childhood, environmental, and ecofeminist fields. Lastly, the chapter will end with implications for future research.

#### **Review**

A newspaper article reported on findings from a study of the changes in people's feelings towards caring for the natural environment (Irvine, 2012). The story told of shifts in environmental care that were lessening with each passing generation (Twenge et al., 2012). As an early childhood female educator and one who has a personal commitment to the care of the environment, I wanted to understand why efforts in early childhood to increase these caring inclinations towards nature in children were less than what we would have thought.

As noted in Chapter I, the purpose of this study was to investigate what promotes or restricts three early childhood educators' inclusion of open-ended outdoor learning. An ecofeminist lens guided my work throughout the study. Previous research findings determined that early outdoor open-ended experiences in nature impacted those who later

invested time and energy in protecting the earth for its intrinsic value (Arnold et al., 2009; Bixler et al., 2002; Chawla, 1999; Ewert et al., 2005; Palmer, 1993, 1998a, 1998b; Palmer & Suggate, 1996; Palmer et al., 1999; Sivek & Hungerford, 1989-1990; Tanner, 1980; Wells & Lekies, 2006). Those identified as environmentalists had developed a caring relationship with nature, rather than adopting an anthropocentric view in which nature was seen strictly as an asset for human consumption (Catton & Dunlap, 1978; Ewert et al., 2005; Milbrath, 1984).

This caring viewpoint could be seen as necessary for those dealing with the changes in our natural environment. A few of these changes included the impacts of chemical use on the environment and humans (Carson, 1962; Jurewucz & Hanke, 2008; Schipper et al., 2008), the increase in carbon dioxide levels impacting global warming (Callendar, 1940, 1949, 1958, 1961; Plass, 1956a, 1956b, 1956c, 1956d, 1956e, 1959; Revelle & Fairbridge, 1957; Revelle & Suess; 1957; Weart, 2011), and deforestation (Williams, 2006).

The EPA recognized the value of young children creating a caring relationship with nature. In 2010, the EPA awarded grant money to the Council for Environmental Education to create a program, Growing Up Wild (GUW), to connect children to nature. The intended audience for this program was Head Start.

Head Start was created in 1965 to address the needs of young children raised in poverty. Over the years the program's focus has shifted from socialization education to one of school readiness (Zigler & Styfco, 2010). The U.S. DHHS oversees the structure and expectations of the federal government for these sites throughout the U.S. Because of

the creation of a new environmental education program, GUW, and because women are the majority of educators (DellaMattera, 2009) working with children, I chose an ecofeminist lens to guide my study.

## **Theory**

Ecofeminists believe in a system free of dualisms and strive to eliminate relationships in which one person is considered in an “up” position of power and domination while the other is in a “down” position of subordination or oppression. One principle of the ecofeminist philosophy is that all forms of life will be respected and all oppression will end (Gaard, 1993; Nhanenge, 2011; Warren, 1996). Within the ecofeminist theory are four major philosophies. The one I selected was the social-constructionist belief that the female/male/nature culture has been socially constructed (Tong, 2009). Women have been asked to carry on a hegemonic social structure and to do so willingly through educational systems established by a patriarchal society (Grumet, 1988; Noddings, 2003, 2005).

One of the socially constructed dynamics discussed in ecofeminism is the “oppressive conceptual framework” (Warren, 1996, 2012) which includes three features: value-hierarchical thinking, value dualisms, and the logic of domination. All three features were identified at the research site.

## **Methods**

As described in Chapter III, a qualitative, purposeful, bounded case study was used to explore the three research questions (Creswell, 1998; Stake, 2005). I used

criterion sampling to choose participants, three early childhood Head Start teachers and their program administrator (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Interviews, observations, and review of the center's documents, along with photo documentation of the outdoor play environment served as my sources of data. These multiple information sources, along with member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), allowed me to triangulate the data.

Throughout the study I was aware that I brought my own perspective of the phenomenon I witnessed. I used a reflexive journal as a venue for my personal thoughts and experiences to be recorded. The use of the journal supported my intention to represent the viewpoints of the participants and not my own in the data collection and analysis. I also recognized that the small intentional sampling of perspectives could and should not be generalized to the larger population and is a limited snapshot of a specific time period.

### **Analysis**

As data were collected, I maintained it as written transcriptions and notes. At the end of the data collection, I analyzed the material and identified 17 codes, which I then studied for commonalities and narrowed down to four themes in what is known as the data analysis spiral (Creswell, 1998). As I continued to read and reread the data, fine adjustments were made in the selection of terminology to best represent the content. In the end, I identified the following themes: (a) *participants' attitudes*, (b) *Head Start program requirements*, (c) *classroom and playground context*, and (d) *student behavior*. The codes within these themes were labeled as either "promoting" or "restricting" open-ended outdoor learning and helped me determine answers to the questions of this study.

## Results

As noted in Chapter IV, the results of the study provided a look into the participants' experiences in promoting or restricting open-ended outdoor learning for the children in their care. In my analysis of the data I sought to find answers to the three questions of this study.

1. What influences promote or restrict three early childhood educators' inclusion of open-ended outdoor learning time for their students?
2. How do three early childhood educators respond to influences that promote or restrict their inclusion of open-ended outdoor learning time for their students?
3. Are the dynamics surrounding decisions of early childhood educators regarding the provision of open-ended outdoor experiences connected to the tenets of social constructivist ecofeminism? If so, in what ways?

### Question 1

**Influences that promote or restrict open-ended outdoor learning.** In answer to question one, what influences promote or restrict three early childhood educators' inclusion of open-ended outdoor learning time for their students, I identified four themes: (a) *participants' attitudes*, (b) *Head Start program requirements*, (c) *classroom and playground context*, and (d) *student behavior*.

**Participants' attitudes.** Within this theme, I determined that three codes encompassed restricted open-ended outdoor learning time, *anthropocentrism*, *absence of appreciation of natural objects*, and *decontextualization of living and natural objects*. Two of the three codes promoted open-ended outdoor learning, *absence of appreciation*

*of natural objects, and decontextualization of living and natural objects.*

***Restricted.*** The attitude of *anthropocentrism* set the stage for a dualistic relationship (Warren, 1996, 2012) in which the participant saw nature as a commodity to be used to fulfill their needs rather than for its intrinsic value. In turn, this perspective lent sustenance to the remaining codes of *absence of appreciation of natural objects* and *decontextualization of living and natural objects*. Together these three attitudes restricted children's ability to engage in open-ended outdoor learning.

***Promoted.*** Two of the three codes were found to indirectly promote open-ended outdoor learning: *absence of appreciation of natural objects* and *decontextualization of living and natural objects*. In their open-ended learning, children discovered facets of nature, such as an insect in the grass. When they shared what they found with their teacher, the insect would be removed from its natural surroundings and be put in a bottle or light table to be observed. What started as open-ended became a lesson on insects through the adult's involvement and direction.

Children were limited in their ability to create a caring relationship with the outdoors and to experience the intrinsic, ecocentric, value that nature possesses as a result of participants' attitudes. These restricting attitudes towards nature exemplified an oppressive dualism (Warren, 1996, 2012) exhibited through their anthropomorphic attitude. In the process children were presented a view of nature as a tool for human's use and exploitation, the continuation of a dualistic relationship. What would this perspective mean to the future of the natural outdoor environment?

**Head Start program requirements.** This theme included data from six codes:

*safety regulations, schedule, core curriculum, records, child's development, and absence of Project Wild data.* All six of the codes were identified as restricting, while two were found to promote open-ended outdoor learning.

***Restricted.*** *Safety regulations* were found to limit opportunities for children to engage in open-ended learning. Teachers closely followed the program's required playground rules and procedures to the extent that it limited children's decision making abilities about their play. This code was also identified in the *classroom and playground content* theme.

The next four codes: *schedule, core curriculum, records, and child's development,* were required by the Head Start organization, and participants shared an expectation to comply. I found this organizational expectation to fit Warren's (1996, 2012) explanation of the "logic of domination." Teachers followed the spoken and written guidelines of the program, setting their own knowledge and initiative to the side in deference to the hegemonic structures of the institution.

The final code within this theme, *absence of Project Wild data,* left me wondering how the program might have been accepted by the participants if it had been in place. I would surmise it may have something to do with G UW not being considered a "school readiness" standard.

While studying the influence of the absence of something is difficult, this study examines to what degree some aspects of the goal of G UW exist within one setting where G UW is absent. Project Wild was designed to support children's exploration of their environment and to encourage a caring relationship with nature.

**Promoted.** Two codes, *schedule* and *core curriculum*, were identified as promoting children's open-ended learning. The expectation that children would spend time outdoors provided opportunities for discoveries. Although in analyzing the core curriculum of the program, the mention of outdoor time was only connected to children's large muscle development. This expectation placed the children in the outdoors where at times they found moments to explore their surroundings, uninhibited by adult intervention.

**Classroom and playground context.** This theme contained five of the total 17 codes. All five: *formal activity*, *structure*, *control and order*, *equipment*, and *teacher engagement*, were identified as restricting, with two promoting open-ended outdoor learning.

**Restricted.** *Formal activity* was mentioned by all of the participants as the transition for children's outdoor time. It consisted of a teacher-led game, usually followed by questioning, before children were led to the open area of the playground. The control of the teachers in this activity left no room for children to create their own processes. This code shared the component of teacher-directed behavior with the next two, *structure* and *control and order*.

*Structure* and *control and order* were prominent pieces of data throughout my research. Teachers had established a structure, control, and order central to their interactions with the children. These systems were intended to be understood and followed by the children. At times, when children would forget, or chose not to follow these systems, they would be quickly reminded and monitored by the teacher until they

complied.

This sense of teacher directedness extended to the playground equipment the children had available to them on the play surface. There appeared to be a “right way” and a “wrong way” the structures were to be used, directed by the teacher and the organization’s “guidance” documents (see Appendix C and D) for playground rules and equipment use. These guidelines left little room for children’s open-ended exploration of the functions and possibilities of the material.

The final code of this theme, *teacher engagement*, displayed a clear image of who was in charge; power was in the hands of the teacher in the student-teacher relationship. Rarely were there moments when I observed teachers displaying an ethic of care (Noddings, 2003, 2005) during my visits. Instead, the student-teacher interactions were opportunities to give directions and guidance to children.

***Promoted.*** Two of the codes were found to promote open-ended learning: *equipment* and *teacher engagement*. Various outdoor play structures were available for children’s use. As noted previously, a set of rules for how they were to be used was created by the local Head Start program, and teachers followed the directives. At times, children were able to freely explore when teacher’s attention was diverted or focused in other areas. The children would climb up, over, and under the structures; they would experiment with putting things down the slides or into containers to be transported to other regions of the playground. When they were noticed by those supervising the play area, they would be reminded of the rules and procedures, which ended their open-ended opportunity.

**Student behavior.** The fourth and final theme, *student behavior*, included the only set of codes in which they all promoted open-ended outdoor learning. These were *children's energy*, *self-discovery*, and *secrecy*. The last two of the three listed codes were found to restrict as well as promote.

**Restricted.** In order to differentiate between restricting or promoting I selected a three minute time limit of children's play to determine the code's placement. Those that lasted more than three minutes were placed under *promoted*, and those less than three minutes were *restricted*.

Children would attempt to make *self-discoveries* after the completion of the formal teacher directed game. As they headed off in varying directions they would pause at spots to explore or connect with the materials at hand. If their behavior was not approved by the teacher on duty, they would be stopped. This same pattern held true for when children would engage in *secret* play. They would watch to see if anyone was looking and then experiment with their surroundings in ways that were often considered inappropriate by those in charge. When the children were discovered, they would stop their behavior and move onto another area.

**Promoted.** All the participants commented on the need for children to expend energy. This "need" afforded children time to be in the outdoors and, at times, to explore uninterrupted by the program's rules and expectations. At these times the children would immerse themselves in their play. This same behavior was observed during times of *self-discovery*. I would watch as children picked up handfuls of leaves and threw them into the air over and over again on the edge of the playground out of direct sight of their

teachers. They would watch as the wind would carry the leaves away.

At times, students would make a discovery when participating in an approved activity. They would then look around to see if they were being watched. If not, they bent in determination to continue their play undiscovered by moving slowly out of direct view of the yard supervisors. Their discovery that *secrecy* afforded more opportunities was used to explore the substances of the branches that fell from the trees, the creation of a world that included the mixing and transport of the forbidden combination of sand and rocks, and the speed with which various objects slid down a steep surface. During my observations these codes presented a chance for children and nature to be one; there were no visible signs of “isms” where one group of people or nature was considered more or less than the other.

## **Question 2**

In answer to question 2, how three early childhood educators responded to influences that promoted or restricted their inclusion of open-ended outdoor learning time for their students, I observed a socially-constructed system of obedience to those who held the organization’s power. Teachers were aware of the expectations and rules of the organization and saw it as their duty to conform and to carry on these beliefs and practices through the education of the children in their care. They did not question the possibility of a misunderstanding of their interpretations of the standards.

This discovery provided data in answering question 3 regarding the dynamics surrounding decisions regarding the connection of the findings to the tenets of social constructivist ecofeminism.

### Question 3

Warren (1996, 2012) explained this phenomenon with the phrase “logic of domination.” The three early childhood educator participants were responding to the influences that promoted or restricted open-ended outdoor learning by referring back to their interpretation of the directives from the establishment. Head Start had clearly delineated the standards that were to be followed in preparing children to be ready for their journey into the public school system (U.S. DHHS, 2006). These standards include guidelines for student instruction and interaction, and are evaluated using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System™ “CLASS.”

Participants had numerous methods for tallying student progress. This system of educating teachers on the process of “how” and not the “what” fits in with a dualistic perspective. These dualistic structural systemic inadequacies of “how” are connected to the logic of domination. Those with the power have designed a tool to measure what they perceive as progress and of value. Unless teachers understand the “why” of curricular decisions, sustaining defensible methods within difficult structures may be hard to understand for those being asked to implement them. Understanding of the “why” would be strengthened if teachers understood the larger social structures and interests that press them toward efficiency models. In relationship to the implementation of open-ended outdoor experiences for young children, the easy answer to “why” is because it is good for them. The more complex answer to the “why” deals with the idea that our world is at stake.

The public school system has historically been based on a hegemonic system of

dominance by those with power (Apple & Franklin, 2004). Warren (2012) referred to this practice as an “oppressive conceptual framework” (p. 590), which is based on a logical structure and value system that is socially constructed (Nhanenge, 2011). Within this “logic model,” teachers were deferring their own experiences with young children and their needs to the standards of a system they considered more knowing and powerful.

### **Interpretations**

Within the ecofeminist framework is the aspiration that all forms of life will be respected, that dualistic systems will be eliminated, and that interconnectedness of all things exists (Gaard, 1993; Warren, 1996, 2012). This theory includes the concept that the current socially constructed relationships between females, males, and nature privilege men and exploit women and nature. I found the tenets of this theory to be present. The identified relationships were ones that mirror the larger society’s typically inequitable relationship. In evidence at the research site was an oppressive socially constructed attitude in both the program-teacher relationship and the teacher-child connection. The social-constructivist ecofeminist view critiques socially constructed attitudes, behaviors, connections, and relationships.

### **Continuation of a Hegemonic System of Dominance**

During my interaction and observations of the participant teachers, I did not sense any urgency for change in their current interactions with children. Overall, they appeared content in their daily routines and procedures they perceived to be established by the

Head Start organization, even though there appeared a disconnect between the defensible, important Head Start guidelines and practices and those that were witnessed at the site. Do teachers' efforts at enforcing defensible principles (checklists) inadvertently become roadblocks to their intended purpose? The one and only challenging issue they mentioned about the program, dealt with the length of time required for meals which impacted their ability to include more required skill development for the children.

Each of the participants voluntarily entered into the system of institutionalizing children. Grumet (1988), in her discussion of the history of public education, described this action as one "that exploited the status and integrity of the family to strip it of its authority and deliver its children to the state" (p. 39). Women were the main players in making this a reality. The Head Start teachers were trained and encouraged to teach processes and procedures to prepare children to enter the public education system modeled on a hegemonic system of order and control with specific checklists of skills. Cannella (1997), along with File, Mueller, and Wisneski (2012), questioned this practice of requiring all children to accomplish a standard set of goals—the "checklist." They present a holistic approach to early childhood education, considerate of cultural and spiritual influences, rather than the widely accepted practice of developmental and stage theories.

Warren (1996, 2012) used the term "logic of domination" to explain the participation of women to continue the patriarchal system in society. Grumet (1988) described this as "the logic we need to understand...as teachers, [that we] have contributed our labor and our children to institutional and social organizations that have

extended our own subordination and contradicted our own experiences of nurturance” (p. 45). I did not notice any sign that the teachers were consciously supporting the dualistic relationship with the children, but rather, they were doing what they considered was their job. If my understanding was inaccurate, why were the teachers not aware of the impacts their actions had on the children? Or, if they were aware, who reinforced these impacts as the goal of the program? Why were those who oversaw the program not taking action or providing alternative methods?

This unconsciousness or acceptance of actions carried over into the purpose of nature children were being exposed to. I was struck by the promotion of an anthropocentrism attitude modeled by the participants. Students, while in the care of their teachers, were being conditioned to view nature as a commodity for human’s use rather than to view nature as intrinsically valuable. Ewert and colleagues (2005) found that early childhood experiences in unstructured play in the outdoors supported the formation of an ecocentric view of nature. Would the message these children were experiencing in preschool be with them the rest of their lives? Would these children view nature as a commodity, rather than take into consideration the intrinsic value the outdoor environment provides?

### **Children’s Practice of Secrecy to Satisfy Curiosity**

Although the teachers appeared to conform to the establishment’s expectations of skill acquisition through checklists, I found the children not as cooperative, but rather resisting the logic of domination thrust upon them. I observed an amazing energy and

nature in the children. Their sheer desire to participate in open-ended activities resulted in those activities being inadvertently integrated into the established routine. Their natural disposition took over; their persistence to touch and learn allowed them to experience the outdoor world they were exposed to. Young children were not yet fully appreciated as human beings, and were immersed in a culture of dominance and control. They were placed in the “down” position in the oppressive conceptual framework of the educational setting, and yet by their very nature, they would not fully comply with that role. Their drive to experience and explore went beyond the dualistic structure and values the teachers held and into a world of secrecy, which Cannella (1997) referred to as the “silent knowing,” where children could satisfy their desire to touch and know. As Blaise and Ryan (2012) pointed out, “Children are active agents in the curriculum, regulating each other’s subjectivities and yet also using spaces to subvert adult discourses” (p. 89).

Participants were consistent in their attempts to control the children, and at times they were successful. When the children saw the opportunity to be themselves and explore, they took it, seemingly no matter how many times they would be reminded of the established rules and program expectations. They came forward to make their case even with the dualistic structure placed before them. They challenged the expectations of those in power and learned to work the system to their advantage through secrecy.

### **Reflections on the Research Process**

As I looked back at my reflexive journal, I noted a feeling I had of wanting to do something to “fix” what I considered the teachers’ and children’s dilemma. I recognized

immediately that this was my interpretation and sense of what was considered “right.” Being open to view what I observed without judgment was a concept I kept referring back to throughout the study.

During the observations and interviews I sensed the difference in responses of participants with whom I had previous encounters, and those I had not. I wondered if being present as a participant before qualitative research began would provide a more open dialogue between the participants and the researcher. How would such a relationship impact the findings?

Actually doing the research was a very different experience than reading about and practicing it from the numerous courses, articles, and books (Creswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Emerson et al., 2008; Fontana & Frey, 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Wolcott, 2009) over the past 4.5 years. I found the support of my chair extremely valuable from the position of a novice being mentored by an expert. Any suggestions or feedback were always given in a positive tone, which gave me encouragement that I was heading in the right direction after a few wrong turns along the way.

In looking back at the process in the actual study, I wondered how the timing of the study influenced the findings. My observations took place at the beginning of the school year. Visits at the middle or end of the year might add a different perspective as students were more familiar with their surroundings and teachers knew more about their students.

### **Importance of the Study**

As the study came to an end I realized this was actually only the beginning of an ecofeminist perspective of the socially structured early childhood environment. During my reading I was unable to locate any current or past research that looked into the field from the focus areas I selected. This study provides an understanding, although limited, of the socially constructed influences on teachers and children that indirectly impact the environment and will add to the literature on these topics.

Environmentalists and early childhood educators may find this a starting point for discussion on the involvement of early childhood experiences in the creation of behaviors and caring attitudes towards our natural environment. It also provides a point for discussion on the continuation of the “logic of domination” among early childhood educators.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Additional studies that would add to the knowledge base of early childhood education and the ecofeminist theory should include a study of programs that support open-ended outdoor learning opportunities for young children, in both words and actions, and the components that make it successful. A comparison study of programs in similar context areas that support open-ended outdoor learning with ones that do not would document how the process is achieved and what are the differences and similarities. A longitudinal study of the children in an open-ended outdoor learning environment could add to the discussion of what influences those who profess a caring attitude towards the

environment and the people in it.

Another comparison study would include programs using the G UW curriculum and those who are not; along with the “how” and “why” of what is being taught. This data would add to the understanding of the impacts of such a program on young children. Does it meet its goal of encouraging children’s future as environmental stewards?

A look at teachers’ current understanding of children’s play in the outdoors would provide a starting point for further discussion and inclusion of meaningful approaches to training. Do participants have a sense of the way their regular daily practices edge out attention to the environment? Do they consider the long-term impacts of early childhood experiences on the future caretakers of the earth?

Further analysis of the early childhood education programs and their conceptualization in the larger social framework is also warranted. Practices based on stage theories and developmentally appropriate practices have been taken for granted and are being reproduced and replicated in practices that may not be in the best interest of young children (Cannella, 1997). These practices are being carried out in the name of “school readiness.” More work needs to be done in order to expand our understanding of the social structures and practices in this field. Are we inadvertently repeating methods, procedures, and curriculum in early childhoods that are limited and possibly inappropriate?

Critical researchers are problematizing the structures of the widely used developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) curriculum in search of answers. Wisneski (2012) questioned the exclusion of the “spiritual” development of children in working to

meet the needs of the “whole” child. Zelazo and Lyons (2012) encouraged the development of “mindfulness” beginning in early childhood, to encourage children to think about their choices and actions, not to be judged as right or wrong. Mueller (2012) noted “that early childhood education has been forced to conform to economic and market pressure to maintain its relevance and, indeed, its very existence” (p. 61). With the “school readiness” concept, whose views of readiness are being used? How does this expectation for school readiness play into the socially constructed dualism among programs and their teachers, and children with those who care for them?

### **Conclusion**

As evidenced in my findings, adult hegemonic cultures took precedence over the culture of children. The child’s ingenuity and creativity were being silenced under the name of “school readiness.” Their inquisitive nature was being reduced and oppressed by those considered more knowing. Teachers were unknowingly carrying on the patriarchal practices of the power structures in the education profession and, they seemed unaware of their participation in the continuation of a hegemonic system of dominance and the part they were playing in the indoctrination of the children in their care. They are given little time to create relationships among themselves or with children because of the numerous and varied tasks expected of them, including documenting the skills children had mastered—a time consuming task that may partially explain why the curriculum was limited.

Researchers have identified a variety of methods to support and nurture children’s

caring attitude towards the environment. I did not find these methods visible nor institutionalized in the Head Start program of my study. Proposed methods to include the established G UW guidelines, and an ecocentric attitude, would be comprised of training, continual discussion of changes in thinking and practice, along with mentoring and on-going evaluation of approaches used. A system of on-site, sustained teacher support would work against existing, loosely coupled systems that perpetuate dualistic, anthropocentric practices.

The ecofeminist theory promotes the building of relationships and values conversations and openness concerning differences. As Warren (1996) stated, “Difference does not breed domination” (p. 35), we can learn to live with nature rather than conquer it. There is hope that someday a collaborative model will be in place in which children are not isolated from the adults’ decision-making processes and will have a place in pursuing their interests in an open and supportive environment. With the current promotion of natural outdoor play environments, the resurgence of the project approach (Helm & Katz, 2001) and critical discussions on early childhood curriculum models (Cannella, 1997; Mueller, 2012; Wisneski, 2012), there is reason for hope that the “oppressive conceptual framework” (Warren, 2012) will come to an end.

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**APPENDICES**

Appendix A  
Interview Questions

## Semistructured Interview Questions for Teachers

**Interviewee:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Transcribed:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date and Time:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Confidentiality Policy Shared**

**Location:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Purpose of Study Shared**

**Interviewer:** Anne Mackiewicz

### **Personal perspective on education, the outdoors, and children and the outdoors.**

1. Please tell me about your educational journey and how you became a teacher.
2. Please tell me about the time your students spend outdoors during their school day?  
(Are there prescribed activities? What kinds of things do they do? How much supervision is there?)
3. Who or what determines how much time your students spend out of doors? (Student interests? Your preferences/beliefs? School traditions? School policies? Curriculum standards? Head Start requirements?)
4. Who or what determines what the time your students spend out of doors during the school day is like? (Student interests? Your preferences/beliefs? School traditions? School policies? Curriculum standards? Head Start requirements?)
5. Is there anything you wish you could do differently related to your students' time out of doors?

Is there anything else you want to tell me about the outdoor time your students have as part of their school day?

6. Any further thoughts, questions, or comments?

## Semistructured Interview Questions for Head Start Executive Director

**Interviewee:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Transcribed:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date and Time:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Confidentiality Policy Shared**

**Location:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Purpose of Study Shared**

**Interviewer:** Anne Mackiewicz

1. Please share your journey to your current position as executive director.
2. Please tell me about the time the students spend outdoors during their school day?  
(Are there prescribed activities? What kinds of things do they do? How much supervision is there?)
3. Who or what determines how much time students spend out of doors? (Student interests? Your preferences/beliefs? School traditions? School policies? Curriculum standards? Head Start requirements?)
4. Who or what determines what the time students spend out of doors during the school day is like? (Student interests? Your preferences/beliefs? School traditions? School policies? Curriculum standards? Head Start requirements?)
5. Is there anything you wish you could do differently related to the students' time out of doors?

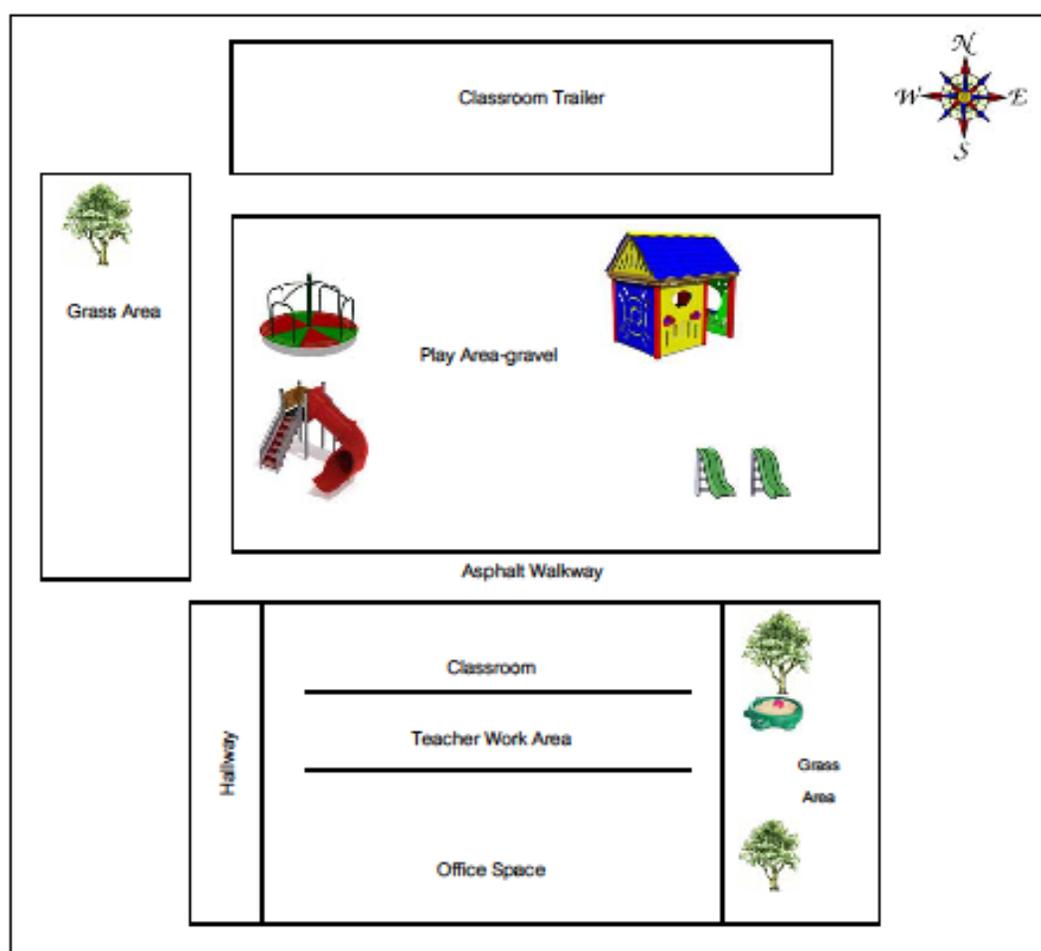
Is there anything else you want to tell me about the outdoor time students have as part of their school day?

6. Any further thoughts, questions, or comments?

Appendix B  
Outdoor Play Environment

The outdoor play area (Figure 2.) had an “L” shaped format which was dominated by a large rectangular area filled with gravel cushioning. On top of this surface was a climbing fort with a curved slide, two small three foot plastic stand-alone slides, a play house, a merry go round, and various moveable pieces of playground equipment. Around the perimeter on three sides was an asphalt sidewalk. The remaining side of the “L” shape was a long narrow patch of grass with two trees, one at each end. Under the one tree closest to the gravel surface was a small rectangular sand box. About six feet away, also on the grass, was a turtle shaped sand box.

Figure 2. Research Site’s Outdoor Play Area



Appendix C  
Outdoor Playground Rules

## GUIDANCE

<b>Number: ECHS Guidance 20</b>	<b>Revised: 08/26/09</b>	<b>Page #1 of 1</b>
<b>Agency Approval Date: NA</b>	<b>Policy Council Approval Date: NA</b>	<b>Governing Board Approval Date: NA</b>

**SUBJECT:** Playground Rules

**PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVE:** To establish some basic outside rules for each of the centers to build on and to determine the need for repair and/or purchase of outdoor equipment.

**OPERATIONAL PROCEDURE:**

1. The teacher and assistant will set up the equipment, often with the help of the children and using their suggestions. However, once the equipment is set up, it is usually left that way. Too many squabbles and rambunctious play have resulted in the past when the arrangement of equipment has been changed without proper pre-planning and thinking. The children can also help put the equipment away. Centers only having one class will be required to put equipment away each night.
2. General rules and reasons are:
  - A. No throwing things that can hurt someone (this is an inside rule also).
  - B. No picking plants - it makes our plants die.
  - C. No pulling or swinging people by the arm - it can hurt (dislocate their elbows and shoulders).
  - D. No climbing trees or fences - you can fall and get hurt if a tree branch breaks or fall off a fence.
  - E. No pushing - running is fine.
  - F. Be nice to other children you play with, and they must be nice to you. If not, say, "When you are nice I'll play with you, but not now."
  - G. No standing in wagons or moveable equipment - falling out can hurt someone badly.
  - H. Always look around at all areas being aware of dangerous situations and set down other rules as necessary.
  - I. Use your best judgment.
3. At no time will children be left unattended on the playground. To do so is grounds for immediate dismissal.
  - A. The safety of the children is the ultimate responsibility of the teacher. During outdoor play the teacher and teacher assistant are required to supervise the children. There should be two adults supervising children on the playground at all times. If a parent or volunteer are present either they or teacher assistant will be responsible for setting up for the next activity if needed.
4. Daily checks of outdoor play areas are done by classroom staff and arrangements made to dispose of broken or dangerous equipment.

Appendix D

Outdoor Playground Equipment and Requirements

## GUIDANCE

<b>Guidance Number: ECHS 19</b>	<b>Revised: 08/26/09</b>	<b>Page #1 of 1</b>
<b>Agency Approval Date:</b> NA	<b>Policy Council Approval Date:</b> NA	<b>Governing Board Approval Date:</b> NA

**SUBJECT:** Playground Equipment

**PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVE:** To define and ensure a system for installation of playground equipment.

**OPERATIONAL PROCEDURE:**

1. Education staff will be responsible to head planning and organization of team.
2. Team will consist of Center staff, parents, and community.
3. Prior to meeting, Education staff will measure area and have measurements for equipment to be installed.
4. Education staff will become familiar with state playground rules and regulations by using the playground perspectives (available from Early Childhood Specialist).
5. Playground diagram for installation of equipment will need to be submitted to their Early Childhood Specialist for final approval.
6. Playground equipment will be secured and stable enough to hold an adult. In some cases, playground equipment may be mobile and would not need to be secured to the ground.
7. The team will make a decision on dates and arrange for final installation of playground equipment.
8. Early Childhood Specialist will be informed when final playground equipment installation has been completed so final surfacing can be arranged.
9. To ensure safety, the Family Educator will coordinate with centers and group day site managers, if feasible, to install playground equipment.

Appendix E

Daily Plan



## CURRICULUM VITAE

ANNE K. MACKIEWICZ

### **BUSINESS ADDRESS:**

Utah State University Eastern  
451 East 400 North  
Price, UT 84501  
435-613-5206  
[anne.mackiewicz@usu.edu](mailto:anne.mackiewicz@usu.edu)

### **EDUCATION:**

- 2013 Ph.D., Utah State University, Logan, Utah.  
Education-Curriculum and Instruction
- 2003 M.S., Utah State University, Logan, Utah  
Education, focus on Early Childhood
- 1978 Bachelor of Arts, Saint Mary's College, Notre Dame, IN,  
Elementary Education major/Early Childhood endorsement

### **PROFESSIONAL WORK EXPERIENCE:**

2010-Present Utah State University Eastern  
*(Institutions merged in July of 2010, name change in 2013 from Utah State University-College of Eastern Utah)*  
Full time instructor  
Manage Campus Preschool program  
Executive Director of Child Care Resource & Referral Agency Eastern Region (PI)

2008-2010 College of Eastern Utah, Price, UT  
Full time faculty and chair of Education and Family Life Departments  
Manage Campus Preschool program  
Executive Director of Child Care Resource & Referral Agency

#### **College and University Courses Taught:**

Orientation to Elementary Education- previous title Introduction to Education

- Introduction to Children's Literature- previous title Children's Literature  
 Seminar in Early Childhood Education- previous title Introduction to  
 Early Childhood Education  
 Child Development-Birth through Eighteen  
 Cooperative Education  
 Teaching Assistant Experience  
 Storytelling  
 Child Guidance  
 Administration of Early Childhood Programs  
 Planning Creative Activities for Young Children
- 1999-2008 College of Eastern Utah, Price, UT  
 Director Child Care Resource & Referral Eastern Region  
 Oversaw and participated in services for the Eastern region of Utah  
 which included training on developmentally appropriate practices to  
 licensed child care providers; referrals and educational materials to  
 parents looking for licensed child care; represented the Eastern region in  
 state wide meetings concerning early care; developed curriculum for  
 state wide trainings including school-age, multicultural, and creative  
 arts; supervised staff in completing state contractual duties; submitted  
 quarterly reports to contractor; created and maintained yearly budget.
- 2000-2008 College of Eastern Utah, Price, UT  
 Adjunct Faculty Member  
 Storytelling  
 Children's Literature
- 1978-1999 Notre Dame Regional School, Price, UT  
 Faculty Member
- 1999-1994 Full Time 6<sup>th</sup> grade Teacher- all content areas, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade Art  
 Teacher, Yearbook Editor, Jr-high Volleyball Coach, Student  
 Government Advisor
- 1994-1990 Part Time 3<sup>rd</sup> -6<sup>th</sup> grades Religion, Yearbook Editor, Jr. High Volleyball  
 Coach, and Student Government Advisor
- 1990-1989 Part Time 3<sup>rd</sup> grade Social Studies and Science, 5<sup>th</sup> grade Math, 6<sup>th</sup> grade  
 Religion, Yearbook Editor  
 Jr-high Volleyball Coach
- 1989-1988 Part Time 3<sup>rd</sup> grade Social Studies and Science, 4<sup>th</sup> grade Math, 5<sup>th</sup> grade  
 Religion, Yearbook Editor, Jr-high Volleyball Coach

1988-1986	Part Time 3 <sup>rd</sup> , 5 <sup>th</sup> , & 6 <sup>th</sup> grade Religion, Yearbook Editor, Jr-high Volleyball Coach
1986-1984	Part Time 4 <sup>th</sup> grade Math and Language Arts, Yearbook Editor, Jr-high Volleyball Coach
1984-1983	Part Time 7 <sup>th</sup> & 8 <sup>th</sup> grade Math and English, Yearbook Editor, Jr-high Volleyball Coach
1983-1982	Part Time 1 <sup>st</sup> grade Math and Language Arts
1982-1981	Kindergarten all content areas
1981-1980	Volunteer Jr. High Physical Education
1980-1978	Full Time 5 <sup>th</sup> Grade all content areas, Junior-high Basketball and Volleyball Coach

#### **CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS:**

2012	Mackiewicz, Anne, <i>Who will be caring for our world? Influences that impact environmental behaviors.</i> Presentation at the Utah Early Childhood Conference, Orem, UT.
2010	Mackiewicz, Anne, <i>Taking the creepy out of creepy crawlies: How teachers' perceptions impact what children learn about nature.</i> Presentation at the National Association for the Education of Young Children Annual Conference. Anaheim, CA.
2010	Mackiewicz, Anne, <i>Does what you think of bugs really matter? How adults' perceptions impact children.</i> Presentation at the Child Care Professional Development Institute State Conference. Salt Lake City, UT.
2009	Mackiewicz, Anne, <i>The benefits of nature.</i> Presentation at the Utah Association for the Education of Young Children Conference. Orem, UT.
2008	Mackiewicz, Anne, <i>Listen to the birds and the bees and the flowers and the trees: Outdoor activities for children's self discoveries, immersion in play, and nature.</i> Presentation at the Child Care Professional

- Development Institute Conference, Salt Lake City, UT.
- 2007 Mackiewicz, Anne, *Ramp and roll: Self-discovery of early scientific and engineering principles through hands on experimentation*. Presentation at the Child Care Professional Development Institute Conference. Salt Lake City, UT.
- 2006 Mackiewicz, Anne, *Many Paths to Learning: Introduction to the many ways children learn*. Presentation at the Utah Association for the Education of Young Children Conference. Orem, UT.
- 2006 Mackiewicz, Anne, *Outdoor magic: Play environments for children and the importance of outdoor environments for children's development*. Presentation at the Child Care Professional Development Institute Conference. Salt Lake City, UT.
- 2005 Mackiewicz, Anne, *Storytelling: Reasons and benefits of sharing stories with children using the oral tradition*. Presentation at the Child Care Professional Development Institute Conference. Salt Lake City, UT.
- 2004 Mackiewicz, Anne, *What's out there: Sharing the universe with children through the creation of a solar system*. Presentation at the Child Care Professional Development Institute Conference. Salt Lake City, UT.
- 2003 Mackiewicz, Anne, *File folder games and more: Easy to make games for children and the benefits they provide*. Presentation at the Child Care Professional Development Institute Conference. Salt Lake City, UT.

**PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS AND BOARD POSITIONS:**

- 2008-2012 National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Affiliate Council Board member
- 1999-Present NAEYC member
- 1999-2012 Utah Association for the Education of Young Children (UAEYC) Board member- held Membership, Vice-President, & President Positions
- 1999-2008 National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies (NACCRRRA)
- 1999-2010 Utah Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies (UACCRRRA)-held President, Treasurer positions

1999-2008 Utah Professional Family Child Care Association  
 2007-Present Redleaf National Institute  
 2000-2008 Department of Workforce Services Regional Council Member  
 2006-2007 Utah After-school Network  
 1978-Present Utah State Teaching Credential Level 2  
 1977-1978 Student Educational Association

**COMMUNITY & COLLEGE SERVICE:**

2011-2013 Live United Service Day  
 2011-Present Utah State University Faculty Evaluation Committee  
 2010 Volunteer at Child Care Professional Development Conference, SLC, UT  
 2010 Co-taught Student Success Workshop on Writing and Plagiarism  
 2009-2012 Utah State University-College of Eastern Curriculum and Instruction Committee  
 2009-Present Utah State University Eastern Awards' Ceremony Committee  
 2008-Present Volunteer for Bureau of Land Management, Price, UT  
 1979-Present Support services to Boy Scouts of America Troop 282  
 2003-2009 Mentor for Carbon County Youth Commission  
 2001-2003 America's Promise Carbon County Chapter  
 1991-1995 Habitat for Humanity Board Member  
 1978-Present Active in church service  
 1977-1979 St. Mary's College New Mexico Summer Program, Truchas, NM.

**CONFERENCES:**

- National Institute for Early Childhood Professional Development, Providence, RI, 2011.
- National Association for the Education of Young Children Annual Conference, Anaheim, CA, 2010
- National Institute for Early Childhood Professional Development, Phoenix AZ, 2010.
- National Association for the Education of Young Children Annual Conference, Washington, DC, 2009.
- National Institute for Early Childhood Professional Development, Charlotte, NC, 2009.
- National Association for the Education of Young Children Annual Conference, Dallas, 2008.
- Good Stuff for Kids Conference, Roseville, CA, 2007.
- Play as a “Fun-damental” Experience, It’s a “Sense-ational” World, Salt Lake City, UT, 2007.
- National Association for the Education of Young Children Annual Conference, Washington, DC, 2005.
- National Association for the Education of Young Children Annual Conference, Anaheim, CA, 2004.
- National Association for the Education of Young Children Annual Conference, Chicago, IL, 2003.
- National Association for the Education of Young Children Annual Conference, New Orleans, LA, 2002.
- National Association for the Education of Young Children Annual Conference, Anaheim, CA, 2001.
- Learning & the Brain, Washington, DC, 2000.
- Zero to Three Annual Conference, Anaheim, 1999.

**PUBLICATIONS:**

2013 Environmental Stewardship and Early Childhood Experiences. In review, Young Children Journal, Washington, DC.

**GRANTS:**

2010 Daniels Fund, Nature Explore Classroom- Utah State University-College of Eastern Preschool, \$44,561. Not funded.

**INTERNET COURSE MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS:**

Canvas course management system, Utah State University Eastern  
Blackboard course management system, College of Eastern Utah

**AWARDS:**

National Daily Point of Light Recipient, Volunteer Services, March 2006  
Notre Damean Award, Notre Dame Regional School, 1984